

# Taobh istigh

MOBILISING TRADE UNIONISTS FOR IRISH UNITY **PAGES 20-22**

REFLECTIONS ON THE NATIONAL WOMEN'S ASSEMBLY **PAGES 28-30**

SINN FÉIN PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE **PAGES 39-41**

# new IRELAND

SAMHRAIDH  
2025 SUMMER  
EAGRÁN ISSUE 10



# éire NUA



A new Ireland – a United Ireland – is viable and affordable is the conclusion of Professor John Doyle's report – 'The Projected Public Finances of the Early Years of a United Ireland, and the Northern Ireland Subvention' which was published in July. Professor Doyle of Dublin City University, using the most recent economic data, states that: "For the South the costs associated with Unity have tended to be exaggerated and the benefits

## IRISH UNITY IS AFFORDABLE

of an all-Ireland economy largely ignored." He concludes that the initial cost of Unity would be just over €3b per annum. This could be "funded by taxes or borrowing of less than three quarters of one per cent of GNI\* in year one, (falling gradually as the overall economy of the island grows) and reaching breakeven point within five to nine years."

Paul Maskey MP examines the implications of Professor Doyle's report on **page 6**

# KEEP TALKING ABOUT PALESTINE



# SEASANN MUID LEIS AN PHALAISTÍN

# Clár an Abhair

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**EAGRÁN ISSUE 9**

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# Health and Care in a New Ireland

David Cullinane

**T**he future of health and the provision of a first-class public all-island health and care service in a new Ireland frequently tops the agenda when Irish Unity is being discussed. That has been my experience and that of the Party's Commission on the Future of Ireland in the many public events it has held in recent years.

In a significant contribution to the conversation around this issue Uachtarán Shinn Féin Mary Lou McDonald last month launched a new discussion document focussed on health and care - 'The Case for an Irish National Health & Care Service.' Despite the challenges currently faced by the health services North and South there is a shared concern that Irish unity will adversely impact on each health system. Consequently, the future shape of an all-island health service is a priority for many people. A new Ireland requires a new health and care service that can meet the needs of citizens and is free at the point of delivery.

The health and care services in the North are in crisis. The health system in the South is in better shape but is also failing patients in the provision of many services. Irish unity is about improving both services,





making them more equitable and effective. It's about combining the best of both services and making a new all-island health and care service more effective and more responsive to the needs of patients.

Sinn Féin is for a world-class healthcare service.

Although some citizens, particularly in the South, may opt to stay with their private health schemes our vision is of a publicly funded, universal service which can deliver better working conditions for healthcare staff, and greater investment in vital services – including mental health care and disability services. Citizens and patients will be much better served by a health and care service that is planned, managed and delivered based on the needs of the national population.

To this end Sinn Féin is proposing a series of steps to deliver a better, safer and more efficient health and care service. These proposals include:

- The Ministers for Health, North and South, along with an Assistant Secretary General (or equivalent) from each Department of Health should lead design, planning, integration and collaboration on an all-island basis.
- The Ministerial health group and the Shared Island Unit should bring together expert health and social care professionals, health economists, senior management, professional organisations, trade unions as well as relevant experts from across Ireland to implement health and care planning in an all-island context.
- The Shared Island Unit should develop detailed costings for implementing the Sláintecare and Bengoa reports and also develop costed proposals for integrating the health services in the north and the south as a single universal healthcare service
- A single, integrated hospital waiting list system for the island of Ireland should be established.
- Digital health and care records should be in place from primary to tertiary care across the island, with appropriate data sharing to support cross-border care.
- Emergency services should be aligned to maximise recruitment, training, and operational capacity. A particular focus is needed in the border region to ensure best use of equipment, investment, and specialist skills.
- Clinical programmes and national strategies should be delivered on an all-island basis to drive service improvements and set common, comparable standards.
- All island workforce planning must be initiated to ensure enough graduates are available to fully staff the all-island health service.





- Develop common professional and regulatory standards for all health and care service professions to improve access to work opportunities, professional development, and clinical governance.
- Establish a Rural Health Commission to develop an all-island rural health strategy

Speaking at a conference on 'Health and Care in the New Ireland' in St Comgall's - Ionad Eileen Howell in Belfast last month, which brought together over 100 health professionals, Pat Cullen MP pointed out that:

"Successive Irish and British Governments have not prioritised our public health services. They have failed to plan services according to need, to train and retain enough health and social care professionals, or to modernise health and care provision for the 21st century. The gap between public and private is growing in the South's two-tier health service, despite the all-party commitment to Sláintecare. Little progress has been made towards realising that vision.

Waiting times have grown unacceptably long in the North, where the crisis is exacerbated by the financial control of Westminster and the impact of partition on our ability to make decisions that maximise all-island potential."

The Sinn Féin MP who is a former nurse and was the Chief Executive and General Secretary of the Royal College of Nursing told her audience that: "All island cooperation and planning makes sense. It is the responsibility of the Irish Government and the Executive to work together to improve health services for the people of Ireland. They should also give the health and care community the necessary space to deliver improvements without regard to the border, in a fair and shared way."

On an island of under seven million people – less than the population of most of the world's great cities – it makes no sense having two separate health services with no all-island healthcare plan. It makes sense that political parties, governments, and health professionals sit down to plan for a better health future in a new Ireland.

**You can read the discussion document at [www.sinnfein.ie](http://www.sinnfein.ie)**





# Suicide Prevention Bill — out to consultation

In the North the issue of suicide remains a critical public health concern. Statistics reveal alarming rates of suicide, particularly among vulnerable populations. People that live in the most deprived communities are twice as likely to die by suicide than those in the most affluent areas. This highlights the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to promote mental health and prevent suicide. Sinn Féin MLA, Órlaithí Flynn, has now put a Suicide Prevention Bill out to consultation. The Bill will make suicide prevention training a requirement for frontline staff in public bodies and government departments. It will also place a legal duty on public sector employers to provide suicide prevention training to all staff in public-facing roles. This initiative will help to equip



frontline workers, including those in health services, education, social care, and law enforcement, with the knowledge and skills necessary to identify the warning signs of suicidal behaviour and respond appropriately. By fostering a culture of mental health awareness and responsiveness within

public services, we can create a more supportive environment for individuals in distress, ensuring that no one feels alone or without help when they need it most.

Furthermore, the bill promotes collaboration among agencies and organisations dedicated to mental health advocacy, creating an integrated approach to suicide prevention across the north of Ireland. By investing in training and resources for public-facing staff, we endeavour to enhance early intervention capabilities, reduce stigma surrounding mental health issues, and ultimately save lives.

In summary, this bill represents a timely and necessary response to a pressing public health crisis, ensuring that our public sector staff are aware of the complexities of suicide prevention in their communities."



**David Cullinane**  
**Health spokesperson in the South:**

No issue excites public opinion more than the future shape of a single, national health and care system for the island of Ireland. The "Case for an Irish National Health & Care Service" is a contribution to this. It sets out clear, sensible steps that can ensure proper planning and consultation with all stakeholders.

"It is not a blueprint for a new national health and care service model. Nor does it seek to estimate a cost for the creation of such a service. Both of these matters require additional detailed study informed by expert contributions, led by the Irish government.

A new generation brimming with talent, energy and courage is stepping forward to shape a new Ireland. It is the most important public conversation of our lifetime and it belongs to us all. All island cooperation and planning makes sense.



**Philip McGuigan MLA**  
**Health spokesperson in the North:**

The reality is that since the Good Friday Agreement the health services North and South have been finding new ways to cooperate. While cross border collaboration is fairly common, all island planning and delivery of services is extremely rare. In 2017 the EU and the British Government undertook an extensive mapping exercise to assess the level of cross border cooperation. It identified over 20 health related projects which included:

- North West Cancer Centre
- All-island congenital heart disease network
- Cooperation and Working Together (CAWT)
- Workstreams on child protection
- Health protection and promotion (including addressing alcohol misuse, tobacco control, ECDC, and public health alerts)
- The Institute of Public Health in Ireland

An all-island national Health and Care Service will be to the advantage of all citizens on this island. The Executive and the Irish government have a responsibility to examine these matters as a priority."





# NO ECONOMIC BLOCK ON IRISH UNITY

*By Paul Maskey MP*

**In recent years there has been a significant growth in the conversation around Irish Unity. The scale of discussion on constitutional change has never been higher. It's now a mainstream topic of conversation among citizens. Successive electoral results have shown a growth in the North of nationalist/republican opinion and this coupled with demographic changes, has heightened popular awareness of the Unity project. In addition, the work of Sinn Féin's Commission on the Future of Ireland; Ireland's Future; Irish Border Poll; the SDLP's New Ireland Commission; and other groups; opinion polling and individual**

**contributions from well-known public figures, have all combined to encourage the growth of the Unity debate, including among many within the unionist section of the North.**

July saw the impetus around the Unity discussion markedly increase with the publication of Professor John Doyle's report – 'The Projected Public Finances of the Early Years of a United Ireland, and the Northern Ireland Subvention.' The report is the product of joint research by Dublin City University and Ulster University's Economic Policy Centre.

The impact of Irish reunification on the two economies on the island, and how issues like the provision of health and care, education, the environment, and agriculture, are likely to be affected are hugely important for citizens. No one wants to take a leap in the dark. Future

The Projected Public Finances of the Early Years of a United Ireland, and the Northern Ireland Subvention

John Doyle  
Dublin City University





certainty and planning in respect of jobs, quality of life, housing, governance and so on are all hugely important.

### THE BRITISH SUBVENTION

Professor John Doyle has previously published extensively on the British subvention. However, his latest report, using the most recent economic data, concludes that: "The cost of a united Ireland has been exaggerated partly because what is called the UK subvention has been misunderstood and misinterpreted. At the same time the potential for economic growth in an all-island economy, where Northern Ireland is once again inside the European Union, has not received sufficient attention.

Doyle's report examines three different possible scenarios around Unity. He believes that each of these would allow for investment in the necessary policy changes to boost education, economic growth and living standards, while also absorbing all the increased costs of gradually equalising salaries, benefits and pensions.

The inherited 'subvention' for Northern Ireland is £1.5b (€1.75b), based on 2023 data. Boosting public expenditure by one billion euros pa, to provide necessary investment in health, education, infrastructure and welfare, while also allowing for the cost of equalising public sector salaries and taking over pensions, would see a full year-one cost of €3 billion."

Professor Doyle describes the deficit of just over €3b as a 'subvention' from the 'South' that would be "funded by taxes or borrowing of less than three quarters of one per cent of GNI\* in year one, (falling gradually as the overall economy of the island grows) and reaching breakeven point within five to nine years."

This could be easily managed and afforded by the Southern economy and it would allow for expected further economic growth as the two economies jointly exploited the emergence of a single island economy within the European Union. As Doyle states in his conclusion: "For the South the costs associated with Unity have tended to be exaggerated and the benefits of an all-Ireland economy largely ignored. Without underestimating the difficulties of a process of unification, the aim of this report is to contribute to the discussion by demonstrating the range of possible costs and benefits of this project.

There is a belief held by some that without the British subvention the North's economy would collapse and could not be sustained within a single island economic model. Doyle disagrees. His report "deconstructs the subvention" and clarifies how each element is calculated. The main elements he examines are pensions; national debt; defence spending; expenditure related to foreign policy; and central UK 'non-identified expenditure'. He analyses these based on the published £14b 'UK Subvention' for 2023 (the latest available).

### PENSIONS

State and public-sector employment-based pensions within the British system are based on individuals' pension, tax, and social insurance contributions to the British Treasury, and for women especially, their caring responsibilities. In the current subvention calculation pension liabilities total £5.7b.

Doyle points out that: "Based on existing agreements and practice, there is no reason to believe that the UK will not pay the state and public-sector employment pensions that had been built up during Northern Ireland's membership of the United Kingdom, leaving the new Irish state to take over the liability built up from the date of the creation of the new state. This position would be consistent with the UK-Ireland Bilateral Convention on Social Security, signed after Brexit which came into effect on 31 December 2020, and would also be consistent with the approach to pensions taken during the UK's withdrawal from the EU.

This reduces the year one cost of a united Ireland by £5.7b (on current figures) as the full cost of pensions would transfer gradually to a United Ireland over the following 40 years."

### BRITISH NATIONAL DEBT

Currently the annual interest paid through the subvention by the North on the British National Debt is £3.5b.

Doyle points out that: "There is no legal basis for requiring a United Ireland (or Northern Ireland) to pay a percentage of UK national debt. It is legally owed by the UK and there are precedents for expecting the UK government to honour this debt. The UK Government accepted during the 2014 Scottish referendum that, 'In the event of Scottish independence from the United Kingdom (UK), the continuing UK Government would in all circumstances honour the contractual terms of the debt issued by the UK Government... a share of the outstanding stock of debt instruments that have been issued by the UK would not be transferred to Scotland.'

### DEFENCE

Within the subvention the cost of Defence is the third largest element. The British government has imposed a defence bill on the North of just under £1.6b as its contribution to the national British defence expenditure. This includes the costs of the nuclear weapons programme.

Professor Doyle reveals that the North's bill for defence is over a half a billion pounds more than the current total Irish defence expenditure. The Irish Defence Budget will never meet the total paid out of the North's subvention to the British. The report "allows for a post unity increase of £200m pa." on top of the current planned increases in defence spending by Dublin that "will take place well before a referendum."

### EU + BRITISH FOREIGN OFFICE COSTS

At present the North is billed just over £700 million per annum for its contribution toward the EU Withdrawal Agreement and the running of the British Foreign Office. John Doyle states; "This expenditure would not be carried over into a new Irish state. Even if the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs increased its international presence, it is extremely unlikely that the increase would be at the scale of the British Foreign Office."

Doyle accepts that there will be an increase in Ireland's contribution to the EU as a result of the state's increase in population and Gross Domestic Product. However, there will still be a saving of around £400m.

**'NON-IDENTIFIED EXPENDITURE'**

This amounts to a cost to the North of £513m per annum. This expenditure relates to costs that it would be not possible, or too expensive, to calculate. Doyle concludes that £177m of these costs would not transfer to the North. To determine this figure Doyle used the same methodology as the Sustainable Growth Commission in Scotland.

**TAXATION**

The amount of tax raised annually in the North is underestimated by the British. Corporation Tax, Capital Gains Tax and VAT are generally paid by companies based in the North by their head offices in London. It is estimated that there is an underreporting of half a billion pounds in taxes which should be going to the North's finances. Doyle

also states that civil service taxes would increase the tax take by approximately £255m at 2023 prices.

In addition, Professor Doyle states that with the North moving to the Irish income tax system in which those on lower incomes would be better off, that this combined with increased employer contributions to social security, would bring in an additional €769m in tax revenue.

**UNITY MAKES SENSE**

Professor Doyle's report is an important contribution to the debate on Irish Unity. People generally understand that there are no advantages for a small island people of seven million having two separate tax regimes, legal systems, and competing economic development programmes, with one jurisdiction inside the EU and the other outside of it. Consequently, many people are increasingly recognising the economic and societal advantages to a united Ireland within the EU.

In the past civic and business leaders such as Sir George Quigley, a Presbyterian, argued that regardless of how Ireland was governed, it made sense for such a small island to operate as a single economic unit. This can only be properly realised when economic decisions that affect this island are made by people here.

Cross border trade is surging, and now there is a degree of certainty on our trading arrangements, it is time to build upon this success. However, we must go further. The best economic scenario would be a reunified all-Ireland economy which combines the best of the South and the best of the North.

Professor Doyle's report is a detailed, well researched, peer reviewed paper that deserves more than An Taoiseach Micheál Martin's sneering and scandalous rejection of it as 'nonsense.'

As Pearse Doherty TD remarked: "Progress has been held back for too long by fear mongering about the so-called 'subvention', a British accounting practice that never represented the economic cost of Irish Unity. I welcome the clear recognition in this research that the cost of Unity has been exaggerated because the subvention has been misunderstood

and misinterpreted. This comprehensive research has delivered a fatal blow to economic arguments against a united Ireland."

Professor Doyle's report leaves no doubt that Irish Unity can deliver economic benefits to people across this Island. There is no economic obstacle to forging ahead with Irish Unity. The message for the Irish government is clear – begin planning now – planning for the unity referendum and planning for unity.

In the short term this means the Taoiseach ending his block on the establishment of a Citizen's Assembly or Assemblies to plan for the future.

Irish Unity is an economic opportunity that must be grasped. That means doing the preparation work now. The Irish Government needs to get into gear and get into step with the momentum behind Irish Unity. We need to see vision and leadership on this defining issue.



The report can be found here: <https://all-islandeconomy.com/analysing-the-economic-impacts-of-a-united-ireland/>





# Charting a course to Unity

*By Aoife Ferguson*

**“People and parties across the island who believe in the power and potential of a new Ireland need to find new ways of cooperating and coming together to advance that mission.” Pat Cullen MP**

**T**he Fermanagh South Tyrone MP Pat Cullen was speaking at an event in Westminster in May organised by Irish Border Poll. The event included former SDLP leader Colm Eastwood MP, Kevin Meagher Author and Columnist and Kevin Rooney of Irish Border Poll.

In his contribution Kevin Meagher said Unity is “going to happen, but the precise timescale and pathway are reliant on a range of variables that are wont to change and alter the calculation. They include the state of play in the North – election results, demographics and polling. They also include what’s going on in the South – election results again, but also the attitude of the Irish state towards unity and Irish public opinion. Then there is also the posture taken by the British government and public opinion on this side of the Irish Sea.”

Meagher pointed out that between 2026 and 2030 there will be a series of elections with each having a bearing on the timing of the unity

referendum provided for by the Good Friday Agreement. These include, elections in Scotland and Wales; an Assembly election in the North; local government elections in the North; a British General Election; local government elections in the South and an Irish general election.

All of these will “set the scene and help frame the possibility of constitutional change.” It is likely that with an increasing nationalist/republican vote and support for unity continuing to grow that “demands for a border poll will become impossible to ignore...”

In this respect Meagher called for greater co-operation between Sinn Féin and the SDLP. He said: “For United Irelanders, party labels are now



irrelevant. As Leo Varadkar recently pointed out, this is now the 'great cause' of this generation. And finally, a reminder: We are at the cusp of a great historical inflection point. The opportunity is seized, or it is not."

Pat Cullen echoed Kevin Meagher's view that nationalists and republicans must work together to advance the objective of Irish Unity. She said: "The desire for Irish unity is bigger than Sinn Féin and we welcome that it is, because it has to be. We can't do it all on our own."

The Fermanagh South Tyrone MP acknowledged that for many ordinary people a united Ireland might not seem relevant to their immediate needs and wants. "We need," she said, "to speak a language that people understand with a message that reaches them where they are today. We have to re-evaluate what we're doing and respond to people's needs. Imaginative and deliverable proposals must be put forward with an acceptance that Ireland will continue to evolve long after reunification. With this in mind – the diligent work of civic and political coalition-building must intensify."

Expanding on this Pat Cullen said: "There is no bigger idea on these islands than Irish unity. So we need to inspire people – we need to excite people. A united Ireland needs to be about more than stitching two failed states together. A united

Ireland needs to be about workers' rights, better health care, social protections, fair pay, and good work. It needs to be about providing a home for everyone – and a safety net for those who need it. Arguably most of all, a united Ireland needs to be about fighting the climate crisis because there's no point having a united Ireland on a dead planet."

On this basis and with an eye to the election cycle opening up the Fermanagh South Tyrone MP called on all of those who support the concept of a united Ireland to "centre the national question in all that we do. There is a new Ireland for us to win, so, let's go out and win it together, United and determined!" Former SDLP leader Colm Eastwood MP similarly called for greater co-operation between nationalist political parties in pursuing a United Ireland.

Speaking at the conference and later to the Irish News Mr Eastwood accepted that the conversation around Irish unity was now "in a different place" and consequently "people and parties across the island who believe in the power and potential of a new Ireland need find new ways of cooperating and coming together to advance that mission."

The former SDLP leader acknowledged that working together is "a big challenge, especially





for political parties whose instinct is naturally to compete with one another but establishing common ground and common cause outside of narrow electoral contests is an important step for our movement."

Micheál Martin has no right to silence the demand for unity

Both Pat Cullen and Colm Eastwood were critical of An Taoiseach Micheál Martin's emphasis on reconciliation in the North first before planning for unity can begin. Eastwood said: "We're not going to be told by anybody, whether it's a unionist leader or a leader in Dublin, that actually you have to wait; you have to play nice and you have to be quiet; and you have to wait until some undefined moment in the future when we might be able to talk about this, when we're feeling a bit more comfortable – that ship has sailed."

Pat Cullen's message to Micheál Martin was equally blunt: "It is unfortunate that we have a government in Dublin that is – with some honourable exceptions – dragging its feet on the question of Irish unity. We have a Taoiseach who tells us that now is not the time to discuss Unity. That we must achieve reconciliation – something that would be hard to quantify or measure by any metric – before we can even begin to discuss constitutional change. Essentially, we're being told that the North must wait. No Taoiseach has the right to set the pace of our journey. No Taoiseach has the right to silence our demand for Irish unity. I would encourage the Taoiseach to come North and talk to ordinary people."



## macallaí na streachailte

*"Cad as ar fás cumáct Connarta na Talman?  
As cumáct croide na n-óg-fear do bí ina ceannus.  
Cad as ar fás bríḡ agus neart Connarta  
na Gaedilge? As bríḡ agus neart intinne na  
n-óg-fear do cuir ar bun é."*

**Padraig Mac Piarais**





# The people are speaking

# PREPARE FOR UNITY

*By Seán  
Mac Brádaigh*



In recent months, a steady stream of opinion polls has sent a clear message to political leaders across Ireland, North and South, and in Britain - public support for Irish unity is growing. While each poll offers a slightly different snapshot, the trend is unmistakable - the constitutional status of the North of Ireland is no longer a settled matter.

The Irish Government must now lead a national conversation with clarity and ambition; the British Government must set out unambiguous criteria for triggering the unity referendum; and all communities - including those from a unionist tradition - must be invited to shape what comes next.

#### A Closer Look at the Polls

In February of this year, an ARINS / Irish Times "North-South" Survey (February 2025) showed that: 64% in the South would vote for unity if a border poll were held, while in the North support had increased from 27% (2022) to 30% (2023) and then to 34% (2024). The level of support for Irish unity has remained consistently high in the South, underscoring a growing political and civic consensus that unity is not only desirable, but achievable.

A few weeks later a LucidTalk poll, commissioned by the Belfast Telegraph, showed support for a United Ireland at 41% among the general population in the North - a notable increase from 2023 levels, which hovered in the mid-30s. Among voters aged under 45, that support jumped to 49%, an 8-point lead over pro-union voters in the same age cohort.

The longitudinal Northern Ireland Life & Times study from ARK (which is a joint project run by Queens and Ulster University) released in May was particularly significant. It found that when voters were asked how they would vote in the event of a border poll if held tomorrow, 36% said they would vote for unity, with just 42% for the Union with Britain and the remainder undecided.

This represents a significant closing of the gap, with it halving since 2023 from 12% to just 6% now. Among under 25s, there is a significant pro-unity lead of 18 points, with near level results for all age groups up to 45.

Only among over 65s does a clear pro-union majority remain. The number of undecided voters - particularly among women and young professionals - represents a fluid and influential bloc.



These polls collectively paint a picture of a society in transition. In contrast to outdated narratives of a rigid, so-called “two-tribe” division, today’s electorate is more nuanced, more open, and increasingly willing to consider a new constitutional future.

#### What the Numbers Really Mean

To dismiss these polls as speculative or “not yet significant” is to ignore the democratic undercurrents reshaping the island of Ireland. While a pro-union majority in the North may still exist by slim margins in some polls, the gap is closing - and fast. And crucially, the conversation is no longer confined to the North. Support for unity in the South is not merely symbolic - it reflects a willingness to financially, politically, and culturally embrace all 32 counties. This is vital. Irish unity cannot be viewed as a Northern concern alone. The 26 Counties must fully participate in shaping a shared vision of the future.

Furthermore, these numbers speak to the changing demographics of the North. Census data confirms that there is no longer a unionist majority in the Six Counties. While religious affiliation does not equal political affiliation, it does influence the electorate’s outlook.

The fact that more and more people from mixed, nationalist, and even agnostic backgrounds are questioning the long-term viability of the Union speaks volumes.

#### Time for Leadership – From Dublin and London

Given these developments, the onus is now on the Irish Government to lead.

For too long, Dublin has taken an overly cautious, indeed passive stance. But this is no longer sustainable. The Irish Constitution (Bunreacht na hÉireann) asserts the right of the Irish people to unity through peaceful means. It is time to translate that principle into policy. That means establishing a Citizens’ Assembly or Assemblies on unity, commissioning costed transition plans, and working with civil society across the island to develop models of governance, public services, and identity in a new Ireland.

Meanwhile, the British Government cannot continue its studied ambiguity. The Good Friday Agreement states that the Secretary of State shall call a poll when it appears likely that a majority would vote for unity. Yet no clear criteria have ever been published.

London must set out, in good faith, what indicators it will use to trigger a poll. Anything less erodes confidence in the integrity of the Agreement and could prove to be a source of deep antagonism and discontent.

#### A Place for All: Unionist Engagement and the Case for Dialogue

Lastly, and perhaps most sensitively, there is a responsibility on all of us - especially those advocating for unity - to continue to extend a genuine invitation to those in the unionist community.

Irish unity will not be sustainable unless it respects and includes those who identify as British, who currently

value the Union, and who feel apprehension - even fear - about constitutional change. The new Ireland must not be a mirror image of old grievances, but a home for all.

There are already signs of movement. Some moderate unionists - business leaders, clergy and others - have begun engaging quietly with constitutional discussions. They should be supported. Preparing for unity is not about erasing one identity to impose another - it is about imagining a political framework where diversity is constitutionally embedded.

#### Conclusion: Polls Are a Signal - Work Must Begin

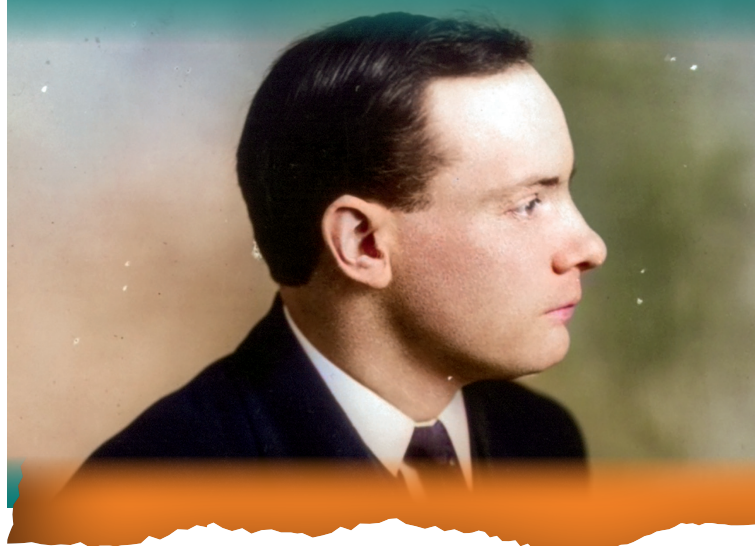
Polls do not guarantee unity - but they signal a moment of historic opportunity. Irish unity is not just a slogan, nor is anymore a long-term aspiration. It is a live question, demanding live answers. If we pretend nothing is changing, we will be unprepared.

The path to unity will be shaped not just by numbers on a poll, but by the political courage, civic dialogue, and imaginative leadership. The people are speaking. It’s time their governments listened.

## macallaí na streachailte

*Céard atá uainn? Tá, ar gceart dúitais. Céard é ar gceart dúitais? Tá, dútaig Gaedéal i seilb Gaedéal gan cur isteaic ó Gallaib. Do b'féidir go mbeadh sos cafa ann tar éis na Feise so do baint amaic dúinn, a'c ní béid síotcáin ann go mbéid deiread le ceannus Gall i nÉirinn. NÍ SÍOTCÁIN GO SAOIRSE." Ní Síotcáin Go Saoirse*

**Padraig Mac Piarais**





# COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF IRELAND

# AN COIMISIÚN UM THODHCHAÍ NA hÉIREANN

## UPDATE JULY 2025



**Grace McDermott**  
UI Committee

In July 2022, Sinn Féin established the Commission on the Future of Ireland to undertake a broad and deep consultation with people all across the island and beyond on our shared future.

Chaired by Declan Kearney MLA, with Lynn Boylan MEP as vice chair, the Commission has hosted discussions on our future, across Ireland and internationally.

Catch up on events that have taken place since the last edition of Éire Nua was published.

### TIONÓL POBAIL BHAILE GHIB

This Gaeltacht Tionól took place on March 14th in Halla Bhaile Ghib. The guest speaker was Mairead Farrell TD. The independent Chairperson was Cathal Seoighe - Rúnaí reatha ar Choiste Náisiúnta Chomórtas Peile na Gaeltachta agus ar bhord Úrdarás na Gaeltachta. The panel included: Chloe Ní Mháille - comhordaitheoir Forbartha le hObair Phobail na hÉireann, Caoimhín Ó Cadhla - Bunaitheoir agus Eagarthóir ar an Páipéar, an nuachtán nua seachtainiúil as Gaeilge and Edel Ní Churraoin - ceoltóir, damhsóir agus craoltóir. The meeting discussed future constitutional arrangements, the role of the Irish government at this critical juncture in our history, the rights and protections needed to underpin equality and democracy and language rights in the new Ireland, a public health service for the island, the benefits of an all island economy and much more.

Watch footage of the event here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5PZZMb4GIG4&t=27s>



### ONE ISLAND, ONE ENVIRONMENT

This event was hosted jointly by Lynn Boylan MEP and the Commission in the Ballymun Rediscovery Centre in Dublin on Friday 4th April. The panel was chaired by Investigative Reporter & Environmental Columnist Shauna Corr. The panel included Justin Moran- Director of external affairs with Wind Energy Ireland, Declan Owens- Environmental Lawyer & CEO of Ecojustice Ireland, Attracta Uí Bhroin- Manager & Law officer of Environmental Law Ireland and Seán Fearon- Ecological Economist & Post Doctoral Researcher. Pa Daly TD delivered the opening address on behalf of Sinn Féin. This event was an

opportunity for environmental activists to become involved in the discussion on Irish Unity.

Watch footage of the event here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d0iBUz5ERS4&t=36s>



### THE EU & IRISH UNITY- WHAT NEXT?

MEP's Lynn Boylan and Kathleen Funchion joined with the Commission to host an event in the European Parliament on Tuesday 8th April. Declan Kearney MLA travelled to the event to give the opening address. The purpose of the event was to engage with leaders in the European Parliament on what institutional arrangements can be/or should be put in place to support the transition to Irish Unity and as information for people pre referendum. The panel for the event included Professor Colin Harvey (Queens University, Belfast), Esther Lynch (European Trade Union Confederation) and George Katrougalos (UN Independent Expert & Former Foreign Minister of Greece).

Watch footage here: [https://www.instagram.com/reel/DIW0xKwoB2z/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/reel/DIW0xKwoB2z/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)



### RURAL COMMUNITIES IN A NEW IRELAND

This event was hosted at the Balmoral Show on May 15th. The panel was chaired by Aoife Finnegan MLA. The panel included Ian Marshall (Queen's University and Former Senator & President of the Ulster Farmers Union) Michelle Gildernew (Former Agriculture Minister) & James Lowe (Chairperson of the Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers' Association). Declan McAleer delivered the opening address and said it was absolutely crucial for farming families and rural communities to engage in the conversation around Irish unity, to ensure they maximise the benefits that reunification could have for their communities.

Footage can be watched here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PSPmfLIB4Yc&t=10s>



### HEALTH & CARE IN A NEW IRELAND

This major conference took place in St Comgalls- Ionad Eileen Howell, Belfast on June 6th. The discussion was chaired by Donegal Pharmacist Tom Murray. The panel included Majella Beattie- Care Champions Ireland, Dr Eddie Rooney- Former Chief Executive of the Public Health Agency and Sara Boyce- New Script for Mental Health. David Cullinane TD and Pat Cullen MP spoke at the event and explained that part of our collective task is to encourage, inform and further the conversation on the kind of New Ireland we want to see: a fairer and more equitable Ireland in which all can enjoy a better quality of life and can have access to a health service that meets the needs of a changing society. There was a lot of audience engagement from lobby groups, health workers, health organisations and others.

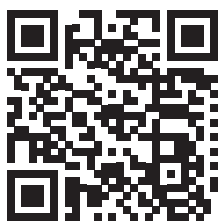
Footage of the event can be watched here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vNPGj8v\\_ax8&t=1826s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vNPGj8v_ax8&t=1826s)





## FRIENDS OF SINN FÉIN

Events are continuing to be hosted by Friends of Sinn Féin in America and Canada. Since the last edition events have taken place in Montreal, Nashville, Cincinnati, Chicago, Ottawa and Toronto. Guest speakers included Louise O'Reilly TD, Pat Cullen MP and Rose Conway Walsh TD. These events have been an opportunity for the Irish abroad and others to discuss the opportunity to unite Ireland, the potential to define a new state, and to strategize on the way forward. At the meetings was a hope for the future and the recognition of the potential of Irish Unity. There was a recognition that an opportunity not realised is an opportunity squandered.



*Keep up to date with future events and read reports from the past events at [www.sinnfein.ie/futureofireland](http://www.sinnfein.ie/futureofireland) and the Commission social media pages.*





# UNITED IRELAND: THE POLITICAL PROJECT OF OUR GENERATION



Over the years, I have helped more than a few clients navigate the bureaucracy in Kentucky state government. The first question to answer is whether to adopt a top-down or bottom-up approach. Top-down means you start with the Governor and work your way down to the career employees to effect a solution. Bottom-up means you start at the lower levels of the bureaucracy and work your way up to the Governor.

I was reminded of this dynamic when I read a quote from former Taoiseach Leo Varadkar when he said: "As is always the case, the impetus for great change must come from below. It will not come from above." He was referring to the reunification of Ireland.

I was privileged to be in the audience to hear Varadkar speak in Philadelphia at the Gala Dinner of Ireland's Future in April. In his remarks, Varadkar stated that every generation has its great cause and that he saw ours as "the cause of uniting our island, working to build a new home where all traditions, all stories, and all people belong." Specifically, Varadkar stated that; "I believe building a new Ireland, a United Ireland, is the political project of our generation." I could not agree more. It was fitting that Varadkar made these remarks directly under a portrait of Abraham Lincoln, the great Kentuckian who gave everything to preserve our Union in the United States.

But, what does Varadkar mean when he says that the impetus for great change must come from below? Surely, he had in mind the efforts of grassroots organizations like Ireland's Future,

a cross-party, cross-community organization that promotes the shared responsibility of delivering constitutional change within the framework of the Good Friday Agreement. One of its stated objectives is to "promote detailed planning for referendums, North and South, to give people a meaningful choice on their constitutional future."

Niall Murphy and the entire Ireland's Future Board should be commended for bringing their work to Philadelphia and the USA. The Gala was an immense success and it served to emphasise the vital part Irish America has in building a new and United Ireland. In a truly bottom-up approach, we all can work to promote and plan for a United Ireland, individually and through social and political organizations.

Unfortunately, Varadkar is also right when he states that a United Ireland will "not come from above." In fact, the Irish Government is in retreat on Unity -- its Programme for Government 2025 is silent on Irish Unity as a goal. A silence that speaks volumes. In an interview in the Belfast Newsletter, An Taoiseach Micheál Martin could not even bring himself to utter the words "United Ireland." He admits that the government is simply not planning for unity referenda. What a disgrace. Worse still, Martin is engaging in a deliberate distortion of the Good Friday Agreement by claiming in a recent speech that the main purpose of the Agreement is to foster "reconciliation", before consideration of constitutional change. Reconciliation is one of

the objectives of the Agreement in a divided Ireland and when the Island is united. It is not a prerequisite to constitutional change. It spans and must include the democratic process of constitutional change. Instead, as Varadkar correctly notes, the GFA, "provides for a democratic mechanism by which Ireland can be united once a majority of both sides of the border want it." Martin's erection of a reconciliation hurdle or veto to the unity referendum provided for in the Agreement is an obvious ploy to push the issue of Unity down the political agenda.

The good news is that Irish Government elites cannot halt the Unity discussion. Ireland's Future is not waiting for a top-down solution. Good for them.

For our part, the Friends of Sinn Féin is organizing a series of fora in the U.S. at which individuals can learn about planning for a United Ireland and have their say. "The Commission on the Future of Ireland: Diaspora" has already held successful programs in Cleveland, Columbus, Rockland County, NY and Washington, DC. In May we also held events in Nashville, Cincinnati, and Chicago. Other events are being planned for later in the year in the USA and in Canada.

Momentum for Unity is growing. However hard they try the Irish government cannot forever turn a blind eye to these efforts.

**Mark Guilfoyle is a lawyer in Covington, Kentucky. He serves as President of Friends of Sinn Féin, Inc.**



# PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLIES

## IN THE USA

By Ciaran Quinn and Greg O'Loughlin

Toward the end of May, Pat Cullen MP for Fermanagh & South Tyrone, joined with Ciaran Quinn, Sinn Féin's Representative to the United States, and embarked on a tour of major cities in the USA. Their aim was to bring the 'Irish Unity People's Assembly for the Diaspora' to Nashville, Cincinnati, and Chicago.

These events, were aimed at updating Irish America and the diaspora on the political situation in Ireland and gathering feedback for the Commission on the Future of Ireland. They also emphasised the critical role of the diaspora in the work of achieving a united Ireland.

**Nashville: Civil Rights and Political Exchange**

The tour kicked off in Nashville, Tennessee, on May 28th at the Scarritt Bennett Center. It marking the first People's Assembly in the State. Before the main event, organizers provided a vital context by touring Nashville's civil rights landmarks, including Fisk University and The Civil Rights Room at the Nashville Public Library. This highlighted the city's rich history of activism and its relevance to contemporary struggles for self-determination.

Pat Cullen was welcomed at Nashville City Hall by Councilperson Emily Benedict, who provided a tour and introduced Cullen to local council members. This offered a unique opportunity to exchange experiences in electoral politics and public service.

Addressing an audience of seasoned activists, members of the Ancient Order of Hibernians and the Ladies AOH, as well as curious learners, Cullen emphasized the historical significance of the moment, drawing parallels to the founding of America. She stated, "We are at the point at which the founding fathers of America found themselves after the British agreed to withdraw. The challenge to define a new nation."

She urged attendees to consider this "break from the past of division" and the "building of a shared future," inviting their input on the

opportunities and challenges of Irish unity. Following her address, Councilwoman Brenda Gadd interviewed Cullen about her inspiring journey as a labor leader, nurse, and activist, particularly her role in leading over 240,000 nurses on strike. The evening concluded with small group discussions focused on actionable steps towards Irish unity.

**Cincinnati: Community and Nation-Building**

The next stop on May 29th was the Irish Heritage Center in Cincinnati, Ohio, a vibrant community hub. Friends of Sinn Féin President Mark Guilfoyle opened the event, introducing Cullen as a leader whose roots in activism exemplify the evening's purpose.

Cullen highlighted the significant political shifts in Ireland, noting Sinn Féin's position as the largest party on the island and Michelle O'Neill's role as First Minister in the North. The Fermanagh South Tyrone MP explained that the Good Friday Agreement provides the pathway for unity, emphasizing; "The potential for Irish Unity is recognized... All has changed."

Cullen articulated the clear objective; "We need to secure and win unity referendums... We are engaged in a project of nation-building." She stressed the importance of a peaceful transition to a "new Ireland" that reconciles past differences and builds a home for everyone.

After her remarks and an interview, the attendees engaged in small group discussions, brainstorming strategies for activism and examining the roles of the Irish, British, and American governments in advancing unity. Ciarán Quinn concluded the evening by reminding the audience that Irish America's support was crucial for both the Good Friday Agreement and the future of a united Ireland.

**Chicago: A Legacy of Activism**

The tour concluded in Chicago, a city with deep historical ties to Ireland and a robust Irish American







community. Pat Cullen MP once again delivered the keynote address, underscoring America's pivotal role in driving change in Ireland, particularly during the peace process.

Cullen recounted how Irish America's advocacy for US engagement, including the visa for Gerry Adams and the appointment of a special envoy, was instrumental in ending decades of conflict and achieving the Good Friday Agreement. She highlighted that the Agreement "asserts the primacy of politics over conflict, secures the rights of citizens, and lays out the operation of interrelated and co-dependent sets of institutions."

Crucially, she reminded everyone that the Agreement explicitly provides for Irish Unity referendums, obliging the British government to legislate if both jurisdictions vote for unity. Following her address, Cullen was interviewed by host Vincent Casey, discussing the historical moment and the various way in which activists can contribute. The latter half of the event focused on interactive small group discussions, where attendees, joined by Cullen and Quinn, formulated plans for action, identifying key players in local, national, and international politics. Ciarán Quinn's closing remarks reinforced the message: everyone has a role to play, and "the time to act is now."

#### Toronto and Ottawa

Ciarán Quinn and Rose Conway Walsh TD travelled to Canada for Irish Unity Commission events. They are an opportunity for the Irish abroad and others to discuss the opportunity to unite Ireland, the potential to define a new state, and to strategize on the way forward.

In Canada, a diverse range of speakers, drawn from cultural, sporting, business, labor unions, and political life, shared their hopes for the future of a new and united Ireland. Their ideas were added to by contributions from attendees.

In Toronto, one of the panellists reminded the audience that Ireland is an old nation but with a young people. An old nation held together by our culture and shared experiences; our music, dance, language, and sports are the glue that binds us regardless of time, oceans or borders.

Ciarán Quinn said: "We are also a young people with some of the highest levels of well-educated young people in Europe. We also have

some of the highest rates of emigration. Canada, alongside Australia, is now the go-to destination for young Irish people leaving in search of a better standard of life than in Ireland, with its high rents, high costs, and failing public services."

One speaker gave the example of being in the final year in school, and the conversation about the future was a choice of where they would emigrate. At the time, they saw no future for themselves in Ireland, but in the Commission spoke passionately about building a better Ireland and a home to return to.

Rose Conway Walsh added: "At the meetings there was a hope for the future and the recognition of the potential of Irish Unity. There was a recognition that an opportunity not realised is an opportunity squandered. The next stage of the discussion must be how we all work together to bring about a new and united Ireland. To overcome the obstacles of the resistance of the British Government and the refusal of the Irish Government to plan, prepare, or advocate for Unity.

The peace process and the Good Friday Agreement have been described in the phrase from Seamus Heaney as a place where history and hope rhyme. We are now living in a time of hope and opportunity.

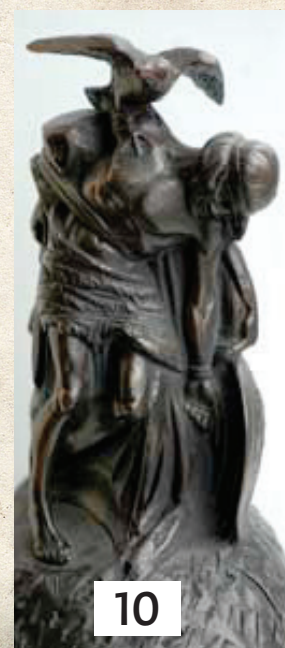
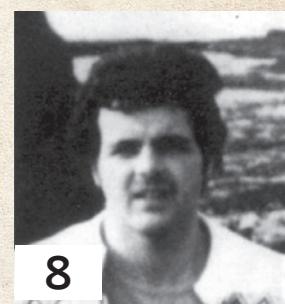
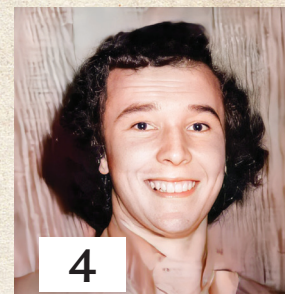
Further meetings are planned in the USA and Canada before the end of the year.





# ONLY OUR RIVERS Quiz

- 1 The longest river in Ireland is the Shannon but how many counties does it flow through?
- 2 What rivers are nicknamed the Three Sisters?
- 3 Who was the Internee in Tintown in 1923 who wrote the song My Lagan Love?
- 4 What river flows through the hometown of Raymond Mc Creesh?
- 5 What is the name of the river, now almost fully underground, from which Belfast takes its name?
- 6 What colour was King Billy's horse at the Battle of the Boyne?
- 7 What river flows through the hometown of Kevin Lynch?
- 8 Volunteers Antoine Mac Giolla Bríghde and Ciarán Fleming died after an attack on the SAS in December 1984. Antoine was executed by the SAS, Ciarán tragically drowned while escaping. What was the name of the river in which Ciarán lost his life?
- 9 What river flows beside Vinegar Hill?
- 10 On which river did Cú Chulainn slay his half brother Ferdia in battle?
- 11 Roddy Mac Corley was executed in Toome. On what river does Toome stand?
- 12 The Battle of the Yellow Ford, in August 1598 saw Hugh O'Neill deliver a massive defeat to the English forces under Henry Bagenal. On what river is the Yellow Ford?







ICTU BIENNIAL DELEGATE CONFERENCE  
BELFAST 26-27 OCTOBER 2021

7. 1998 BELFAST/GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT  
CONFERENCE ENDORSES THE CONTENT OF ICTU'S "NO GOING BACK, A NEW DEAL TOWARDS A SAFE AND SECURE FUTURE FOR ALL" POLICY PAPER PUBLISHED 2020. THIS PUBLICATION MAPS A WAY FORWARD TOWARDS REAL POSITIVE CHANGES FOR WORKERS, ACROSS THE ISLAND, FOLLOWING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC. CONFERENCE FURTHER ENDORSES THE CONGRESS POLICY OF SUPPORT FOR AND ONGOING COMMITMENT TO THE 1998 BELFAST/GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT. CONFERENCE ALSO NOTES THE PROVISION IN THE BELFAST/GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT FOR REFERENDUMS IN BOTH JURISDICTIONS, AS WELL AS THE GROWING PUBLIC DEBATE RELATING TO THEIR TIMING, POTENTIAL OUTCOME AND IMPACT ON WORKERS. CONFERENCE IS MINDFUL OF THE UNITY OF THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT AND THE NECESSITY OF ENSURING THAT THE PURSUIT AND MAINTENANCE OF THE RIGHTS, INTERESTS AND CONCERNS OF WORKERS ARE PART OF ANY SUCH DEBATE. IN THIS CONTEXT, CONFERENCE MANDATES THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL OF CONGRESS AS THE STEERING BODY OF THE LARGEST CIVIC BODY ACROSS THE ISLAND, IN LIAISON WITH AFFILIATE UNIONS AND TRADE COUNCILS TO IDENTIFY THE PRIORITIES OF WORKING PEOPLE AND THEIR COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE ISLAND OF IRELAND AND TO DEVELOP A POLICY ON THE REFERENDUMS, CONSISTENT WITH THE "NO GOING BACK" OBJECTIVES. THE POLICY SHOULD THEN BE ADVOCATED FOR BY THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL IN RELATION TO THE REFERENDUMS IF AND WHEN THEY ARISE AND THE PROPOSALS THAT WILL BE CONTAINED THEREIN.  
WATERFORD COUNCIL OF TRADE UNIONS

# Mobilising trade unionists FOR IRISH UNITY

*By  
Anne  
Speed*



**I**t was 66 years ago that trade unions organising on the island of Ireland reunited after almost 15 years apart. Economic prospects for workers across the island were dismal, both North and South, living standards were poor and expectations of a better life were rising. The 1950s was truly a dreadful decade, with emigration and poverty at record levels. British administration of the 6 Counties, delivered through the political consolidation of unionism, meant deepening discrimination and unemployment for catholic workers. Trade unionists, influenced by the role of syndicalist James Larkin or socialist James Connolly, recognised the need to galvanise the trade union organisation. There was common cause in fighting for the needs of working people. There was however no common cause in challenging partition.

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions was reborn in 1959, but this time with a Northern Ireland Committee (NIC) constituted to engage with the political administration of the 6 Counties. Over the 66 years since, this has meant enduring periods of direct rule, unionist dominated local governance and, currently, a devolved power sharing government. When the demand for civil rights erupted in the 1960s, strong instincts to challenge Partition were constrained by the imperative to maintain the corporate unity of trade union structures. Many would argue that this was the only path to take. However, it could equally be argued that it was the time to put the democratic demand, the right of the Irish people to accept or reject partition. That question, never put before the people across the island, remains a key question and a key democratic demand.

In the North, years of nationalist exclusion through employment and other forms of sectarian discrimination have been diluted or removed by fair employment legislation and the Good Friday Agreement. Trade unions have adapted to the changing political environment. But our ability to influence economic resilience across the 6 Counties remains intractably constrained by the overarching fact of the political-economic union within the British system. In the South while development of state infrastructure and resources began seriously during the Lemass government, subsequent governments have followed strategies of reliance on foreign direct investment and a turn to acceptance of the predominant interests of European capitalism. This is how we have landed in the lap of European expansionists who are demanding the ending of our military neutrality.

So what now for trade unions? There can be no doubt that as the largest civic society organisation across the island of Ireland with 800,000 members and 44 affiliated unions to Congress, the leaders of workers' economic interests have an essential role in defining how these are best delivered. While we gather in the first instance to achieve decent jobs and pay, our horizons have expanded to seek social justice, equality and

## macallaí na streachailte

*"Sílím go bhfuil thart fá cúig teach déag ann [Bóthar Seoighe] comh maith le sin tá naíscoil beag acú, agus tá na paistí ag foghlaim gach rud trí Gaeilge agus bíonn siad ag caint i nGaeilge i gcónaí agus a dtuismitheoirí freisin agus tá cultúr féin acú.....Cad tuige nach bhfuil níos mó na Gaeltacht amháin i mBéal Feirste? Bhail leis an firinne a insint sílim go bhfuil na Gaeilgeoirí rófhallsa, chuala mé a lán leithscéal cosúil le seo, níl na daoine le Gaeilge ábalta Gaeltacht a dhéanamh de thairbhe nach bhfuil aon airgead acú, ní fíor é agus ní leithscéal é. Thig leo Gaeltacht bheag a dhéanamh ina sráideanna féin fhad as tá gach duine toilteanach. Ní raibh mórán airgid ag na daoine eile nuair a thosaigh siad, ní raibh ach rud amháin acú, bhí misneach láidir acú agus sin an rud is tábhachtach. Rinne na daoine eile scoil, agus tá fhios agam ní ach scoil beag í ach is scoil lan Ghaeilge í ....Tá fhios againn nach bhfuighidís aon lámh cuidiú ó Rialtas ar bith, thuaidh nó theas choíche, agus sin an tuige go gcaithfidh muid é a dhéanamh muid fhéin .... sula ndéanann tú aon rud, tá eolas de dhiith ort ar an rud a mbeidh tú ag déanamh agus an tuige, comh maith le sin tá misneach láidir de dhiith, agus le sin thiofadh leat aon rud a dhéanamh.*

### Roibeaird Ó Seachnasaigh





a rights based society to live in. That surely must include the right to decide on how we organise our politics and political structures across the island. This is not a question that we should shy away from.

This is why Motion 7 on the Good Friday Agreement, adopted at the 2021 ICTU delegate conference is so important. It established a mandate and also a responsibility of trade union leaders to engage with the developing debate on a new and united Ireland. The welcome focus on an all island and alternative economic model will implicitly raise questions on how we will realise implementation of that model within partitioned political governance.

This will be an easier debate for some more so than others. Workers with unionist political convictions and allegiances are furthest from accepting new political governance on the island of Ireland. There is no doubt that there is an underlying frustration and demoralisation among many who have for decades believed in the political union with Britain. There is also a growing realisation that socialist ideals will never be delivered through Westminster, whether Tories or Labour are undemocratically installed. The task for trade unionists now is to find ways to engage with these workers.

Ireland's Future has taken on the task of engaging with civic society. Inevitably those listening are predominantly from the nationalist and republican communities. There are efforts underway to attract unionist interest. There is a particular role for trade unions and ICTU's Motion 7 in 2021 allows trade union leaders and activists to participate in these interactions, but we have not done so to any great extent. This is an important step towards engaging with unionist workers.

Sinn Féin's Commission on the Future of Ireland has held a series of informative and well attended Peoples Assemblies and sectoral engagements in Ireland and the USA and Canada. The SDLP's New Ireland Commission is also contributing to the debate on the new Ireland.

There is an opportunity for all trade unions North and South, as we develop discussion on an alternative economic model, to invite viewpoints including from external contributors, on how we can politically achieve the best outcomes. These discussions, led by the trade unions, have real potential to attract and encourage unionist workers' attention and will be important occasions where non-sectarian debate can be facilitated.

We have not yet utilised the capacity of the North/South bodies of the Good Friday Agreement to deepen a dialogue with the trade unions and unionist workers, in particular around their all island initiatives and strategies. These bodies should be encouraged to hold public forums where their all island projects can be made more visible and relevant

The Shared Island Unit, within the jurisdiction of the department of the Taoiseach, is an important resource for funding and dialogue. NIC-ICTU could invite the Unit to discuss how the dialogue and resources can be encouraged and developed. Engagements should include the lay leaders from sectors of the economy and workforces.

The panel of experienced trade unionists from across the island, with different political allegiances, who are committed to a new and united Ireland are important allies. Their willingness and capacity to contribute is an essential ingredient. Further discussion is needed with these allies on future joint work.

In conclusion, our right as a people to decide on continuing partition or not, is a key debate which we must embrace. All that we as workers are living through tells us that trade unions have a duty and a responsibility to lead that debate.

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**Anne Speed is a senior official within Irish trade union movement. Formerly Head of Equality and Campaigning with SIPTU, she has just finished a 13-year stint with UNISON In the North as Head of Bargaining and Representation. Anne was a member of the Sinn Féin Ard Chomhairle during the emergence of the peace process.**





# THE CLARE SHORT INTERVIEW

ON THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE LABOUR GOVERNMENT OF KEIR STARMER IN POWER SINN FÉIN'S WESTMINSTER OFFICE MANAGER **JOE DWYER** INTERVIEWED LONG STANDING ACTIVIST AND FORMER LABOUR MP CLARE SHORT.



Clare Short was the Labour MP for Birmingham Ladywood for 27 years and made headlines globally in 2003 when she resigned from Tony Blair's Cabinet over the illegal invasion of Iraq.

Throughout her years of political activism, she championed peace in Ireland and advocated for the cause of Irish unification.

**Joe Dwyer:** It feels like every interview and article I've read about you mentions that your father, Frank Short, was born in Crossmaglen and your mother, Joan O'Loughlin, was a descendant of emigrants who fled the Great Hunger. Your father was the first National Secretary of the Anti-Partition league, later the United Island Association. So just how 'Irish' was the Short household?

**Clare Short:** We were born in Birmingham but all sang the Irish songs. Dad was a great one at singing when he put you to bed. We went to Irish dancing; we did a bit of Irish lessons - but I don't think we got much beyond the prayers!

Of course, we went fairly often to Ireland. My dad was one of eleven, and most of them had six or seven children; so, we had sixty odd first cousins! And most of them live around Crossmaglen or on the other side of the border. I mean, the family naturally comes from both sides of the border. So Irish politics was part of our life.

The history of Ireland also helps you understand the British Empire. It helps to shape the way you look at the world. My father, was born in 1904. He was angry when Ireland was partitioned. His village ended up 3 miles north of the border. He was pretty cross about the Boundary Commission because that excluded Crossmaglen. He carried that with him all his life.

He was a teacher in Birmingham in a quite poor area. So, we also knew about inequality in Britain. So, yes, we had quite an Irish heritage.

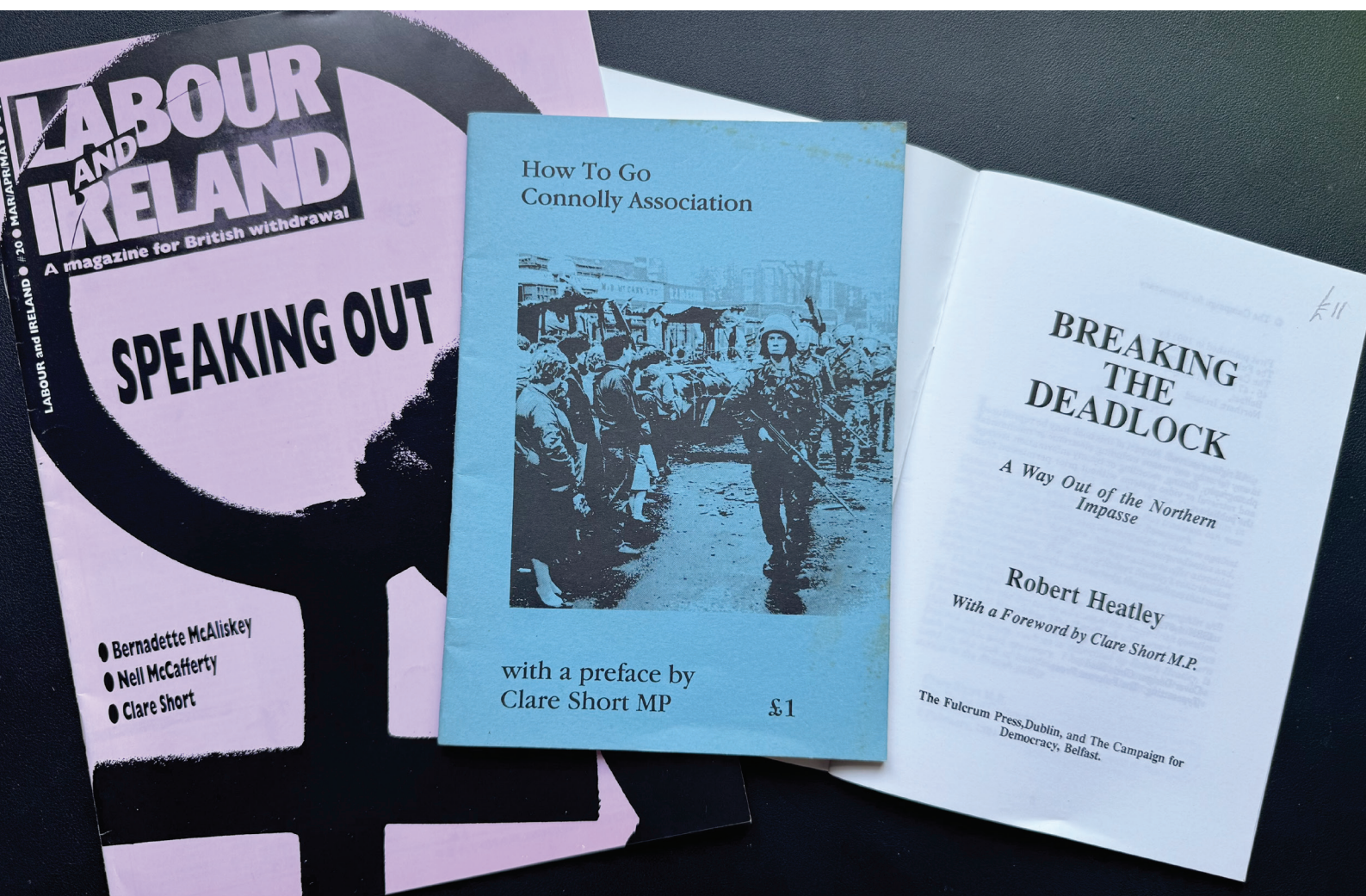
**Joe Dwyer:** Being Irish in Britain, and in particular following the Birmingham pub bombings, it wouldn't have been the easiest time to be Irish. When you hear the current narrative and rhetoric from this British Government around "an island of strangers" and the negative media tone specifically toward the Muslim community, do you recognise that experience?

**Clare Short:** After the pub bombings the whole atmosphere changed considerably. The two bombs were awful. For example, when we were younger, there had been an Irish parade on Saint Patrick's Day. My dad was involved in that and people marched under the County banners. After the bombings it didn't run for years. It was eventually reinstated. So there was that backlash. And of course, it was only much later that it became clear that the wrong people had been blamed for it!

When we were young we used to give out leaflets for the Labour Party and knock on doors in local elections for local councillors and so on. When some Irish people said racist things, because this was the beginning of a considerable influx of people from the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent, my Dad would tell them off. Tell them about Irish history! We knew that racism has to always be opposed.

So, this "island of strangers" remarks by the Prime Minister were disgraceful. Thinking you can defeat the Reform Party by competing on their ground is both reprehensible and foolish.

**Joe Dwyer:** So, obviously you come from this political household and you're leafletting from an early age and so on, and yet you chose to begin a career in the Civil Service? You were Private





Secretary to a Minister in the Home Office?

**Clare Short:** I went to Leeds University. During my studies I realised how the Senior Civil Service was the British establishment and it was running the country. So, I thought I'd take the Civil Service exams and have a look at the British establishment at work. This was in 1970. So, I went to have a look. I didn't think I'd be there forever, but it was very interesting.

**Joe Dwyer:** So, did you plan on always going into elected politics?

**Clare Short:** No. In truth I didn't have any idea that someone like me could be a Member of Parliament until I was a Private Secretary, first to a Tory Minister and then later when the Labour government came in. As I briefed MPs in Parliament I realised, 'Good heavens, I could do that!' That was when I decided to go into electoral politics.

**Joe Dwyer:** As an MP you were frequently associated with the cause of Ireland in Westminster. Indeed, from my research, you were on the first Executive of the Labour Committee on Ireland; you were an editorial adviser on the 'Labour and Ireland' magazine; you were honorary President of the Labour Party Irish Section; you shared panels with the Irish in Britain Representation Group; and you memorably helped to launch the Time To Go Campaign.

You also spoke out on the use of plastic bullets and strip searching in Armagh Women's Gaol. Undoubtedly you invited a backlash from the Labour establishment and the media. What motivated you to put your head above the parapet on the issue of Ireland?

**Clare Short:** There was also my resignation in 1988 over the Prevention of Terrorism Act under Neil Kinnock. Labour used to vote against renewal and then our position was changed without consultation! I also did other things, on race, immigration, women's rights, constituency work and so on. But yes, I remember I got particularly attacked by The Sun and others for daring to suggest the people convicted for the Birmingham pub bombings weren't the right people.

But I think, when we got to the stage of a possible peace process things shifted. I got to know John Hume quite well. I also met Gerry Adams. I became very keen on assisting the peace process and finding some means of resolving the situation

**Joe Dwyer:** You mentioned previously the Birmingham Six campaign. Why do you think it essentially took English Members of Parliament to raise such cases of British miscarriages of justice, rather than Irish Members of Parliament?

**Clare Short:** I've always felt it took a long time for some people to even believe that they could have possibly convicted the wrong people. Even suggesting that seemed to some as if you were saying the bombings were ok. Often when you put your head above the parapet people take a shot at you. Chris Mullin, of course, took a lot of it!

**Joe Dwyer:** In one of the interviews I read, it suggested that you were something of 'a bridge' on the issue of Ireland between the 'hardline' Ken Livingstone and the more 'moderate' Kevin McNamara's. Obviously within the labour movement, you were identified as part of the 'soft left' grouping, between the Bennites and the traditional left.

**Clare Short:** Yes, that's exactly where I belong. It's where intellectually and politically I sat. And I think that was true when it came to peace in Ireland, as well as many other issues. Because Sinn Féin made the famous moves to talk and I think they were dead right to do so. I think it led to considerable progress.

**Joe Dwyer:** So that bridging tendency, was it a calculated strategy or was that just innately where your politics fell, just sort of common sense?

**Clare Short:** I think it's just the right place to be. Whether emotionally, intellectually or politically it's where I belong still.

I mean, currently everything has moved to the right. But I'm still where I was, even now.

For example, when the Socialist Campaign Group, inside the Labour Party, was established; it had split from the Tribune Group. In those days the Tribune Group was a significant force, not like now. I decided to join both. Because I thought that the split was a mistake.

**Joe Dwyer:** It's fair to say you're probably most remembered, in popular memory at least, for your principled stand against the Iraq war. When you resigned as Secretary of State for International Development in 2003, as well as over the Prevention of Terrorism Act in 1988, how did you decide when it was the right time to take a stand?

**Clare Short:** In politics, there are always compromises. In a political party there will always be things that you don't 100% agree with. But most of the time you can sort of swallow it because you can't have your own way on everything

But there's some things that just are too much. As I said, the change around the Prevention of Terrorism Act came out of the

## macallaí na streachailte

*Ní hé cinnte gurb é an áit as a dtigeann sé. Mura bhfuil siad in inmhe an fonn saoirse a scriosadh, ní bheadh siad in inmhe tú féin a bhriseadh. Ní bhrisfidh siad mé mar tá an fonn saoirse, agus saoirse mhuintir na hÉireann i mo chroí. Tiocfaidh lá éigin nuair a bheidh an fonn saoirse seo le taispeáint ag daoine go léir na hÉireann ansin tchífídh muid éirí na gealaí.*

**Roiibeaird Ó Seachnasaigh**







blue, without any consultation. So, it was both the decision itself and the way in which it was just laid down.

In terms of the first Gulf War, that was different from the subsequent Iraq War because there had been the invasion of Kuwait. I simply said that they had bombed a bunker that was full of women and children. And that lots of them had died. There had been all these terrible pictures. And they claimed that they didn't know that there were people in there. So, I did a local media interview saying, 'Well, I'm willing to believe that they didn't know that there were people in there, but why are they bombing all the water sources and provision across Iraq? There's no need to do that to take over Kuwait.' That was when Neil Kinnock sent for me! And said that I had to apologise. I refused. And that's how I ended up resigning from the Shadow Cabinet in 1990. I didn't start off planning to do it.

**Joe Dwyer:** Did you sort of feel vindicated when the Good Friday Agreement did come about?

**Clare Short:** I was so happy about it. It was just such a good development, and it took a lot of courage from a lot of people. I think John Hume doesn't get enough praise. Because when he started talking to Sinn Féin he got massive flak.

Kevin McNamara was a good man. Very much on the soft left, but he stuck with Ireland right through and never gave in. He did become Shadow Secretary of State, but he never got the credit he deserved. So, there were a lot of people who plugged away and it was a very big achievement. Yes, everything's not perfect but that was a big step forward and I'm glad I contributed a bit.

**Joe Dwyer:** Turning to current events, does it concern you that there isn't that same space within British politics at the moment for dissenting voices? Particularly when we look at current conflicts like Palestine, it seems to be there's a much more top-down approach than there was before?

**Clare Short:** Under Tony Blair, things became less tolerant of dissent but nothing like it is now! Nothing! I mean, it's always been the case that if you weren't on the front bench or in the government, you could speak freely. But they can't do that now! They got rid of anyone who they thought might have left-wing views - they just weren't allowed to stand. How do you get new ideas? How do you get discussion of ways forward if no one is allowed to speak?

**Joe Dwyer:** We recently saw in the Life and Times survey in the North of Ireland that the gap between supporters for Irish unity is at 36% and those favouring the Union is 42%. And that gap has halved in the last year. Throughout your career, you regularly argued that democracy was key to resolving the Anglo-Irish question. With recent developments, the debacle of Brexit, the election of a Sinn Féin First Minister etc. do you hope, or better yet do you believe, that you will see a referendum on Irish unity in your lifetime?

**Clare Short:** In my lifetime? I'm getting quite old now! But I do think it's inevitable. I actually think Brexit, and this complicated deal on Northern Ireland's economic status, which actually will improve investment in the North because there'll be more North-South economic integration which is going on anyway, I think it's a matter of time.

I think it just needs to be handled with care and it's achievable. You see that already from Sinn Féin spokespeople. It's the work of saying quite kind things towards the Unionist community, to reassure them and say, 'yes of course you'll have to be accommodated and so on.' So, it's a matter of time. Just have to keep going on, like now, carefully. Governing well. Not being sectarian. That's the right way to go. It would be very nice if it happens in my lifetime, but even if it doesn't, I'm sure it will be shortly thereafter.





# WOMEN'S ASSEMBLIES HAVING CONSTITUTIONAL CONVERSATIONS

*By Eilish Rooney*

Something remarkable that has never happened before is happening on the island of Ireland. For the most part it is happening below the radar of public notice. Women's organisations are holding women's assemblies to discuss constitutional futures and the implications for women's lives north and south.

The first women's assembly was organised in Belfast in June 2023 by a team from Sinn Féin's Commission on the Future of Ireland. Women came from all walks of life, from different cultures and backgrounds, from Belfast and beyond, they came ready for the conversation.

The top room in the Europa Hotel was packed and buzzing. As the report shows (<https://sinnfein.ie/futureofireland/>) the conversation was wide ranging. Women listened to each other. In feedback they called for opportunities to continue cross community constitutional conversations.

The second Belfast Women's Assembly (BWA) was organised in response to that call. Some who attended the first assembly got together and launched Belfast Women's Assembly to a packed Mayor's Parlour event in Belfast, February 2024. All of Belfast's women political representatives were invited. Many of them attended.

Belfast Women's Assembly sees women's equality, human rights and climate justice as central to preparations for new constitutional arrangements across these islands and within Europe. It hosts conversations in response to community requests; organises festival events at Féile, and, this year, held an event in Shankill Shared Women's Centre at the Look North festival. Feedback from that event, once again, affirmed the value of listening in conversations between people who have different experiences and expectations of the UK and Irish states.

On 17th June, the Belfast Women's Assembly hosted an

event featuring feminist theorist and writer Cynthia Enloe. When it came to discussions of feminist constitution creating, Professor Enloe emphasized that constitutions are values and protection put to paper – but feminism is an action. So, key to the success of feminist constitutions is the fine line of firmly enshrining protections, while still being flexible enough to move with the change we create. She also highlighted that in order for a constitution to be successful, we need to have a shared knowledge and feel individual ownership of a constitution.

Coverage of that event can be found here: **“Later is a patriarchal time zone”: Cynthia Enloe in Conversation with the Belfast Women's Assembly — Women's Resource and Development Agency**



The third women's assembly was organised by the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCi) in 2024/25. The council invited fifty women from all corners of the island to join The Women's Assembly: A Feminist Shared Future. The two-day assembly was chaired by former president of Ireland, Mary McAleese. ([https://www.nwci.ie/learn/publication/the\\_womens\\_assembly\\_a\\_feminist\\_shared\\_future](https://www.nwci.ie/learn/publication/the_womens_assembly_a_feminist_shared_future))



At this year's Féile an Phobail Belfast Women's Assembly (BWA) and the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCi) Women's Assembly are coming together to discuss what 'a feminist shared future' might look like in a new Ireland. That's on Thursday 1st August, 11am in St Mary's University College, everyone is welcome.

If you would like to join the Belfast Women's Assembly mailing list or find out more, please contact [belfastwomensassembly@gmail.com](mailto:belfastwomensassembly@gmail.com)

*Eilish Rooney, Scholar Emeritus, Ulster University*



# REFLECTIONS ON THE NATIONAL WOMEN'S ASSEMBLY

*By Rachel Coyle*

Women's voices must shape this island- and we aren't waiting to be asked.

**T**he National Women's Council (NWC) Women's Assembly was held in March and brought together fifty women from across the island to talk about constitutional change and imagine a new Ireland through a feminist lens. In doing so, it revealed that those often left out of the conversation may hold the key to unlocking its transformative potential.

**macallaí na  
streachailte**

## *Óró Sé do Bheatha 'Bhaile*

*'Sé do bheatha, a bhean ba léanmhar,  
Do b' é ár gcreach thú bheith i ngéibheann,  
Do dhúiche bhreá i seilbh méirleach,  
Is tú díolta leis na Gallaibh.*

*Óró, sé do bheatha 'bhaile,  
Óró, sé do bheatha 'bhaile,  
Óró, sé do bheatha 'bhaile  
Anois ar theacht an tsamhraidh.*

*Tá Gráinne Mhaol ag teacht thar sáile,  
Óglaigh armtha léi mar gharda,  
Gaeil iad féin is ní Frainc ná Spáinnigh,  
Is cuirfidh siad ruaig ar Ghallaibh.*

*Óró, sé do bheatha 'bhaile,  
Óró, sé do bheatha 'bhaile,  
Óró, sé do bheatha 'bhaile  
Anois ar theacht an tsamhraidh.*

*A bhuí le Rí na bhFeart go bhfeiceam,  
Mura mbeam beo ina dhiaidh ach seachtain,  
Gráinne Mhaol agus míle gaiscíoch,  
Ag fógairt fáin ar Ghallaibh.*

*Óró, sé do bheatha 'bhaile,  
Óró, sé do bheatha 'bhaile,  
Óró, sé do bheatha 'bhaile  
Anois ar theacht an tsamhraidh.*



Chaired by former President Mary McAleese, the two-day Assembly created space for honest, courageous, and at times difficult but ultimately hopeful conversations about the island's future. The NWC made no attempt to steer participants toward a single position on the constitutional question. Instead, they opened a space for listening, learning, and open expression. Over two days, participants engaged in panel discussions, breakout groups, poetry, and storytelling. In a political culture where public debate is so often combative and polarised, the Assembly was quietly radical. It allowed women to show up as they are, to speak without needing all the answers, and to be heard. Ground rules agreed by the group meant participants could share freely, honestly and respectfully.

As someone who coordinated this project during my time as Head of Campaigns and Mobilisation with the NWC, I witnessed something powerful and something that should have an enduring place in our constitutional journey. In a room filled with different histories and hopes, we had a brave conversation about what this island could and should look like, if it is to serve all of us equally.

#### THE CURRENT DEBATE ISN'T SERVING US

Women have been underrepresented in constitutional conversations. The structures and language shaping these debates have often been adversarial, rooted in masculinised ideas of statehood and economy, and dominated by experts and commentators.

But at the Assembly, something different happened. Women shared their lived experiences and reimagined what a feminist future might look like—one that centres care, justice, and equality. The discussion moved beyond borders and budgets to more fundamental questions: What kind of Ireland do we want? Who will it serve? What values will shape it?

#### WE DON'T WANT MORE OF THE SAME INEQUALITY

Women spoke about the shared realities they face across the island: austerity, poverty, inaccessible healthcare, housing crises, and political systems that continue to neglect those who do the most caring. We heard about the toll of unpaid care work, the crisis of gender-based violence, and the layered impacts of class inequality, racism, ableism, and exclusion.

One of the greatest risks in the unity debate is reducing it to economics. While finances matter, if we limit the conversation to costs and benefits, we are selling ourselves short.

When asked what really mattered, women didn't speak about GDP or taxes. They spoke about justice, safety, dignity, and freedom. They brought reproductive rights, housing, childcare, climate justice, and gender-based violence to the centre of the discussion not as side issues, but as foundational to any future Ireland worth building.

A FEMINIST FUTURE DEMANDS SAFETY AND RESPECT FOR ALL COMMUNITIES, WITHOUT HIERARCHY OR EXCEPTION. UNDERSTANDING OUR OWN IDENTITIES, AND EACH OTHER'S, IS ESSENTIAL TO RECONCILIATION. THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVERSATION AFFORDS US THE OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE THESE POTENTIALLY TRANSFORMATIVE IF NOT DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS.

Participants also reimagined our relationship with land, not as something to own or extract from, but as something to steward for future generations. The Assembly called for us to start thinking like "good ancestors"—a powerful reframing rooted in feminist and environmental values. Despite differing views on the constitutional question, a shared vision emerged: a fair society that values both people and planet. One where access to services isn't shaped by postcode, income, or accent.

Who Leads the

Conversation Matters

In a political culture that is often adversarial and performative, intentionally created women-led spaces are different. They are safer, more open, and more imaginative. But building that kind of space requires more than goodwill. It means stepping back and allowing others, including those who don't share our views, to lead. If we only engage those who already agree with us, we miss the radical potential of this moment. We have to let people enter the discussion and come along the journey on terms that are safe for them and make them feel heard.

To their credit, the NWC created that space. Women weren't asked to represent political positions. They were welcomed as people with lived experiences shaped by class, race, geography, trauma, and resilience. Many entered the room unsure whether their voice belonged in a constitutional debate and most didn't have a fixed opinion at all.

Too often, people think they need to be experts to participate in this conversation. The Assembly reminded us that no one is an expert on what comes next. But all of us have a role to play in shaping it.

#### A VEHICLE FOR RECONCILIATION

Just as women's roles have been marginalised in public life, so too have their experiences of conflict and reconciliation. As the report notes,

"The narrative of conflict in Ireland has remained male-centred, ignoring women's roles as caregivers, community builders, peacebuilders, activists, and, at times, combatants." At the Assembly, reconciliation was not an abstract aspiration, it was a present, urgent need. Women addressed the intersecting legacies of colonialism, partition, patriarchy, religious control, and institutional abuse. These are not simply historic injustices either, they are still shaping lives.

Domestic and gender-based violence were recognised as central to this legacy. Whether through militarisation, state abuse, or in the home, these harms have left deep scars. Their impacts persist in mental health crises, poverty, addiction, and intergenerational trauma.

A powerful theme emerged around disconnect. Women from the South

admitted they hadn't considered themselves part of a post-conflict society. The conflict was something they believed happened "up there." But conversations revealed that while the forms of harm

IRISH UNITY AND FEMINISM ARE NOT SEPARATE PROJECTS. THEY ARE DEEPLY CONNECTED. THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM IS ALSO THE STRUGGLE FOR JUSTICE, CARE, AND TRUE EQUALITY. ANY VISION OF AN IRELAND OF EQUALS IS INCOMPLETE WITHOUT DISMANTLING PATRIARCHY, CAPITALISM, AND COLONIAL LEGACIES.



differed with militarisation, sectarianism, surveillance and violence in the North and State and Church repression in the South - the effects were widespread and deeply felt. Women from the South also expressed shame that successive governments had distanced themselves from the North, leaving inequality and instability unchallenged.

As the report puts it:

“Reconciliation cannot only be about ending violence. It must reckon with and dismantle the systemic harms that have shaped women’s lives across generations.”

#### IDENTITY AND RECOGNITION

The Assembly wasn’t designed to fully unpack identity in all its complexity, after all, we only had two days together. But through poetry and storytelling, women from Traveller, migrant, unionist, and proud Gaeilgeoir backgrounds reflected the depth and diversity of identity on this island. What became clear is that identity is multifaceted and meaningful to all communities, not just one. Too often, the wider debate frames cultural identity, particularly concerns about erasure as something that only Unionists experience, positioning it as a reason to avoid the unity conversation altogether. But fears about recognition is not unique to any one group. As we move forward, recognition and protection of identity must be understood not as a concession to Unionism, but as a universal principle of equality, dignity, and belonging for everyone who calls this island home.

A feminist future demands safety and respect for all communities, without hierarchy or exception. Understanding our own identities, and each other’s, is essential to reconciliation. The constitutional conversation affords us the opportunity to have these potentially transformative if not difficult conversations.

As one participant put it during the launch event in Dublin, “Ironically, the constitutional debate—although we share totally different positions—is the only space I’ve had to get to know my unionist sisters better.”

That kind of space is rare and deeply needed.

#### A BLUEPRINT FOR FEMINIST DEMOCRACY

The Assembly’s report, launched in both Dublin and Belfast, is not an end point. It is a starting point and a living framework for what inclusive and imaginative constitutional dialogue can look like. Alongside the Belfast Women’s Assembly and the Women’s Charter for Inclusive Constitutional Futures, it maps a bold and actionable path forward.

Its key demands include:

- Structural support for women’s participation in all constitutional processes
- Recognition of care and equality as core values
- A commitment to climate justice and land stewardship
- Truth-telling and reckoning with the past, centred on women’s lived experience
- Inclusion of marginalised voices: migrant, disabled, working-class, LGBTQ+, and Traveller women

The blueprints already exist. What’s needed now is political courage and resourcing to bring them to life.

#### IRISH UNITY AND FEMINISM ARE NOT SEPARATE PROJECTS

The Women’s Assembly affirmed what I have long believed: Irish unity and feminism are not separate projects. They are deeply connected. The struggle for freedom is also the struggle for justice, care, and true equality. Any vision of an Ireland of equals is incomplete without dismantling patriarchy, capitalism, and colonial legacies.

A referendum on Irish unity is a democratic right. Demanding a date is a fair and necessary ask, whatever the outcome may be. But how we approach this moment matters. The Women’s Assembly showed us how inclusive and imaginative dialogue can lay the foundation for genuine transformation.

This is more than a political opportunity. It is a chance to build something new. To centre long-ignored voices. To ask better

questions. And to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past.

Unity without transformation is not enough. If we simply merge systems without challenging the inequality they produce, we will have wasted this historic moment.

The good news is that women are already doing the work, in homes, in communities, in trade unions, and across the feminist movement. Initiatives like the Women’s Assembly, the Belfast Women’s Assembly, The Women’s Charter for Inclusive Constitutional Futures, point the way. But they need more than praise. They need investment and political backing.

This may be a decade of opportunity, but opportunity alone is not progress. Progress must be made deliberately, collectively, and with women at the centre.

Irish unity is possible. But a truly equal, shared future will only be possible if it is a feminist future. And women, North and South, are not waiting. We’re already building it.

Rachel Coyle is a feminist activist and former Head of Campaigns and Mobilisation at the National Women’s Council of Ireland. For over a decade, she has been organising for political, and community led change across Ireland, including as a former political organiser with Sinn Féin.

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# Tá seans ag an nglúin seo Róisín Dúbh a chur faoi bhláth faoi dheireadh

*By Eolan Ryng*



Bhí tráth ann in Éirinn nuair ba ghníomh ceannairceach é labhairt go hoscailte faoi Éire shaor agus aontaithe. B'éigean dár bhfilí — faoi bhrú cinsireachta agus riail choilíneach — a n-aislingí a chur in iúl trí mheafair. Tháinig Róisín Dúbh — an “Rós Beag Dorcha” — chun cinn mar shiombail d'áilleacht, de bhrón agus d'fhrithbheartaíocht. Amhrán grá a bhí inti, ach le teachtaireacht i bhfolach — guth pobail a raibh iallach orthu a mbrionglóidí a nochtadh i gcaint chiúin.

Sa lá atá inniu ann, ní gá dúinn a thuilleadh labhairt i bhfocail cheilte. Tá deireadh leis an ré sin. Is féidir anois cás aontacht na hÉireann a chur os comhair an phobail go hoscailte — go morálta, go sóisialta, agus go straitéiseach. Ní línte ar mhapa amháin atá i gceist leis an gcríochdheighilt, ach scoilt inár n-intinn agus inár spiorad — scoilt i náisiún nár thoiligh riamh leis an gcríochdheighilt sin.

Cruthaíodh teorainn neamhdhaonna, a ghearr amach srutháin, páirceanna, iarnróid — agus teaghlaigh. Agus cé go bhfuil an fócas i gcónaí ar na Sé Chontae, ní mór dúinn freisin machnamh a dhéanamh ar an tionchar a bhí ag an gcríochdheighilt ar an Deisceart. Laghdaigh sí fíís pholaitiúil, choil sí samhlaíocht náisiúnta, agus chruthaigh sí stát róchúramach, róchléireach, róthostach i bhfianaise cumhachtaí níos mó.

Ach ní taisteal ar ais atá i gceist agus Aontacht na tíre a phlé againn, saoradh na todhchaí atá i gceist. Sa domhan atá romhainn, áit a bhfuil géarghá le ceannairí neamhailínithe agus iontaofa, tá ról ar leith ag Éirinn. Go nádúrtha nílimid gafa le coilíneachas ná impireachtaí. Tá cáil orainn mar thír shíochánta, mar idirghabhálaithe, agus mar thír le cultúr oscailte. Ach tá ár gcumas fós srianta ag an scoilt.

Is deis í aontú na hÉireann ní hamháin chun teorainn a bhaint, ach chun ár luachanna a athbhunú i saol atá á thiomáint ag an mbrabús. I ndomhan ina gcuirtear praghas ar gach rud — ó chúram sláinte go ham pearsanta — d'fhéadfadh Éire Aontaithe bealach eile a thaispeáint: tír a chuireann sláinte roimh shaibhreas, tithíocht roimh spéculaithe, oideachas roimh íocaíocht, agus sonas roimh fhás geilleagrach gan chiall. D'fhéadfadh sé a bheith ina athbhunú morálta agus daonna — seans chun an saol a thomhas ní i luach airgid, ach i gcáilíocht mhaireachtála.

Tá ról ag athbheochan na teanga sa scéal seo freisin. Ról an-tábhachtach. Ní ag filladh ar an am atá caite a bheimis agus sinn ag athnascadh le teanga, stair agus cultúr na hÉireann, ach deis chruthaitheach a bheadh ann le dul chun cinn a dhéanamh ar bhealach atá fíor dúinne féin. Tuigeann an nglúin óg — iad siúd atá ag éirí míshásta leis an gcultúr tomhaltais Angla-Meiriceánach — nach leor aithris a dhéanamh ar an méid atá i réim. Ina ionad sin, tá siad ag tógáil rud nua: Éire chruthaitheach agus mhuiníneach a úsáideann an Ghaeilge, an ceol traidisiúnta, agus stair na tíre mar bhunús le todhchaí úrnua, nuálaíoch. Ní faoi chaomhnú sean-rudaí atá sé, ach faoi shamhlú nua-Éireannachais — Éireannachas atá fréamhaithe ach nuálach, dúchasach ach cuimsitheach, comhaimseartha ach dílis dá croí féin.

Tá seans ag an nglúin seo Róisín Dúbh a chur faoi bhláth faoi dheireadh.

*Eolan Ryng, gníomhaí de chuid SF i gCathair Chorcaí*





# Irish Unity is the future for rural communities

*By Órfhlaith Begley MP*





*People living in rural areas, particularly along the border, operate on an all island basis as much as possible already. This can be seen in the agri-food sector, in tourism and in commerce. A united Ireland will unlock our full economic potential and protect and promote our established international reputation as a world leader in agri-food production.*

*The agri industry is not well served by uncertainty regarding farm funding in the north, and two back to back systems with different regulatory and financial frameworks. It is unfair that people in the border corridor have to navigate both systems. Tá dúshláin amhail comharbas, feirmeoireacht teaghlaigh, fadhbanna meabhairshláinte, athrú aeráide agus géarchéim na bithéagsúlachta roimh thionscal an agraibhia agus roimh phobail tuaithe ar fud ár n-oileán.*

*Is fearr is féidir aghaidh a thabhairt ar na dúshláin seo le straitéisí agus struchtúir uile-oileáin agus le cinntí á ndéanamh ag polaiteoirí freagracha a toghadh go háitiúil agus iad ag obair i gcomhar le saoránaigh na tuaithe. Luíonn seo le ciall.*

*A United Ireland, with appropriate governance structures, will benefit the people of the island, including rural dwellers and farming families. Decisions which affect our agri industries should be made on the island of Ireland, and not by governments in Westminster.*

*Family farms are the backbone of our agriculture sector and rural economies in the north of Ireland. Recent decisions by the British government have rightly caused concerns for farmers here in the north.*

*Changes to the inheritance tax threshold has*

*caused significant concern and could make it more difficult to sustain family farms into the next generation which are vital to the future of our agri-food sector and many local rural communities.*

*The British government has also announced that there will no-longer be a ring-fenced budget for agriculture in the north which is causing uncertainty about future funding for agriculture. This is in stark contrast with the situation of farmers in the rest of Ireland who continue to receive EU funding.*

*The European Council has stated that in the event of Irish unity the entire island would re-enter the European Union.*

*A single island approach to the development of our agri-food sector, within the EU, is our best way forward.*

*Molann go leor daoine, Sinn Féin ina measc, do Rialtas na hÉireann tosú ag pleanáil agus ag ullmhú d'athrú bunreachtúil agus tá géarghá ann anois don rialtas Tionól Saoránach a bhunú chun an bhunobair a dhéanamh roimh Reifreann faoin aontacht.*

*Tá comhráite ag dul ar aghaidh ar fud na tíre – ar ár bhfeirmeacha, ag an mhargadh, ag ár gclubanna CLG áitiúla agus ag geataí na scoile.*

*This is an exciting time for us all; filled with opportunity and hope for a better future. It is absolutely crucial for farming families and rural communities to engage in the conversation around Irish unity to ensure they maximise the benefits that reunification could have for their communities.*





# VOICES

## for Constitutional Change

*By Gerry Adams*

**T**he visit on 20 June by former Fine Gael Taoiseach Leo Varadkar to west Belfast was a timely reminder that the issue of a new Ireland remains for many the political priority of our time. The packed event in St. Mary's University College was organised by Féile an Phobail and Ireland's Future and it was chaired by the Rev. Karen Sethuraman.

A year ago Leo Varadkar addressed the Ireland's Future event in the Odyssey Arena in Belfast. Only two months after stepping down as Fine Gael leader the former Taoiseach went beyond the accepted Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil positions of pushing back on any suggestion on the prospect of Unity. In advance of the meeting he said acknowledged that: "There is no doubt that inclusive constitutional conversations are happening in a new way on this island. Safe, constructive, shared discussions will be pivotal to building our future. I have said before that there could be a united Ireland in my lifetime and participating in events such as this Ireland's Future conference is very important in that regard."

He went further in his public address calling on the Dublin coalition government to push harder for a united Ireland. He said that there is a need to step up preparations for a possible end to the

border, including setting aside funding to pay for the change. And Unity should no longer just be a "political aspiration" - a united Ireland should become a "political objective." Mr. Varadkar said: "It means actively working towards it, preparing the ground for it."

He said he did not want a united Ireland just for the sake of it, he wanted it to be a success, with the maximum amount of support.

In his conversation with Rev. Sethuraman and the Ireland's Future audience this June the former Taoiseach accepted that there is now a widely shared public consensus on the means by which constitutional change can be achieved. This is rooted in the provision of the Good Friday Agreement that a majority in the North - 50% +1 - is sufficient to validate constitutional change. However, like Mr. Varadkar many of us have long articulated the view that we should "aspire to maximum consent - as large a majority as possible both south of

the border and north of the border." That is common sense and it is why we need a Citizen's Assembly or a system of Citizen's Assemblies, led by the Irish government, to encourage and facilitate the widest possible conversation about the future shape and governance of a new Ireland.

The unity referendum will take place. But as Leo Varadkar pointed out in St. Mary's "we need to prepare both here and in the South... I have proposed the establishment of a forum for parties interested in talking about unity. I hope at some point in the term of this government that decision will be taken."

Early in his remarks Varadkar pointed out that "nothing in politics is inevitable" and that this includes a united Ireland. The inference is clear: if we want a united Ireland we have to work at it; secure the widest consensus for it and put in place systems that will improve the lives of citizens. Unity cannot be the "annexation of six more counties" to the South but the



“THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT INCLUSIVE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVERSATIONS ARE HAPPENING IN A NEW WAY ON THIS ISLAND. SAFE, CONSTRUCTIVE, SHARED DISCUSSIONS WILL BE PIVOTAL TO BUILDING OUR FUTURE. I HAVE SAID BEFORE THAT THERE COULD BE A UNITED IRELAND IN MY LIFETIME AND PARTICIPATING IN EVENTS SUCH AS THIS IRELAND’S FUTURE CONFERENCE IS VERY IMPORTANT IN THAT REGARD.”

Leo  
Varadkar

creation of a new state “that can be better for all of us”.

The former Taoiseach saw little prospect of a violent loyalist response to Unity: “I know there are people south of the border who, when I talk to them about reunification, express to me concerns that there might be a very small minority within unionism who may turn to violence ... I don’t think we should dismiss that as a possibility. I don’t think it will happen, to be honest.”

In his wide ranging contribution Mr Varadkar said that there must be a bill of rights, guarantees of civil protections and liberties: “Just saying it as an aspiration isn’t enough anymore, it should be an objective and an objective is something you act on.” he said.

#### WALLACE THOMPSON

The conversation on Unity must include our unionist neighbours. The interview in the Irish News by Denzil McDaniel with DUP founding member Wallace Thompson, the day after Leo Varadkar’s event in Belfast, illustrates how far the conversation has already come. It is also an insightful record of one man’s personal journey.

From the 1960s Wallace Thompson was a staunch supporter of Ian Paisley and worked closely with Peter Robinson and Nigel Dodds. Last June, like Varadkar, he spoke at the Ireland’s Future event in the SSE Arena in Belfast. In his interview with Denzil he acknowledges that the political landscape has changed: “We are not wanted by Britain; we’re strangers in our own land ...” He feels “more and more Irish and less British these days” and he is convinced that unionists need to engage in the conversation on the constitutional future of the island of Ireland.

“I wonder would we not have more direct clout in an Irish setup, however it’s done, whether it’s devolved through the regions or unitary state. “People say that’s all very well but once they get you in there’s no guarantee, you could end up in very difficult territory. “I’ve moved considerably on this. I’m at a tipping point.”

Mr Thompson believes that Brexit should be regarded as the last straw for unionists. They would have more influence, he believes in the Oireachtas, than at Westminster, where “you’re hardly even noticed”. He told Denzil McDaniel that the catalyst that changed his attitude to a new Ireland was, “Boris Johnson’s nonsense on the Irish Sea border.” He said: “Friends in Fermanagh were more aware of the complexities and voted to remain, but we were foolish in believing we could achieve a total break easily. We began to realise that it was not that simple, but then came Boris’s betrayal. I began to think of the past and it was betrayal after betrayal.

“Every time unionism was on the back foot, we lost ground by crying ‘not an inch’. “Down through the hundred years of Northern Ireland we kept losing ground. The 1974 strike and Sunningdale, with the violence being so severe in 1972 and ‘73, all seemed a bridge too far in the heat of battle. We said we can’t compromise, but perhaps that was an opportunity that should have been taken. Then we opposed the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 and lost seats, and we opposed the 1998 Belfast Agreement. Then had to accept the principles of it were going to be the foundation of whatever we did,” he says. “Every time we said no surrender, not an inch, while losing inches. The final straw was this nonsense from Boris.”

Questioned further by Denzil McDaniel, Wallace Thompson acknowledges that constitutional change is coming. He said: “There’s an inevitability that some sort of constitutional change will take place. When, I don’t know. It is some way down the road, but we need to discuss it, we need to prepare for the possibility of it. We need to talk within our own groups ... “ But he expresses concern that there is no evidence that the Irish government is taking the steps needed to prepare for change: “I don’t see that conversation taking place. The southern government is not showing much direct interest



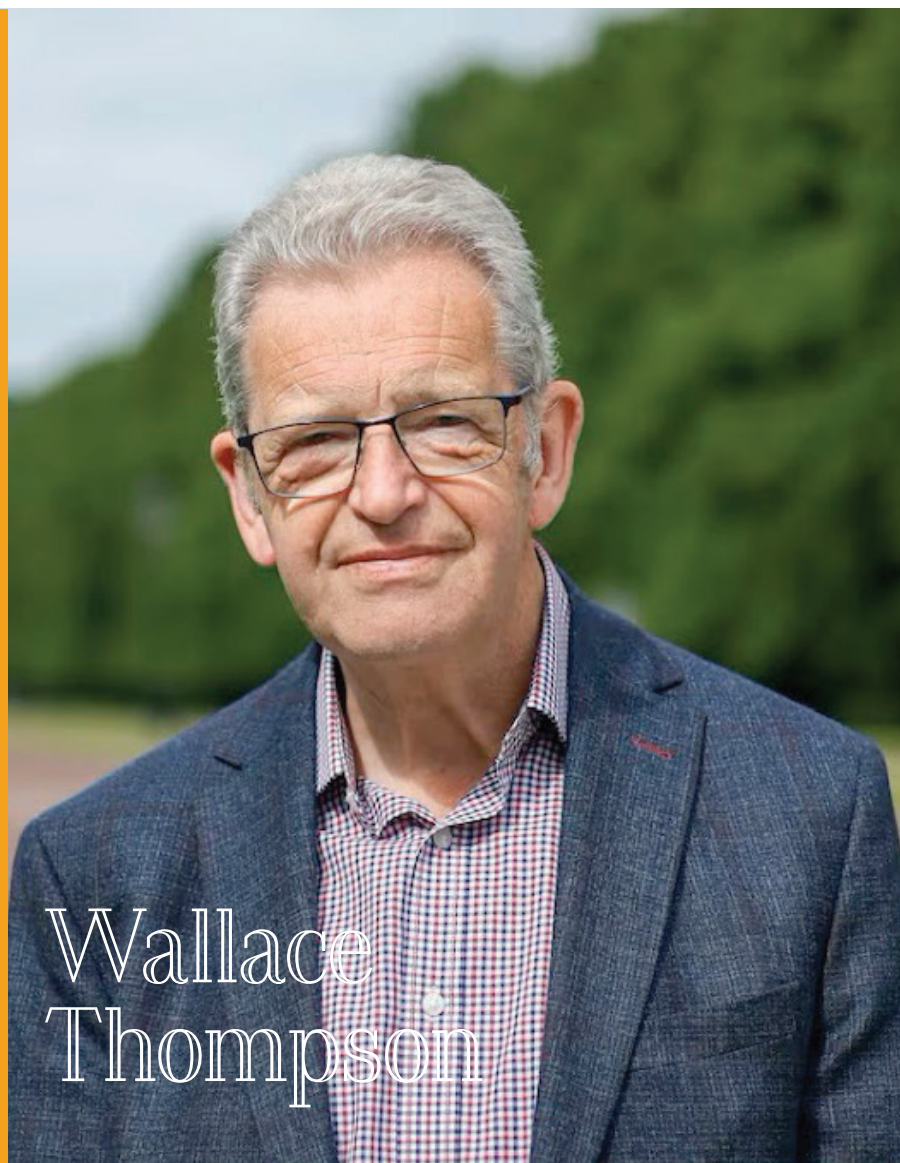
beyond broad principles. The only ones pushing for it are Sinn Féin and we don't know what version of change they want to achieve. Other nationalists and unionists need to be involved."

This is one citizen thinking his way through the complexities of constitutional and political change. Successive opinion polls show that he is not alone in this but it would all be so much better for society if the Irish government grasped the imperative of dialogue and commenced a planned programme of assemblies and public meetings. Wallace has questions he would like answers to. He is not alone. The Irish government is failing in its responsibility as the sovereign government in not rising to this challenge.

Wallace Thompson wants people within his tradition to prepare for the possibility of constitutional change by discussing it internally, and says he has been surprised by the level of private support he has received. That places an onus on nationalists and republicans to reach out, to have the conversation that Mr. Thompson and others within unionism obviously want to have and to answer their questions about the new Ireland and their place within it.



"THERE'S AN INEVITABILITY THAT SOME SORT OF CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE WILL TAKE PLACE. WHEN, I DON'T KNOW. IT IS SOME WAY DOWN THE ROAD, BUT WE NEED TO DISCUSS IT, WE NEED TO PREPARE FOR THE POSSIBILITY OF IT. WE NEED TO TALK WITHIN OUR OWN GROUPS ..."



Wallace Thompson





# LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEADING THE WAY ON UNITY

*By Cllr Conor Heaney*

Sinn Féin and others have been consistently calling on the Irish Government to establish a Citizens Assembly to begin the preparatory work for a referendum on Irish Unity, thus far they have refused to do so. But we cannot wait on Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, therefore in Councils across Ireland motions have been passed to begin that work in their local districts.

In May of 2021 Derry and Strabane Council passed a motion to establish a Working Group on Irish Unity. Its Terms of Reference are:

- Identifying relevant sources of information / stakeholders that can inform the development, roll out, analysis and dissemination of relevant information.
- Engaging, as necessary, with representative groups and other stakeholders to inform the approach and design of the engagement / consultation process.
- Initially engaging and informing an analysis on broad economic, environmental and social impacts
- Helping to identify any barriers to engagement and appropriate mitigation measures.
- Identifying implications for the Council area and the wider north-west
- Lobbying for funding and identifying funding opportunities
- Disseminating the results of the engagement / consultation process.
- Engaging with political representatives, where required, on a regional, sub regional and cross

border basis.

Other similar motions have been passed in Mid Ulster, Donegal, Belfast, Newry Mourne and Down and most recently in Fermanagh Omagh Council. So, the process of discussion about Irish Unity is being held and progressed through our Council teams and other parties at local Government level.

The political purpose of these Groups is to begin research, discussion and consultation on constitutional change and what preparations Councils would need to take to manage a new constitutional arrangement. In the absence of the Irish Government establishing a Citizens Assembly or Assemblies to facilitate preparation and discussion local Government forums provide a valuable platform



for such conversations to begin.

The Derry Strabane Working Group has met eight times and has carried out a three-part phased consultation and produced a document titled 'Starting the Conversation-Potential Way Forward.

The first phase was an online consultation with rate payers and stakeholders and over 200 submissions were received, and Ulster University have since done an analysis of the responses and produced a report.

The second phase was inviting sectors such as health and tourism, trade unions etc to talk to the Working Group on Irish Unity about their views what a new Ireland should look like.

Phase three will take the conversation into the communities of each Council area and the working groups will attend meetings organised by the Neighbourhood Renewal partnerships.

Good work has been done so far but much more is to be done and replication of this initiative across Councils in the country will build momentum towards the structured national conversation and planning that the Irish Government needs to establish.

Fermanagh and Omagh Council agrees Working Group Sinn Féin MP for Fermanagh South Tyrone Pat Cullen has welcomed the decision by Fermanagh & Omagh District Council "to establish an Irish unity working group in advance of any move towards the unity referendum that is provider for in the Good Friday Agreement."

A motion to establish the working group was discussed and passed at a full meeting of the Council on Tuesday 1 July. The motion was proposed by Cllr Stephen Mc Cann and by Cllr Debbie Coyle. Pat Cullen said:

"This is an important initiative which was passed overwhelmingly by 23 Councillors to 9 against and with 2 abstentions.

The unity referendum is a key part of the Good Friday Agreement which was overwhelmingly endorsed in referendum in May 1998. The unity referendum is an opportunity for the people of the island of Ireland to agree

peacefully and democratically the constitutional future of the island.

Local Councils can play a very constructive role in creating a positive atmosphere in which the many issues arising from the conversation on unity can take place.

So too can the Irish government which should as a matter of urgency be establishing a Citizen's Assembly or Assemblies to bring together interested sectors and citizens to discuss how best we can advance the unity project.

The Citizens' Assembly/Assemblies are an important mechanism for democratising the debate on the future. In the last decade Irish governments have held several successful Citizens' Assemblies. These helped deliver marriage equality and the repeal of the 8th amendment.

The establishment of Citizen Assembly/Assemblies have a vital role to play in facilitating the integration of public services, especially health services; the all-island economy; culture, rights and identity, and the shape and form of new democratic institutions."

Councillor Stephen McCann commenting on the successful vote at the Council said:

"With the momentum for Irish Unity growing, it is important to consult as widely as possible and widen the debate into what a new Ireland would need to entail.

"Local Councils can facilitate this debate by establishing working groups to engage with our constituents on the issues and to explore the potential implications for individual Council areas.

"The work of the working group for Fermanagh and Omagh Council should include a consultation process with all stakeholders including community & business groups, trade unions, sporting organisations, LGBTQIA+, health professionals, disability groups, transport organisations and all other relevant bodies and agencies to assess views on all the issues relating to constitutional change"

This will provide and invaluable forum for the local community to feed in their views.

## FULL MOTION PASSED BY THE COUNCIL

"This Council notes that across the country the momentum for Irish Unity is growing.

This Council notes with disappointment the failure of the Irish Government to establish a Citizen's Assembly to debate and discuss our constitutional future and resolves to contact the Irish Government again to convene a Citizens Assembly on this issue.

This Council recognises the need to engage with our constituents on this issue and to explore the potential implications for our Council area. Therefore, this motion calls for this Council to establish of a formal working group on Irish Unity.

The work of this working group should include a consultation process with all stakeholders including community & business groups, trade unions, sporting organisations, LGBTQIA+, health professionals, disability groups, transport organisations and all other relevant bodies and agencies to assess views on all the issues relating to constitutional change"

"This Council has done sterling work along with its neighbouring Council in Donegal building the NW city region. However, in preparation of ending Partition we must go much, much further than that. To take the approach as some have that now is not the time is actually an irresponsible thing to do."





# SINN FéIN PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

*By Declan Kearney*

**S**inn Féin is constantly calling on the Irish Government to begin the process of planning for constitutional change. The provision for a referendum on Irish unity is codified within the Good Friday Agreement (GFA). It makes common sense that preparatory arrangements should be made to plan for it. We all have to plan in our personal lives, with our families and in our communities – governments do it every day.



The call on others to plan for the future behoves republicans to do the same. Consequently, several months ago the party held a day long internal National Strategic Conference on the issue of Irish Unity. The purpose of the conference was to focus on the party's national political strategy and its objective of securing and winning a unity referendum and achieving national self-determination.

This conference was an opportunity for national, regional, middle leadership, and elected representatives to examine where this strategy sits in the context of recent election results, the current state of the party and how successful we have been in integrating the national democratic question into our economic and social policies, the demand for a Citizen's Assembly/Assemblies and the day to day activism of the party. It was about developing a focus to use our political strength to secure and to win a referendum.

Over 300 activists, as well as delegates from each Chomhairle Ceantair from across the island of Ireland – including several comrades from London and Europe – came together for a series of workshops and group discussion to examine how Sinn Féin can maximise our ability to win support for Irish unity.

The proposal to hold a national strategic conference was first made two years ago but the electoral cycle and the increasing workload of party activists and elected representatives meant that March was the first real opportunity to hold it.

Our political and strategic objectives are how we determine party policy and activism; they are at the core of who we are and what we are trying to achieve. Our political goals are:

- Our ultimate aim is to build an Ireland of equals.
- Our primary aims have remained constant.
- National self-determination.
- National territorial reintegration.
- Political independence and sovereignty.

In my opening remarks to the conference, I said:

“Struggle is never static; nothing ever

stays the same. As agents of change we need to constantly and critically assess our project. Solutions are never found on the basis of impulse or kneejerk. Strategy has to be our reference point. Our national strategy is predicated on the national aim and the ultimate aim. The national aim is self-determination and a national Republic. Our ultimate aim is an Ireland of equals and a socialist republic.

“For decades we have been guided by a series of strategic objectives with the aim of moving toward the achievement of our national objective. These involve the popularising of republican ideas; maintaining internal political unity and cohesion; to internalise our struggle; to constantly be focussed on the development of positive alliances for change and at the same time focussed on denying our opponents the ability to create negative alliances to frustrate change. And all of that is done by maximising our support and building political strength.”

The conference itself was structured around four key objectives:

- To harmonise the national democratic project with our economic and social programme – integrating the national & social struggle;
- To strengthen our national political position as we lead the opposition in the 26 counties and power-sharing coalition in the north;
- To maximise our campaigning capacity to secure and win unity referenda north and south;
- and, to improve cohesion at all tiers of the party leadership regarding our Strategic Objectives and implementation of national strategy Planning and Logistics.

An organising committee was convened and workshop facilitators and note takers were selected and briefed prior to, and then again on the morning of the conference.

The imperative of internal party cohesion, and critical debate was emphasised throughout the conference.

It was agreed that there would be no media presence at the conference to distract from the work of the day. The sole purpose of the conference was to discuss strategy on the central

republican objective of unity. Eight workshops took place.

Feedback at the conference was immensely positive. Comrades were universally supportive of the exercise. Several key conclusions emerged, including the need to increase campaigning within local communities; to enhance our political campaign edge; and door to door engagements. There was general agreement that we need to emphasise the connection between economic and social issues, and the promotion of Irish unity. This is the integration of the national and the social struggles.

A further area of agreement was the importance of strengthening efforts within the party to improve internal communications locally and regionally. Addressing the obvious political impact of partition on both jurisdictions and to improve activists understanding of the damage partition is responsible for.

There was a recognition of the importance of young people and the need for a greater effort to attract more young people into the party. The role of Ógra Shinn Féin was discussed. The importance of building political alliances with different sections of society such as unionists, trade unionists, women, community organisations and so on was also raised and there was a lively discussion on the potential for building a broad left alternative alliance.

The rise of the far right and the importance of Sinn Féin having an effective strategy to challenge it was debated.

Some contributors stressed the need for increased attention on our Irish unity campaigning, better campaign co-ordination, and value of dedicated local co-ordinators. The party's publicity strategies and structures were discussed along with the importance of publicity and social media messaging.

It was agreed that internal strategic conferences should be a more regular feature of the life of the party as a way of keeping a consistent focus upon the national democratic project and the mainstreaming of the Irish Unity campaign within the Party.

In her remarks to the conference Uachtarán Shinn Féin Mary Lou





McDonald TD said:

"This is big important work that we have to undertake. Our conference and discussion today is about how we chart a way forward, how we advance our ultimate aim, the reunification of Ireland and the building of a society underpinned by equality, fairness and economic justice. This was the vision of the revolutionary generation more than a century ago and it remains our goal today."

"Three decades ago, Sinn Féin had no TDs, no MEPs, no MPs and we had 59 Councillors. In the European elections in June 1994, we received 89,038 votes. Today that's changed. We now have 45 members of the Oireachtas, 27 MLAs, 7 MPs, 2 MEPs. We have 243 Councillors right across Ireland. We are the lead party of opposition in the South having ended decades of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael stifling control of both of opposition and of government. And in the North the unionist majority, once described as perpetual, is now gone. Sinn Féin is now the largest party in the Assembly and in local government we have a republican First Minister."

In her conclusion, Mary Lou McDonald TD reminded attendees that a key part of Sinn Féin's focus now is on moving the Irish Government toward the "calling a unity referendum before the end of this decade":

"Our primary task in the time ahead is to build Sinn Féin as the most potent vehicle for political change in Ireland. There are no shortcuts to what we have to do. We have to walk the walk. So being a passenger won't cut it. We have to challenge ourselves to find new ways to advance the goal of the unity referendum. We need to look at how we win those referendums and how we win them well. Persuasion through action is how we get the job done. Thinking nationally, acting locally also means planning for Unity locally. Planning by town, city, county and province. It means embedding Irish Unity into the work of the party in every area."

"The work of uniting Ireland is a historic task, and it is our privilege to be driving this history in our time and in our generation."





# dúirt síad

## Comments on Irish Unity

“The cost of a united Ireland has been exaggerated partly because what is called the UK subvention has been misunderstood and misinterpreted. At the same time the potential, for economic growth in an all-island economy, where Northern Ireland is once again inside the EU, has not received sufficient attention”. **Professor John Doyle’s conclusion in his economic report published by Dublin City University and Ulster University. 3 July 2025**

“This comprehensive research has delivered a fatal blow to economic arguments against a united Ireland. Irish unity is an economic opportunity that we need to grasp. That means doing the preparation work now”. **Pearse Doherty Sinn Féin TD, finance spokesperson, responding to the report by Professor John Doyle, published by Dublin City University and Ulster University. 3 July 2025**

“It provides clear evidence, based on a range of economic models, that uniting Ireland has enormous potential to improve outcomes, quality of life and opportunities for people in the North. That is an exciting project and a much-needed antidote to the politics of despair and deadlock that has gripped the North and Britain”. **Colum Eastwood, former leader of the SDLP and chair of its New Ireland Commission, responding to the economic report published by Dublin City University and Ulster University. 3 July 2025**

“Irish unity offers us the opportunity to build an all-island health and care system”. **Pat Cullen Sinn Féin MP, Fermanagh and South Tyrone – 26th of June 2025**

“ This book offers a thorough evidence-based look at Ireland’s constitutional future. In these pages, two of the island’s most respected commentators set out opposing cases with clarity and civility, giving citizens in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland the balanced information they’ll need.” **Ruth Hegarty, Royal Irish Academy, speaking about the book ‘For and Against a United Ireland’, by Fintan O’Toole and Sam McBride. – 25th of June 2025**

“Opinion polling has found that while support for Irish unity is broad, it may also be shallow if those in the Republic are required to make concessions with regard to such matters of the flag, the anthem, and perhaps recognition of the British identity of northern unionists unwilling to lose their membership of the United Kingdom. There needs to be a committee of constitutional experts established to consider how these concerns might be resolved”. **Irish News article by Paul Gosling, journalist, author and speaker specialising in the economy. 24th of June 2025**

“I look forward to the day when partition is ended and Ireland is united, when all Irish citizens at home and abroad are afforded their full democratic rights. Those barriers and the partitionist mindset that created them will not fall of their own accord. We must dismantle them piece by piece. The President of Ireland is the President for all the people of Ireland. November’s election must be the last presidential election that excludes citizens in the North and those living abroad, who deeply love this country”. **Sinn Féin President, Mary Lou McDonald, speaking in the Dail debate which passed a Sinn Féin motion calling on the Irish government to extend voting rights in Presidential elections to all Irish citizens in Ireland and the diaspora. – 24th June 2025**

“I really appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this debate. I can confirm the government is of course not opposing the motion. I fundamentally believe in expanding the presidential franchise to all Irish citizens regardless of where they live on this island, or around the world. I want to win the debate. How do we win this debate. We are committing tonight to work with all members of this house, of all parties and none to deliver this”. **Neal Richmond, Minister of State. – 24th June 2025**

“The Labour Party has long supported the extension of the voting franchise. I thank Sinn Féin for tabling this motion which we will support. In our view it would be a largely symbolic measure and another step towards unity”. **Ciaran Ahern TD – 24th June 2025**

“We in the Social Democrats support the extension of the franchise for the presidential election to both recent emigrants and those Irish people living in Northern Ireland. We support a united Ireland. Irish people in the six counties feel ignored. At times they feel invisible, and this is one way we can show they are valued, and they are seen by us in Dail Éireann”. **Sinead Gibney TD – 24th June 2025**

“I have no problem with implementing the recommendation of the Fifth Report of the Convention on the Constitution, for all Irish citizens on the island of Ireland. Now that the government is agreeing with the motion. I welcome that. Tell us what the government is going to do for the next step”. **Catherine Connolly TD – 24th June 2025**

“Independent Ireland believes we must give all the people on the island of Ireland the right to vote in Presidential elections. It makes no sense that people who live on the island – North and South – cannot have a vote for the President of Ireland”. **Michael Collins TD – 24th June 2025**



# dúirt síad

## Comments on Irish Unity

"I am pleased the government has not opposed this motion. I want to reassure the Dail that the government takes this matter very seriously and will continue to reflect on it and it will work cross-party to look at this issue in a lot more detail". **Emer Higgins Minister of State. – 24th June 2025**

"More Blacks, More Dogs, More Irish. Mo Chara". **Kneecap32. Billboard Advertisements across London before the court appearance of Kneecap's Mo Chara charged with flying a flag in support of Hezbollah at a London gig. 18th of June 2025**

"Many Northern nationalists believe there is a partitionist mindset in the South and that the "establishment" parties of Fiann Fail and Fine Gael are not interested in Irish unity, despite rhetoric to the contrary". **Irish Time article by Cormac Moore, columnist, historian and author. -11th June 2025**

"This Council will again write to the Irish government to demand they establish a Citizens Assembly to plan and prepare for a referendum on Irish unity". **Second motion on a Citizens Assembly passed by Derry, Strabane Council, May 28th 2025.**

"A majority of people in Northern Ireland believe opinion polls should be used to determine if there should be a referendum on reunification" **LucidTalk survey for the Belfast Telegraph, 25th of May 2025.**

"Ben Collins is someone from a unionist background who now believes that the future is Irish reunification. He has written two books on the subject: Irish Unity: Time to Prepare, and The Irish Unity Dividend, which will be published in September". **Brian Feeney, historian, Irish News columnist, author and commentator. – 23rd of May 2025**

"People and parties across the island who believe in the power and potential of a new Ireland need to find new ways of cooperating and coming together to advance that mission". **Former leader of the SDLP Colm Eastwood MP speaking in Westminster at an Irish Border Poll organised event, Irish News 20th of May 2025**

"Irish citizens living in the North of Ireland should have a right to a say in the future role and influence of the Irish presidency. Our rights as full Irish citizens are fully guaranteed under the Good Friday Agreement and in the Irish constitution but these rights are not being engaged. The unacceptable democratic deficit should end. The Irish government should act now". **Declan Kearney MLA, Sinn Féin's national Chairperson, speaking in the Assembly debate which passed a motion calling on the Irish government to extend Presidential voting rights to citizens in the North. – 6th May 2025**

"I speak in strong support of the motion and welcome the fact that Sinn Féin members have tabled it. It is an extremely important subject, on which it is entirely legitimate that the assembly gets a chance to make its voice heard". **Mathew O Toole, SDLP's leader in the Assembly. – 6th May 2025**

"Let me turn to what the motion represents. It is about fixing a democratic anomaly that should have been resolved quite sometime ago. If you are eligible to hold an office and if you wish to have, as the Good Friday Agreement gives you the right to be recognised as a citizen of Ireland you should be eligible to vote for that office". **Stewart Dickson, MLA, Alliance Party. – 6th May 2025**

**Extracts from a research report prepared by Zaida Morte Montolio and Karlo Bialek during an internship in the Spanish Embassy in Dublin, in the spring of 2025. – May 2025**

"The more that national identity is defined by shared values, the less that both sides will need to dilute the cultural aspects of their tradition in order to find a shared identity. A myriad of cultural traditions can sit under the banner of an Irishness defined by shared values". **Ross Neil, Belfast solicitor practising in Dublin writing in the Irish Times 27th of April 2025**

dúirt síad



## BOOKREVIEW

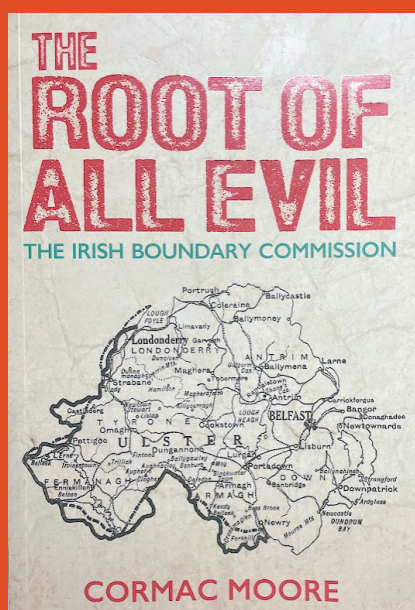
# The Root of All Evil: The Irish Boundary Commission by Cormac Moore (2025)

*Reviewed by  
Chris Turley*

Cormac Moore's 'The Root of All Evil' is a powerful indictment of the political failures, strategic miscalculations, and entrenched sectarianism that surrounded the Irish Boundary Commission of the 1920s.

Published in 2025, Moore's book arrives at a time of renewed focus on Irish unity, and its central argument — that the Boundary Commission was designed not to revise partition but to entrench it — resonates with contemporary discussions centered on the prospect of Irish Unity. Combining deep archival research with sharp historical analysis, Moore exposes the duplicity of the British government, the failures of the Irish Free State, and the uncompromising rigidity of Ulster unionism. But most significantly, he draws a clear line from these past failures to today's political landscape, offering a timely warning to those advocating for a unity referendum.

Moore opens with the damning assertion: "The Boundary Commission was never a vehicle for unity—it was a mechanism to copper-fasten partition under the guise of revision" (Moore, 2025, p. 12). The 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty created the impression that the North's borders might be reconfigured. But Moore demonstrates that the British government had little intention of allowing meaningful change. Among the most revealing examples is Lloyd George's role in the original Treaty negotiations. He promised Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith that significant nationalist areas would be transferred to the Free State — a promise made with no intention of

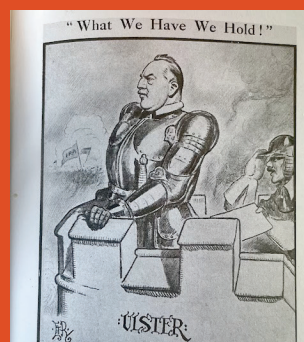


fulfilment. Moore quotes one British official who admitted, "Lloyd George knew it was a bluff. The map was drawn in ink, but the guarantees were made in disappearing ink" (p. 47).

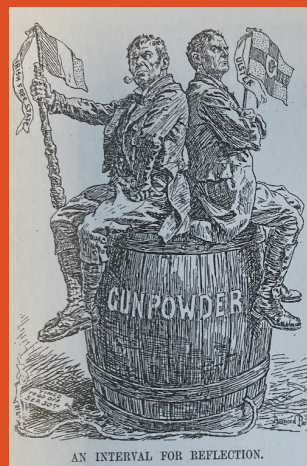
This duplicity continued into the 1920s, as British officials reassured James Craig's Unionist government that no significant concessions would be made, while encouraging Dublin to believe otherwise. Internal correspondence from Lord Birkenhead explicitly reassures Unionists that "no transfer of territory will be forced on them," while the Irish Free State was misled into thinking that large swathes of Fermanagh, Tyrone, and Derry could be gained. "The British never intended to act as honest brokers—they acted as guarantors of the Unionist veto," Moore concludes (p. 78).

Yet Moore does not let the Irish government off the hook. He is unsparing in his critique of W. T. Cosgrave's administration and its policy of abandoning Northern nationalists and republicans. Cosgrave, emerging from the civil war, prioritised Free State stability over confrontation. His government feared economic fallout, social unrest, and the wrath of Britain, which remained the Free State's dominant trading partner. The Free State's introduction of tariffs and customs posts in April 1923 transformed a political boundary into a physical and economic one. Moore offers; "The imposition of customs barriers in 1923, long before the Boundary Commission sat, entrenched the border in practical terms. It was a sovereign decision by the Free State government that reduced the prospect of a seamless reunification." (Moore, 2025, p. 132)

Moore notes the appointment of Eoin MacNeill to the Commission. MacNeill was politically out of his depth and had a propensity for making poor decisions. His appointment reflected Dublin's lack of preparation. MacNeill cut a divisive figure for many due to his role in attempting to call off the Rising. "MacNeill entered a political lion's den armed with maps, statistics, and good



Almost from the moment of the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in December 1921, Northern Ireland's Prime Minister James Craig adopted a 'not an inch' strategy that ultimately prevailed. (Bystander)





## BOOKREVIEW

### The economic unity of the island was sacrificed at the altar of partition—an irony not lost in the era of Brexit” (p. 134). *Cormac Moore*

intentions—but no political leverage” (p. 102).

Cosgrave’s government also feared the implications of a hard customs border if the North remained excluded from southern governance. This economic anxiety, Moore argues, was a critical factor in Dublin’s eventual decision to abandon the Commission’s findings. “The economic unity of the island,” he writes, “was sacrificed at the altar of partition—an irony not lost in the era of Brexit” (p. 134).

Unionism’s response was equally rigid. James Craig and his administration viewed the Commission as illegitimate from the start and resisted any suggestion of territorial compromise. Moore paints Ulster Unionism as a siege-minded entity: “They engaged not to negotiate, but to obstruct” (p. 89).

Where Moore excels is in drawing contemporary parallels. He notes that the same caution which paralysed Cosgrave’s government has persisted in Irish politics for much of the 20th and 21st centuries. Noting that successive Irish governments have been reluctant to even discuss unity, let alone plan for it. “A century on,” Moore laments, “partition remains the unspoken fault line of Irish politics—acknowledged symbolically, ignored strategically” (p. 224).

This political dissonance has deep roots: fear of reigniting conflict, alienating Unionists, or damaging diplomatic relations with London have all taken precedence over pursuing Irish Unity. Reinforcing the Free State was paramount for the new administration. As Liam Mellows warned during the treaty debates in 1922 “Men who get into power, even men who have fought for a principle, soon forget it, or come to regard it as an impractical thing.” Moreover, the political establishment in the South—particularly Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael—has historically viewed Northern nationalism as politically volatile and electorally unhelpful. This attitude has been magnified with the electoral expansion of Sinn Féin in the 26 counties. For much of the post-Good Friday Agreement period, unity was treated as a rhetorical aspiration rather than a policy objective. However, Moore notes a subtle shift in recent years, especially in the wake of Brexit. In 2022, Taoiseach Leo

Varadkar became the first sitting Fine Gael leader to publicly engage with Ireland’s Future, a civic nationalist group advocating for unity preparation. In 2023, Varadkar attended their public forum in Dublin and stated: “It is time for us to begin planning, to ask the hard questions, and to ensure that if a border poll is called, we are ready with answers.” Moore sees this as a symbolic departure from past apathy, though he remains skeptical: “Rhetoric without structures is not strategy. Engagement without a plan is the first chapter in another failure” (p. 228).

Moore’s concluding argument is clear: political opportunity must be matched with political preparation. Sinn Féin and civic movements like Ireland’s Future, possess far greater democratic leverage than their predecessors. But democratic leverage is not enough in itself. Preparation and engagement with citizens are a principal component of winning any referendum on unity. There is a clear onus not just on those advocating for unity but also the Irish government, who should be driving the need for constitutional change. Yet the dangers of assuming goodwill from Westminster, or avoiding the difficult groundwork of consensus-building, remain potent. He warns: “History does not repeat, but it echoes. Without clarity, we risk another 1925” (p. 211).

Ultimately, *The Root of All Evil* is far more than a historical account. It is a forensic examination of how partition was protected, not challenged; how northern nationalists were not only abandoned but ignored by successive governments; and how British power was wielded to secure Unionist dominance. Moore’s meticulous research and urgent prose make this an essential read—not just for students of Irish history, but for anyone serious about the future of the island. The past, he reminds us, is not behind us—it is beside us, shaping the road to unity or division once again.

Chris Turley recently graduated from Queen’s University with a BA Honours in History and Politics. He is a long standing Sinn Féin and community activist in west Belfast.

Men who get into power, even men who have fought for a principle, soon forget it, or come to regard it as an impractical thing. *Liam Mellows*

A century on partition remains the unspoken fault line of Irish politics – acknowledged symbolically, ignored strategically. *Cormac Moore*