

TROOPS OUT MOVEMENT AND THE NORTH - SEE PAGE 26

New IRELAND

FÓMHAR
2022
AUTUMN
EAGRÁN ISSUE 4



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A FIRST MINISTER FOR ALL

SEE PAGE 4

TAOBH ISTIGH

BELFAST PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY CALLS ON IRISH
GOVERNMENT TO ESTABLISH A CITIZEN'S ASSEMBLY
PAGES 6-13

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AG DUL I DTAITHÍ AR
CHEARTA TEANGA
PAGES 17-19

Clár

FÓMHAR 2002 AUTUMN EAGRÁN ISSUE 4

- 3 **WELCOME TO NEW IRELAND**
- 4 **A FIRST MINISTER FOR ALL**
- 6 **BELFAST PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY CALLS ON IRISH GOVT TO ESTABLISH A CITIZEN'S ASSEMBLY**
- 14 **PARTITION IS ALWAYS RACIST**
- 17 **AG DUL I DTAITHÍ AR CHEARTA TEANGA**
- 20 **A CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY IS ESSENTIAL**
- 23 **CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE DOMINATED DEBATES AT FÉILE**
- 26 **TROOPS OUT MOVEMENT AND THE NORTH**
- 30 **CROSSWORD**
- 31 **YOU DON'T NEED TO BE A ROCKET SCIENTIST TO KNOW A UNITY REFERENDUM IS COMING**
- 34 **UNITED NATION: THE CASE FOR INTEGRATING IRELAND BY FRANK CONNOLLY**
- 36 **SEANAD CONSULTATION BEGINS ON CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE**



IRISH UNITY IS THE FUTURE

Whether Chris Heaton-Harris, the current British Direct Ruler for the North, stays in post longer than the Prime Minister who appointed him in early September will emerge by 28 October. Coincidentally he is legally obliged on the 28th to formally announce an Assembly election. He has already indicated it will be on 15 December. However, given the shambolic state of British politics and the chaos within the Tory Party there is no certainty in any of this. December 15 is also the date by which Micheál Martin hands back the office of An Taoiseach to Leo Varadkar.

The next British Prime Minister will be the fifth in six years. And as each has tried and failed to reshape Britain to a post Brexit world Tory government policy – especially under Johnson – shifted further and further to the right. Truss's adherence to right wing politics followed this direction and cost her, her job.

Whatever the outcome of the latest Tory leadership contest - and the possible return of Boris Johnson - we know that the next Conservative leader and Prime Minister will behave much as his/her predecessors have done. The self-interest of the Tory Party and of the British establishment will trump those of working people in the North and in Britain.

There is now an opportunity to write a new script for the people of our island.

The stance of the DUP in consistently backing a Conservative Party that invariably throws it under the bus is evidence of how shallow and insecure unionist politics are. The DUP backed Theresa May. They even did a deal to keep her in power. Ochon ochon. That collapsed. Then there was Boris Johnson and for a wee while, Liz Truss.

The DUP's Sammy Wilson was effusive in the British Parliament in his endorsement of the Truss budget. It would he claim "increase living standards, boost employment and raise revenue for public services". None of which was true. Even the markets refused to believe it. Within hours of Kwarteng's announcement the Bank of England had to spend billions to protect pensions and the British economy went into free fall.

And then there was DUP former leader Arlene Foster who pledged her support to Truss during the Tory leadership contest and described her as "the Union's most passionate advocate". Jeffrey Donaldson apparently met Truss for talks the night before she resigned. That didn't work out well.

How often will unionist politicians debase themselves and their electorate by tying their futures to British parties that don't care about them?

If the Brexit debacle has proven anything it is that the union is not in the interests of the people of the North or of the island of Ireland. Or working class people of England, Scotland or Wales. Whoever emerges as the next Tory leader their focus will be on doing what it takes to win the next general election. That means concentrating on their own little Englander support base in an effort to retain the Westminster seats that they need to stay in power.

The reality is that it is ordinary people – working families – who in the months and years ahead will go cold, struggle to put

food on the table and pay their bills.

There is an alternative for people in Ireland. We have no democratic control over politicians in England - they do what they want about our affairs - and they have no mandate in Ireland. Self determination and self government here will correct that wrong.

Several weeks ago Ireland's Future held a seminal event in Dublin attended by 10 political parties and the leaders of five of the largest parties on this island. These parties must work together to deliver on what was said at that historic event. Sinn Féin's Commission on the Future of Ireland held its first public People's Assembly in Belfast. We are creating space for people to have their say. That's their entitlement. Hardly a day passes without evidence of the growing momentum on the viability of Irish Unity.

There is now an opportunity to write a new script for the people of our island. The unity referendum contained in the Good Friday Agreement and its commitment to defend and protect the rights of all citizens, is the way forward. The Irish government has to be persuaded to stop running away from its responsibility to prepare for this. Or Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael and the Greens should stand aside and give people their chance to elect Sinn Féin to tackle our social and economic problems and to stand up for the Good Friday Agreement and plan for the referendum contained in it.

These are testing times. But they are times of great opportunity as well. The future is for us - together, le chéile -to shape.

*Email your letter to
irish.unity@sinnfein.ie*



A FIRST MINISTER FOR ALL

by Michelle O'Neill MLA,
First Minister elect

In September I attended the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II at Westminster Abbey in London. By doing so I was respectfully joining leaders from Britain, Ireland and the international community to pay my respects as she was laid to rest.

Reaching out the hand of friendship to advance reconciliation is the common ground, where together, we can all build for the future and to do so in a manner that reflects the diversity of allegiances, identities and aspirations is about maturity and civility in this era of change. For politics to work it must be inclusive. That means the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement, must work, serve and deliver fairly and equally for all citizens.

In the May 2022 Assembly election, the people of the north gave Sinn Féin an overwhelming endorsement for our vision for change, and the future. Our election performance reflects changing public attitudes and the progressive shift in politics on our island.

Irrespective of religious, political or social backgrounds my commitment is to make politics work through partnership, not division. I want to co-operate across party lines and deliver in Government by working with others who want progress. Protecting the identities, rights and aspirations of all citizens and working together in a power-sharing government where parties plan together, work together and deliver together is a key priority.

Sinn Féin wants to work together with others to deliver for people. Workers and families are struggling. The reality is that people need our help today. That is why we are ready to form



an Executive now. We need to put money into people's pockets to help deal with the rising cost of living crisis, agree a budget and an extra £1 billion into the health service to reduce waiting lists which have left people crippled with pain, support cancer and mental health services, and recruit more doctors and nurses. The DUP boycott of the political institutions, their refusal to accept the democratic outcome of the recent election and their saddling up to the Tories has the DUP lost in a morass of indifference to the impact on people here. Later this month, on 28 October, the caretaker Ministers will vacate their departments leaving nobody at the helm and without a budget to sustain public services.

The law requires the British Secretary of State to call another election if by that date no First Minister and Deputy First Minister have been appointed by the Assembly. The British Secretary of State Chris Heaton-Harris has indicated 8 or 15 December as the likely dates for an Assembly election.

It is unconscionable that at a time of such concern for the welfare of those who we as politicians are elected to serve are being denied Government leadership because Jeffrey Donaldson continues to act against the will of the majority of people and MLAs here.

Ireland is a changed and changing place. The outworking of Brexit and the decision of the DUP to support it; the shift in the balance of



power at Stormont, the irreversible loss of the unionist political majority and their perpetual veto, and changes reflected in the recent census results signal that the status quo is rapidly shifting.

Continued attempts by the British government to sabotage the Protocol in plain sight through Westminster legislation sponsored by Liz Truss herself, if enacted will have grave consequences and has sounded the alarm bells right across Ireland, Britain, Europe and America, awakening all those who value the Good Friday Agreement and who care deeply about safeguarding our peace and progress of the past quarter century.

It is not taken lightly that this British Government discards international law at a whim in such a reckless way, and only ever in their own selfish interests.

The scale of what has been accomplished since the advent of the Good Friday Agreement almost 25 years ago has resulted in the transformation our society, and in particular border communities, but we have much, much more to do in order to prosper and reach our full potential.

This includes advancing peace and reconciliation and eradicating the cancer of sectarianism in our society.

Sinn Féin seeks partnership, not division with unionism, but we also want to work and serve all those who are of neither a unionist nor

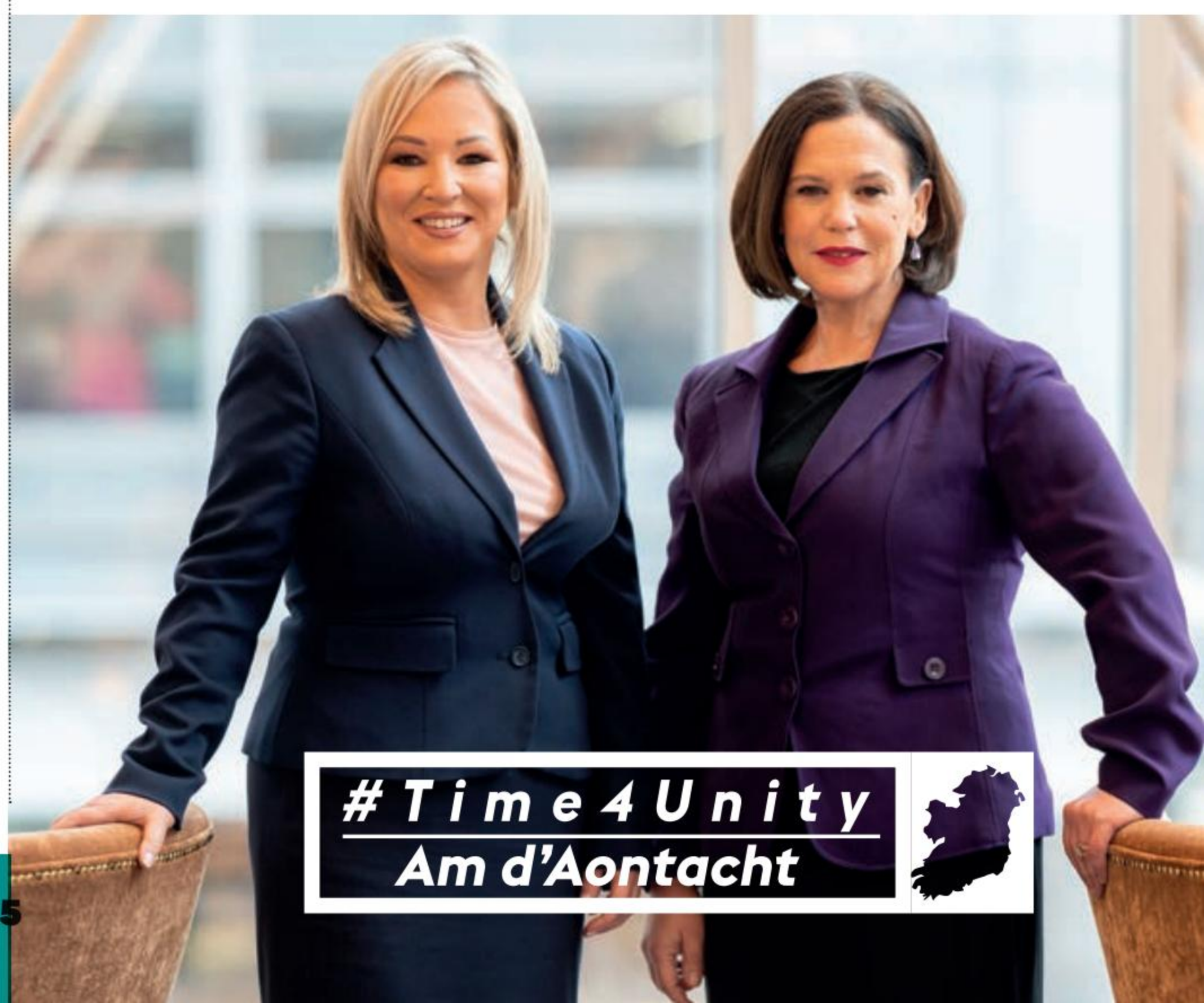
nationalist political tradition too. We want to show respect, and to be shown respect whether we're British, Irish, or neither.

I do not see any contradiction in fully committing and delivering on power-sharing while also aspiring to new constitutional arrangements on this island.

I want to lead a mature and open dialogue about the future; a dialogue where nobody feels they are being asked to dilute, compromise or surrender their identity or allegiance but where together something better is created for us all. Our shared mission must be to bring all the people who share this country together.

As a First Minister For All I am ready to make politics work for all.

That's what people voted for, and that's what they deserve.



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BELFAST PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY

CALLS ON IRISH GOVERNMENT TO ESTABLISH A CITIZEN'S ASSEMBLY

The first of the People's Assemblies to be held under Sinn Féin's Commission on the Future of Ireland was held in Belfast on 12 October. It was a full house in the Waterfront Studio in the Belfast Waterfront Conference Centre where they discussed constitutional change and the steps needed to create a new Ireland.

The event saw 10 expert witnesses make verbal submissions in two plenary sessions and this was followed by a discussion with the audience. Many of those who spoke from the floor were from the unionist community. The contributions were positive and futuring.

The conference was divided into two sessions. The first covered 'The Economy and Communities in the New Ireland' and the second was titled 'A New Ireland for everyone.' The event was opened by Declan Kearney who is the Chair of Sinn Féin's Commission on the Future of Ireland which along with Belfast Sinn Féin was responsible for organising the evening and the keynote address was delivered by First Minister designate Michelle O'Neill MLA. Among those who made verbal contributions to the discussion were:

Seamus McGuinness - Research Professor, Economic Social Research Institute (ESRI);

Ruth Taillon - 20 years experience of Cross Border issues;



Glyn Roberts - Chief Executive, Retail NI;
Áine Hargey - Chairperson of the Markets Development Association;
David Gavigan – Businessman;
Greta Gurklyte - Public Engagement Officer, Disability Action;
Professor John Barry - School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics, QUB;
Dr Raied Al-Wassan - Northern Ireland Council for Racial Equality;
Maighréad Ní Chonghaile - Irish Language activist and Gaelscoil Principal;
 and **Ben Collins** - Writer & Communications Consultant.

At the end of the evening the independent chair Eilish Rooney of the University of Ulster asked for a show of hands on the need for the Irish government to establish a Citizen's Assembly. The response was overwhelmingly in favour.

A video of the Belfast Peoples Assembly is available on YouTube:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B88dmep9SS4>



The Commission was planning a second conference in Letterkenny for November but that has been postponed to the New Year following the tragic events in Creeslough. Other events are being planned and details of these will be released later.

Speaking after the event Declan Kearney thanked those who had participated and said that the Waterfront conference had succeeded in “attracting attendees from across a broad spectrum of people and overall feedback has been very positive.”



Below are edited remarks from the verbal submissions. A full report, including the full submissions will be made public in the next few weeks.

Opening remarks by Commission Chairperson Declan Kearney MLA



Constitutional change is now fixed on the political horizon. Brexit; electoral realignment; opinion polls; and the most recent census results have all contributed to that prospect. Of course, that doesn't mean Irish unity is inevitable, but the discussion has become dominant in our political discourse.

That's the context within which Sinn Féin holds this People's Assembly. We want everyone to have their say. Those who advocate Irish unity; those who are undecided; and, yes, including those who oppose change.

The 3 Arena conference in Dublin illustrated the

significant nature of what is happening. Never before has such a cross section of civic and political opinion come together to address Ireland's Future. That is a hugely important development. It represents common ground, which needs to be harnessed and build upon with common purpose. There is now an irresistible case for the Irish government to establish a Citizens' Assembly on constitutional change.

This is an exciting time for us all; filled with opportunity and hope for a better future. That's why we need to get it right. Achieving a new constitutional national democracy will emerge from a phased transition. And that is why systematic planning and preparation should begin now. Grassroots communities should be involved at the beginning of that process, not at the end.

Our shared challenge must be to create a future which is warm and welcoming for everyone. All ideas and concerns deserve to be validated. Every voice should be heard. This is the time for planning, and to engage with each other. I believe we possess the collective wit, wisdom and compassion to do that, and to start democratically planning for self-determination, constitutional change, reunification, and national reconciliation.

Keynote address by Leas Uachtarán Shinn Féin Michelle O'Neill MLA

Back in 2020 I described this as period as a 'Decade of Opportunity' and tonight's People's Assembly is part of us trying to make best of that opportunity.

I believe that a growing number of people across this society are starting to re-evaluate and assess the present realities and how it is impacting all of our lives.

People are questioning what does the future hold. What could a future outside of the Union look like, and what are the opportunities?

We are here to discuss the most important political issue of this and of previous generations - the right of the people of our island to self-determination. We're discussing the creation of a new Ireland, which is inclusive, rights based, democratic and based on equality.

The partition of our island, and the denial of our right to govern ourselves has long scarred Irish society. Brexit, which was rejected by the people of the North, has exacerbated this. It has deepened divisions.

Next April will mark 25 years of the Good Friday Agreement. And while the power-sharing and North/South institutions are not functioning at this time, nonetheless the Good Friday Agreement has already brought about significant, positive and transformational change on this island. We need a conversation about the 25 years and the future.

More and more people are enthused by the possibility of change and of building a new Ireland. I know that the unionist parties have a different view. To this point tactically they refuse to engage in this conversation. That is a mistake, because they are about our shared future together on this island.

This is about our right to govern ourselves – all of us together. What shape that governance takes is a matter for agreement and for all of the people to decide, but one thing is for certain, the only ones who can govern in the interests of people here are ourselves.



There is an onus on both governments to now prepare for constitutional change. The Irish government has a particular constitutional duty to plan and prepare for unity. Sinn Féin has consistently called on the Irish government to establish a Citizen's Assembly.

We don't want to bounce anyone into a referendum. We want it to be preceded by inclusive discussions and informed debate. A Citizen's Assembly therefore makes sense.

We want more than the reunification of our island – we want the unity of our people. We want a future which consigns sectarianism to the past and in which all of our citizens Irish, British, northern Irish or none of these can live together in peace and prosperity.

Today North and South there are more people than ever before who want that new Ireland. Who see in it an opportunity for prosperity. An Ireland where no one is left behind. We have it within our grasp to create a peaceful, united, democratic Ireland.

We cannot allow those opposed to change to put the brakes on progress, or on the recasting of new relationships between Britain and Ireland, or indeed a shared future on the island of Ireland as the constitutional future comes closer into focus in the time ahead.

SESSION 1 - THE ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES IN THE NEW IRELAND

**Seamus McGuinness - Research Professor,
Economic Social Research Institute (ESRI)**



There are a number of key questions that are central to the debate on reunification that research has attempted to address. How does the performance of the North's economy compare to that of the Republic? What are the potential explanations for

the North's poor productivity performance? What are the potential costs of future reunification?

There is no evidence that the NI economy is heavily integrated with either the GB regional economies or the Irish economy. These findings weaken the argument that any change in the constitutional position of the North would have large economic consequences with a United Ireland. The evidence also suggests that the economic gains to Northern Ireland for being part of the UK are less

than what would be previously thought.

Who will bear the economic cost has been a key feature of the debate on constitutional change? The subvention was estimated at 9.2Bn sterling in 2017/2018. However that figure falls by about 25% when we extract expenditures no longer expected to be incurred post reunification.

Furthermore, somewhat or all of the costs of the North's old age pensions estimated at 3.2Bn in 2016/2017 could also remain a UK liability.

There is a growing consensus among researchers that subvention costs are unlikely to represent a substantial barrier to reunification... A transition period would be necessary in the event of a border poll... Planning needs to be focused on policies aimed at improving the North's low productivity in order to eliminate any subvention requirements at the end of the transition period and to maximise economic benefit to reunification.

Ruth Taillon - 20 years experience of Cross Border Issues

For a long time now, I've been concerned that awareness of the Good Friday Agreement, even among political activists, has largely focussed on the problems related to Stormont and most recently on the criteria for calling a border poll. However, the Agreement was designed to address "the totality of relationships" on these islands and all three strands need to be prioritised.

So far as preparing for a border poll, there is clearly a job of work to be done convincing people this side of the border whose allegiance is presently with the UK. But I don't think a positive vote in southern Ireland can be taken for granted. Many people south of the border will need to be convinced that unification will benefit them, against those who argue that it will prove a detriment to their prosperity and social cohesion.

So, on both sides of the border, we need to put forward all-island solutions to social, environmental and economic issues that will deliver their needs more effectively than a single jurisdictional approach.

So, how is that to be done? What is my main message here?



My argument is that unionists or sceptical Irish citizens can best be convinced that an integrated or united Ireland is in their interests by developing practical cross-border and all-island concepts and projects that deliver on those interests; that provide meaningful opportunities for their input into design and implementation...

Since the GFA, I've spent much time promoting practical cross-border cooperation. Over the years, I've found the lack of enthusiasm for cross-border and all-island projects among many republicans especially disheartening. There seems to be an idea that cross-border cooperation is all well and good, but a wishy-washy alternative to demands for a united Ireland.

My impression is that this attitude is reflected in the negative responses to the Irish Government's Shared Island initiative. This is, as my mother would have said, cutting off your nose to spite your face. I find it shocking how little is known about the Shared Island initiative – which has ring-fenced 1 bnEuros for north-south projects to 2030 -- among otherwise well-informed nationalists north of the border.

Finally, assuming we are going to see the restoration of Stormont and with it the Strands 2 and 3 institutions, every possibility to use them to develop all-island integration and build common cause with progressives in Britain should be maximised both for present day returns and to lay the foundations for unification, whenever it may come.

Glynn Roberts - Chief Executive, Retail NI



The retail sector is Ireland's largest sector and employer and is key to any future success on this island. This is why retail NI work hand and glove with our counterparts south of the border Retail Excellence

Ireland to make sure governments both North and South hear our member's voices. Our two groups were one of the first to present to the Oireachtas Good Friday Agreement Committee. We presented to the North/South ministerial council and some years ago, we produced a joint plan to grow the islands retail sector. Again, all of which was breaking new ground for a Northern Ireland based business organisation. But this cooperation wasn't in any way to advance a constitutional outcome but to ensure we advance our shared goal of a prosperous island. We work North-South, East-West to create a better future for us all. But my main message to you tonight is the importance of investing, improving and modernising Ireland's transport infrastructure. We all know infrastructure is the backbone of economic growth and I firmly believe in the untapped potential of rail to contribute to social and economic development across the island of Ireland, providing faster and more frequent connectivity, connecting communities, as well helping us meet our ambitious climate action objectives. Rail is recognised on this island as an important asset to

enable better quality of life and more sustainable travel. The all-Ireland strategic review rightly expands upon the commitment made in the New Decade-New Approach agreement of a high-speed rail-link between Belfast, Dublin and Cork but also looking at new ways to improve our current rail infrastructure such as electrification, better connections in the North-West and the role of rail as an efficient movement of goods. But whatever the long-term future of this part of the island, we cannot ignore where we need to be in the short-term... no ifs and no buts, we need the Executive back. We are ambitious for this region's future and for the huge potential it has to be the very best place in these islands to shop, socialise, vacate, start up and scale up a business, to be the gateway of the European Union and to be a truly global facing region and of course an ecosystem of innovation.

Áine Hargey - Chairperson of the Markets Development Association

I was born and raised in the Market community. It is over 200 years old and is one of Belfast's most historic working-class districts.

Decades of regressive economic and social policy led successive British and Unionist governments to rip all industry and infrastructure out of the area, with decades long attempts to shrink our district boundaries, encroach on our land and in turn impoverish our people. In the GFA era when economic investment reigned supreme; within a 10-year period over £1.1 billion of investment went into the Laganside area. The Waterfront, hotels, and grade A office space hosting international corporations like price water house cooper were built. Out of the £1.1 billion invested not a single penny reached my community or its people while all traces of us and our history were wiped from this piece of land. Why am I here telling you all the story of the Market? Because our story is representative of working class communities across Ireland. Our experiences are shared. Locked out of the economy; a lack of quality and affordable housing; people trapped in unemployment or low paid work; welfare systems designed to punish; addiction issues that mask the inherent trauma within our people; educational underachievement; lower life expectancy, and systemic poor health. Peace has to be underpinned by prosperity, but when families are struggling to make ends meet and to survive, as they are today, family and community life quite literally becomes chaotic. We have seen this played out in our homes and on our streets time and time again. All of this underpinned by a regressive form of economics and a complete disconnect with those who rule over us from Westminster. All of this is of course predicated by the abject failure that is partition. What is the way forward for working class communities



and our people? How do we begin to solve the issues I just outlined to you all? For me the answer lies quite clearly in a United Ireland and in a Republic. There is not a single equality issue in Ireland that can be solved while partition remains intact. Partition is the root cause of our bread and butter issues, it is the driver of inequality and division and until we root partition out this rampant inequality will continue to thrive. Anyone therefore who is serious about ending inequality must also get serious about ending partition. Unity presents us with unique and exciting opportunity to reconstruct our country from the bottom up. To build a new and just economy, focused on equal outcomes and not just equal opportunity. Where workers rights are upheld and protected, where work has dignity and where it pays to work and where our most vulnerable are protected. And can I just state for the record, because I've been hearing it a lot lately: a rising tide does not lift all boats. The economic ideology that underpins that mantra is utter nonsense and does nothing but reinforce inequality.

David Gavaghan- Businessman



The topic I've been asked to address is an island of 10 million people. In 2010 Intertrade Ireland published a report it had commissioned by the Irish Academy of Engineering - Infrastructure for an island population of 8 million. It was launched by Martin

McGuinness on the steps of Stormont. It was a really significant statement of confidence in the future of the island. Trying to identify the future infrastructure needs which are fundamental to making people's lives better.

Later a second report was published on the importance of the eastern economic corridor of Ireland and its connectivity. The report was dedicated to the work of George Quigley. It looked specifically at the importance of being globally competitive. Without it we will not be able to produce the jobs, and the welfare, and the needs of the people of the whole of the island of Ireland.

A third report – a more significant piece of work – looked at the connectivity of the island. That's where the magic figure of 10 million comes from. So where are we today?

I'm fed up with hearing that the population is less than pre famine levels. That is utter rubbish. There were at least 8 million people on the island of Ireland, possibly 10 million in 1840. The population of Ireland is currently about 7 million, just under 5 million in the republic and about 1.91 million in the north.

NISRA indicated that the population of Northern Ireland in 2043 will be 1.977 million. The Republic says the population of the Republic of Ireland will grow between 1 and 1 and a quarter million in 15 years.

Of that population more than 20% will be born outside of Ireland. In the current demography of the Republic 4/5 people work. By 2050 we will be lucky if 2/5 people work. That has huge consequences for the future of Ireland. It's vitally important that we have enough immigration.

Where will these people live?

In order to be globally competitive you have to have cities of 1 million people.

The prospect of having cities of a million people in Ireland is remote.

There will be 2 million in Dublin, 1 million in Belfast, half a million in Cork, and the rest of the principal cities if we can get on with it will have a quarter of a million people with enough people producing kids.

SESSION 2 - A NEW IRELAND FOR EVERYONE

Greta Gurklyte - Public Engagement Officer, Disability Action

Disabled People have been waiting too long for change. We do not have the same protections and rights as counterparts in the neighbouring jurisdiction and In England, Scotland and Wales.

In fact the Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission for has stated that lack of progress to close the gaps in equality legislation means that we are living in the "dark ages" and that there is a "serious risk of falling way behind, to not being a developed country".

There is a cost of living emergency escalating before our eyes. Disabled people face impossible choices this winter between breathing and eating, due to the escalating costs of running life saving machinery in the home. This is a very dangerous situation and without action disabled people will die this winter.

Disabled people have been left behind at Stormont, and we have been left behind by Westminster. My friends in our neighbouring jurisdiction have similar stories to tell. We need a new form of governance and decision making that works for disabled people. The current political crisis is devastating, we needed sustainable institutions months ago to save our lives.

Part of tonight is about thinking about what can work. We know that working together works. We know that collaborative partnerships bring about the best possible outcome. I have worked on a cross-border ONSIDE project which was co designed with disabled people. ONSIDE project was developed to improve disabled people's health and wellbeing by digitally equipping and upskilling disabled people and reducing social isolation. This project has reached 2400 disabled people, reduced social isolation and established community hubs operating here and in the South of Ireland.

I had the opportunity to participate in the Encounters Programme and to think about what we would do in the future on a Shared Island. As disabled people we agreed we need to work together to deliver real change and rights and equality for all.

We can achieve more working together.



Professor John Barry - School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy, and Politics, QUB



What I am about to say will make me as welcome as a fart in a spacesuit for raising some uncomfortable biological and physical truths about what we could be facing.

The maintenance of growth past sustainable levels relies on overwork, environmental exploitation, endless

overconsumption and consumerism of buying crap you don't need to impress people you don't care about, the privatisation of our public services and non-market provisions.

Or in other words, growth in overdeveloped societies such as ours is worsening not improving our living standards. Growth for growths sake Ms Truss is the ideology of the cancer cell. GDP tells us absolutely nothing about the real social conditions in our society or the well-being of our citizens. It tells us nothing about the inequality, the distribution of income and wealth and resources or indeed poverty and social inclusion and it tells us nothing about the value of the unpaid work of women, without which our economies and societies would not function.

Arguments for Irish Unity based on a scientifically unfounded projection of a post-unification economy based upon island wide endless economic growth are scientifically illiterate, extremely risky and lack all credibility.

Therefore, to ensure a firm scientific footing for the economic debate on reunification, all future contributions must engage in the reality of the planetary crisis and the opportunities that can be realised by embracing a radical post-growth political economy.

In short, a New Ireland requires a new way of thinking and managing in a post-unification economy, all discussions around reunification need to be based on a completely different model and understanding of the political economy. In short there is no new or old Ireland, there is no unified Ireland or partitioned Ireland on a dead planet. So it is time to thank economic growth for what it has done but it is time to move on to a new economic model. Let's give it a good Irish wake, let's move from a focus on more to a focus on better, thank you...

Dr Raied Al-Wassan - Northern Ireland Council for Racial Equality



I came here 32 years ago to study at Queens and I love the place so I decided to make it home. If you look at the latest statistics it shows that 6.5% of people living in the north were not born in the UK or Ireland, like myself. We are entitled to vote and we do vote in every election and we vote tactically.

There are lots of issues for ethnic minorities/communities

in the North when it comes to a United Ireland. A border poll is coming. It will happen. It's just a matter of when. And we will be entitled to vote.

What are the main issues for us? There are lots of issues, like the NHS – its really important – we want it free at the point of delivery.

But the most important tissue for ethnic minority is Irish Citizenship. We are not entitled to be an Irish citizen even after 32 years of living in the Belfast according to Irish law. I have argued many times personally with Irish politicians on this but nobody is willing to discuss this issue.

So when we have a border poll do you expect people from ethnic minorities to vote for a country in which they will be second calls citizens? We need to address that point before any border poll.

If you look at the opinion polls there are at present about 20% undecided, people in the middle and these people will swing the vote one way or the other. Many in the ethnic minorities are in the undecided position because of these issues.

During the flag protests and the vote in Belfast City Council. The people who were blamed were those in the middle. When we have an Ireland vote some will blame ethnic minorities for the result of the vote and that will increase the hate crime.

That scares me. The levels of hate crime North and South, and especially in the North exceeds that of sectarian crime.

We saw after Brexit many people from Europe being told, why are you still here? Go back home we are out of Europe.

So we need to address the hate crime, the NHS, the economy. We have to have a good plan before we go to the border poll and specifically address the citizenship issue for people settled in the North of Ireland.

Unfortunately the GFA deals with those born in the North of Ireland but does not mention those who settled here. So we need to address that point. We need to have a good solution for it before we go for the border poll.

Maighréad Ní Chonghaile - Irish Language Activist and Gaelscoil Principal

A dhaoine uaisle agus a chairde Gaeil.

Mar is eol daoibh, chuaigh na mílte chun sráide arís eile ar na mallaibh i mBéal Feirste chun cearta teanga agus Acht Ghaeilge a éileamh do lucht labhartha na Gaeilge anseo i dTuaisceart na hÉireann. Bhí mé féin i láthair ar an lá ar ndóigh. Bhí mé i láthair mar mháthair atá ag tógáil clainne le Gaeilge, i láthair mar phríomhoide Gaelscoile and i láthair mar ghníomhaí Gaeilge i mo cheantar féin. Bhí sé rí-thábhacht dom bheith ann ar an lá. Bhí sé rí-thábhacht go ghlacainn m'áitse insa slua sin agus muid ag iarraidh cearta teanga. Caithfear a bheith cinnte nach ndéanfaí imeallú orainn mar Ghaeilgeoirí a thuilleadh. Is cinnte go bhfuil Gaeilgeoirí na tíre i dteideal d'áit agus d'ionchur sa chomhrá agus muid ag plé na féidearthachtaí, na



deiseanna agus na dúshláin a bheadh bainte le hÉire Nua Athaontaithe a bhaint amach.

Tá sé simplí domhsa. Bheinn ag dúil go huile agus go hiomlán go mbeadh teanga na nGael agus cearta na nGael iomlán im-leabaithe agus iomlán fréamhaithe go córasach sa dlí agus i mBunreacht nua na hÉireann ar bith.

Mar is eol dúinn ar an drochuair, rinneadh go leor leor ionsaí ar an teanga agus ar phobal labhartha na Gaeilge thar na blianta fada anseo sna 6 Chontae. Cuireadh bac ar fhorbairt agus ar fhás na Gaeilge d'aon turas. Glacadh le gach seans constaicí a chur i mbealach na teanga, léiríodh dímhéas uafasach ar an Ghaeilge agus ar Ghaeilgeoirí go minic. Thárla seo uilig go furasta mar gheall ar easpa pholasaithe – ní raibh aon chosaint nó caomhnú ann sa dlí agus níl go dtí an inniu ann!

Is cinnte nach bhfuil na tuairimí diúltacha seo i leith na Gaeilge teoranta do na 6 Chontae áfach, go deimhin, tá cás déanta ag go leor daoine go bhfuil seasamh na Gaeilge sna 26 Chontae i bhfad siar óna bheith iomlán tacúil nó slán. Bhí Rialtas na hÉireann i mo thuairim féin ó bhunaíodh an Saorstát, chomh leag lochtach agus níos measa arís ag freastal ar an Ghaeilge na mar a bhí Rialtas na Breataine agus mórchuid d'Aontachtas Pholaitiúil. Feictear domhsa go gcaithfear pleanáil don athGhaelú anois mar chuid den chomhrá d'athaontú agus bheith ag plé leis an Ghaeilge go normálta agus go cothrom mar chuid de dhioscúrsa chearta an duine. Bheadh an dioscúrsa céanna i gceist le cibé mionlach eile den phobal chomh maith, bíodh sé bainte le cine, le míchumas, le gnéasacht nó cibé rud. Is Saoránaigh Éireannacha muid uilig agus muid rugtha sa tír seo agus mar sin cearta agus cosaint uainn!

Bheinn féin go pearsanta ag moladh go láidir fosta mar chuid do chaint ar thodhcaí na hÉireann, nach amháin go mbeadh an Ghaeilge, ceist na Gaeilge agus cearta teanga leagtha amach go cothrom agus go láidir, ach go mbeadh sé seo uilig déanta go lárnach, forbartha agus socruithe thar ama taobh le ceisteanna móra eile - go mbeadh an Ghaeilge suite i lár an aonaigh, i gcroílár an chomhrá ón túsphointe agus chan mar bolta móide ag an deireadh. Go raibh míle maith agaibh a chairde.

Ben Collins - Writer & Communications Consultant

Ben Collins speech for People's Assembly 12 October 2022 - Thank you for the invitation to speak today. I don't know what I've done to deserve being last to speak or more importantly what you have done to have to hear me talking at this stage.

Sovereignty for me is not a flag on a pole. It is a roof over your head and food on the table. Housing is the foundation stone for society. The quality of home that somebody lives in has an impact on their physical and mental wellbeing. We must look after the most vulnerable and help them to live as independently as possible, for as long as possible in their own homes. We want to see everyone have access to a good quality home. A New Ireland must have a strong focus on this. The best way to achieve this is through a mixed tenure approach where social, affordable and private housing is provided together.

This helps to create sustainable communities.

We need to take an all-Ireland approach to this which means identifying surplus public sector land across government departments, public agencies and local councils. Using this land where it is suitable and in areas of high need, to build more housing. There should be specific targets set for all government departments across Ireland to ensure that they deliver this in a joined up manner. The post-pandemic world gives us all an opportunity to live and work across this beautiful island in a way which was not possible beforehand. We need to ensure that we provide highspeed broadband so that we can harness this potential, reinvigorate our towns and villages and reduce carbon emissions from people having to commute into our urban centres. Remote working should be welcomed and encouraged across the private and public sectors.

Here are two practical examples of how partition is damaging our ability to provide housing. The housing regulator in the South does not allow out of state control. This means that northern housing associations cannot leverage their assets to help fund and build housing in the South. It means that northern housing associations cannot use their expertise in terms of staff or board members on approved housing bodies in the south, in a truly joined up way. Housing needs to be considered a key part of Ireland's infrastructure and all of this should be done on an all-Ireland basis. You do not need to be an economist to know that one thing is cheaper and more efficient than two of something. Too often there is duplication because of partition.

Prior to Brexit coming into effect northern housing associations were able to access low cost loans through the European Investment Bank. In one example they were able to draw down €200m for solar panels which was put on social housing to help address the climate crisis and provide cheap and safe energy for their tenants. The EIB is no longer processing applications from Northern Ireland for this and the supposed UK Investment Bank is not providing funding either. Irish unity will enable us to reverse these two retrograde steps.

Building new housing provides an economic multiplier effect for the wider economy so by focusing on this we are providing homes and jobs. Attracting inward investment is a good thing but it only works if we have enough good quality housing for those who want to come and live here. We also want to ensure that our young people are able to get access to good quality homes and that they do not feel forced to leave Ireland, to seek opportunities elsewhere.

Thank you.



Clíodhna NicBhranair and Eilíh Rooney, Independent Chair



Partition is always racist

***Yusuf Murray** is a leading community activist within Irish Muslim community working for an inclusive and diverse society in a new and united Ireland. A mature Law student at Trinity College Dublin, he has worked on cross-community events like the Eid at Croke Park celebrations.*

Conor Mulvagh's book "Irish Days, Indian Memories" is a fascinating account of a group of twenty-four Indian Law students studying at UCD in the years leading up to the 1916 Rising. This was no ordinary group of students and no ordinary times. Both India and the entirety of Ireland were at the time occupied by Britain – providing a shared experience of oppression, but also, ironically, the mechanism which allowed a group of Indian students relocate to Dublin with such ease. Amongst the students was a V. V. Giri – trade unionist, Minister for Labour in India's first post-independence government and a future President of India. Amongst their lecturers was Thomas MacDonagh – lecturer of English in UCD, Commandant in the Irish Volunteers and signatory of the Proclamation.

Whilst they were, by any standards, a small group of students, Mulvagh notes that they represented an important shift in thinking amongst the Indian classes privileged enough to send their children abroad to study: a preference towards Law over other subjects, recognising the skills graduates in this field could bring to independence movements, and a preference to enrol in UCD and Dublin's King's Inns over institutes in England, recognising that – even back in 1913 – People Of Colour were less likely to face



racism and discrimination amongst the Irish than the English. The Indian students' time in Dublin was cut short in the aftermath of the Rising, when their friendship with Connolly and MacDonagh, along with others amongst the Irish Volunteers, led to raids on their boarding houses by the RIC and their deportation home to India.

Such links between oppressed and marginalised groups are far from uncommon: as well as deep links between the Indian independence movement and their Irish counterparts, the Indian National Congress forged links with nationalist movements in Africa and around the globe. In more recent times, the solidarity between the Irish Republican movement and the African National Congress blossomed into a personal friendship between Nelson Mandela and Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness.

The deep-felt solidarity of the Irish people with the people of occupied Palestine manifests itself not only in symbols of solidarity—take a drive through Dublin or Belfast and count the Palestinian flags you see—but also in more tangible measures, with the Control of Economic Activity (Occupied Territories) Bill 2018 long passed, but tragically not yet signed into law – ostensibly on the basis of Seamus Wolfe's advice that the government seems determined to keep under tighter wraps than the Third Secret of Fatima.

These links were forged, and continue to be forged until today, because of people who refuse to believe that the world must be as it is. People who believe a better world is possible, that people possess inalienable rights: to self-

determination, to be free from discrimination and state violence, and to speak their mother tongue. Whilst a rebel exiled in Dublin, my favourite places in Ireland is Belfast. The city may only be a short distance from Dublin, a hundred miles up the M1, yet on that short drive, at an arbitrary marker between Dundalk and Newry, the native language of this island disappears from the road signs. A reminder of rights denied.

The denial of rights is a key theme in the history of the Irish nation, and a key theme in the oppression of minorities and colonised people the world over. That arbitrary marker on the road between Dundalk and Newry is not the only random line drawn on a map by men in fancy rooms in London, Paris or Washington. Take the partition of the Indian subcontinent, another random and arbitrary line that tore through entire communities and villages, left extended families stranded on the "wrong" side, a border suddenly needed to separate Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims who had lived in relative peace and harmony for centuries before the arrival of the British East India Company.

Let no one be in any doubt: these random lines, these arbitrary markers, this phenomenon we call partition is always racist. Whether it be in Ireland, the Indian subcontinent, Palestine or anywhere else, partition is always racist. It is racist when the line is drawn: dividing minorities from majorities based on creed, colour or tribe. It remains racist as the years pass by, in ways its initial architects perhaps never foresaw.



Foreign nationals tend to our sick and dying every day in our hospitals and GP surgeries, in all 32 counties. Yet an Egyptian or Nigerian doctor or nurse, employed on a work visa in Letterkenny Hospital, cannot legally travel from their place of work in Letterkenny to a supermarket in Derry. A British citizen from London or Manchester meanwhile, can fly into Derry and cross the border as he pleases with no restrictions. Partition rewards the colour of your skin and your passport, not your contribution to the community.

So too in the lived experiences of Muslims, people of colour, and other minorities on this island. This arbitrary line, these random markers that divide our country determine those lived experiences, and indeed the legal rights and protections of minorities depending on which side of the border they find themselves. For a large part of the past decade, people living in the 26 counties could marry the person they loved, no matter who that was. That was not the case in the 6 counties. Intimidation, racist abuse and attacks remain all too common in the North while the Racial Equality Strategy remains much like the Irish Language Act – forgotten, an irrelevance for people who are too busy worrying about English sausages.

As nationalism becomes stronger, regressive elements within political unionism seek out new, weaker targets. Women, LGBTQI+ communities, disabled people, Travellers, Muslims and other ethnic minority communities. Twice over the last two years, the Belfast Multicultural Association (BMCA) has been targeted in horrific arson attacks. Until today, the PSNI have yet to press charges in

connection with these hate crimes. We can take hope in the wonderful solidarity extended by the people of West Belfast, particularly Davitt's GAC, Councillor Caoimhín McCann and Paul Maskey MP in facilitating thousands of Irish Muslims coming together to pray their Eid prayers on the Gaelic pitches this year. A victory of hope over hate.

My community work and activism brings me into contact with people of all colours, faiths and identities who are struggling. Whether it be Muslim rights, women's rights, LGBTQI+ rights or Irish speakers' rights, whether it be healthcare, housing, social cohesion or economic fairness, the tired, white upper-class, all-male rooms of yesterday have no answers.

And yet I do not despair: I firmly believe a new and united Ireland is possible, and that it presents the opportunity to create something new, something different, to reconsider our social contract and shape the country we want rather than the one we inherited from the trials and tribulations of history. I also believe we all have a role to play: as Thomas Davis said, "It is not blood that makes you Irish, but a willingness to be part of the Irish nation."

The Dublin government should establish a Citizens' Assembly to begin these preparations at the earliest opportunity. Unionist communities have nothing to fear from taking their seat at the table: despite what a regressive element of political unionism insist, the shaping of a new Ireland is not an exclusively Republican or Nationalist project. It is a project for all, to build a home for all — black and white, gay and straight, able-bodied and disabled, of all faiths and none — and I am looking forward to hearing all our voices.



Ag dul i dtaithe ar chearta teanga

Is as Iarthar Bhéal Feirste i gContae Aontroma do Chuisle agus is feachtasóir í leis an Dream Dearg. Bhain sí máistreacht amach sa taighde sa bhliain 2019 agus ó shin i leith, tá sí ag obair in earnáil na Gaeilge, ag díriú anois ar a ról mar chomhordaitheoir chearta teanga ó thuaidh le Conradh na Gaeilge. Tá suim as cuimse ag Cuisle i gcúrsaí CLG agus imríonn sí peil le foireann Naomh Gall.

Ar bhreathnú siar dom, ní raibh nasc i gcónaí agam leis an Ghaeilge mar atá agam anois. Bhí an Ghaeilge mar chéad teanga labhartha agam sa bhaile agus fuair mé m'oidreachas bunscoile go hiomlán trí mheán na Gaeilge. Aithním anois gur seoda iad seo ar cheart go raibh mé bródúil astu, ach i ndáiríre, a mhalairt a bhí fíor; ba thréithe iad seo a léirigh do dhaoine, lucht mo chomhaoise ach go háirithe, go raibh mé difriúil; cúis náire do dhuine óg ar bith atá ag fás aníos agus iad ag iarraidh a bheith mar chuid den slua. “How do you say this in Irish? Why do you even speak Irish? Do you know any curse words in Irish?” Bhí mé mar a bheadh taibheoir sorcais ann.

As an chúigear dlúthchara a bhí agam agus mé ag fás aníos, ba mise an t-aon duine le Gaeilge. Is fíor an scéal é gur tháinig deireadh le mo chuid Gaeilge nuair a d'fhág me slán le geataí na scoile, ach ní ormsa a bhí an locht; comhráití trí mheán an Bhéarla le mo chairde sa tsráid. Cumann óige Béarla thart an coirnéal ó mo teach. An tsólann áitiúil a d'úsáid muid le haghaidh cheachtanna snámha ar scoil le comharthaíocht aonteangach Béarla. An Béarla thart timpeall orm



in achan gné de mo shaol. Thosaigh mé ag cur creidimh sa teachtaireacht a bhí á bhrú orm go fo-chomhfhiosach ón tsochaí thart timpeall orm; ní rud normálta é an Ghaeilge a labhairt go poiblí. Beidh tú i do chág i measc péacóg.

Ar bhealach cinéal ceannairceach, mar sin, chuir mé stop iomlán leis an Ghaeilge a labhairt go poiblí. Más rud é gur chuir mo dhaidí scairt orm agus dá labhródh sé i nGaeilge liom, d'fhreagróinn i mBéarla é. Is maith is cuimhin liom go raibh mé cinéal maith ag an Ghaeilge ar scoil agus d'éirigh liom cúpla duais a bhaint amach ag leibhéal GCSE agus A Leibhéil. Ach d'ainneoin mo ratha acadúil, bhí coimhlint inmheánach ag dul ar aghaidh ionam idir bhród agus náire. "Obviously you did well in Irish. It's easy for you."

Ach i ndáiríre a mhalairt atá fíor. Cén dóigh a mbeadh sé furasta dom nuair nach bhfeicim an Ghaeilge thart orm? Cén dóigh a mbeadh sé furasta dom nuair nach raibh deiseanna foghlama neamhfhoirmeálta trí mheán na Gaeilge ar fáil dom agus mé ag fás aníos? Cén dóigh a mbeadh sé furasta domsa nuair atá cónaí orm in áit a dhéanann imeallú agus neamhaird ar an Ghaeilge? Is ansin a bhuail splanc thuisceana mé; níor cothaíodh dearcadh s'agam, nó na dearcthaí sochaíocha thart timpeall orm de thaisme; is tionchar díreach iad ó neamhghníomh an stáit.

Tá taithí fada, pianmhar ag pobal na Gaeilge ó thuaidh de choimitmintí neamhchomhlíonta ón stát; tá sin soiléir. Rud nach bhfuil iomlán soiléir don phobal, áfach, ná na cearta a thagann leis na coimitmintí sin, go háirithe nuair nár comhlíonadh iad ariamh. Mar sin, nuair a tháinig an deis aníos lámhleabhar chearta teanga a chur le chéile mar chuid den obair reatha s'agam le Conradh na Gaeilge, thapaigh mé an deis. Déanann an lámhleabhar cur síos fiúntach ar choincheap na gceart teanga, coincheap a chuireann béim ar leith ar úsáid phríobhaideach agus úsáid phoiblí na Gaeilge. Is ionann seo agus a rá nach féidir úsáid na Gaeilge a shrianú go suíomhanna ar leith; chun go mairfidh agus go bhforbróidh an teanga, tá suíomhanna poiblí de dhíth a spreagann tuilleadh idirghnímh trí mheán na Gaeilge. Ní raibh sé i gcónaí soiléir domsa.

Tá sé mar aidhm ag an lámhleabhar an pobal a chumasú ar na cearta teanga atá acu i bhfolús agus i bhfianaise na reachtaíochta úra Gaeilge trí iniúchadh a dhéanamh ar na comhaontuithe móra polaitiúla, mar aon leis na conarthaí idirnáisiúnta, a raibh an Ghaeilge mar chroí-chuid dóibh. Leis seo, aimseoidh an pobal a nguthanna agus bainfidh siad úsáid astu chun na húdaráis mhóra a thabhairt chun cuntais trí dhushlán a thabhairt do shárú ar bith ar na cearta seo.

Téann an lámhleabhar fríd gach gné den reachtaíocht a gealladh faoin chomhaontú Ré Nua, Cur Chuige Nua agus briseann sé síos na cearta úra ar ceart go n-eascraíonn ón reachtaíocht. Is áis foghlama í an lámhleabhar agus chuige sin, tá dualgas orainn a bheith ionraic agus iomlán soiléir leis na daoine a



bheas ag baint úsáid as. Cé gur dul chun cinn thar a bheith suntasach é go mbeidh aitheantas ag an Ghaeilge sa dlí anseo don chéad uair riamh, is gá a aithint nach bhfuil an reachtaíocht foirfe ar chor ar bith, ná baol air. Titeann sé go mór faoin rud a gealladh do phobal na Gaeilge anseo sa bhliain 2006 faoi Chomhaontú Chill Rímhinn, agus d'fhan siad 14 bliain lena bhaint amach. Chuige sin, mar aon leis na deiseanna atá ann leis an reachtaíocht úr seo, déanann an lámhleabhar cur síos ar a dúshlán agus laigí fosta.

Ach ní hionann sin agus a rá gur gá fanacht go dtí go achtófar an reachtaíocht chun dúshlán a thabhairt; tá an cumas, ábaltacht agus na scileanna againn ár gcearta a éileamh go neamhleithscéalach. Ní dhéanfaidh an stát rud ar bith as a stuaim féin. Tá ról le himirt ag gach uile duine san fheachtas seo; úsáid do ghuth; cuirtear deireadh leis na laethanta de chur chun cinn éighníomhach agus cuirtear brú ar an stát an Ghaeilge a chosaint, a cheiliúradh agus a chaomhnú. Muna dhéanann tusa é, cé a dhéanfaidh é?

Deir muid i gcónaí go bhfuil muid inár seasamh ar ghuaillí na bhfathach agus go bhfuil an aistear chomh tábhachtach céanna leis an cheann scríbe. Nuair a chuirtear gach rud atá bainte amach ag an phobal go dtí seo san áireamh, in ainneoin na ndúshlán a cuireadh rompu, is údar mór dóchais é don todhchaí.

A Citizens' Assembly is essential

By Emma McArdle

Emma McArdle is the Policy & Campaign Manager for the Uniting Ireland Project

Ending partition and Irish reunification are the necessary bedrock for national self-determination, political independence and sovereignty. A united and independent Ireland is the only possible foundation upon which the new Ireland of equals will be built.

All citizens on the island are equal regardless of which of the 32 counties they live in and in the pursuit of an Ireland of equals none can be left behind. There is no partial Irish freedom, there is only freedom. British rule in any part of our island denies freedom and political autonomy for the nation.

While it is correct that Sinn Féin activists should do their very best to mitigate against the bad decisions of the Tory government in Westminster or the Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael coalition in the south, they do so in the knowledge that reform of the system on the scale necessary can only be brought about under the framework of a united Ireland.

THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT

The Good Friday Agreement of 1998 provided for the first time a democratic pathway to unity. The inclusion of the provision for referendums on constitutional change removed the absolute right of the British Government to control 6 counties of Ireland.

This means that British control is conditional as the Good Friday Agreement states;

"...it is for the people of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively and without external impediment, to exercise their right to self-determination on the basis of consent, freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a United Ireland..."

The Good Friday Agreement

The Irish and British governments are the official guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement. While it would be naive to expect that the British government would lobby for its full implementation, the Irish government should surely be its champion?

After all the Irish government is also constitutionally bound by Bunreacht na hÉireann's Article 3 to

Why the Irish Government must establish a



CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON IRISH UNITY

Tionnól na Saoránach ar Aontú na hÉireann

pursue a united Ireland,

“It is the firm will of the Irish nation, in harmony and friendship, to unite all the people who share the territory of the island of Ireland, in all the diversity of their identities and traditions, recognising that a united Ireland shall be brought about only by peaceful means with the consent of a majority of the people, democratically expressed, in both jurisdictions in the island...”

Bunreacht na hÉireann

The two main parties in the south say they aspire to Irish unity. I hope this is the case and that they will join in a broader coalition to bring an end to partition, but their actions indicate little effort to practically advance their aspiration.

They could take any number of small actions which would indicate their support for equal status for people in the north, such as affording northern MPs speaking rights in the Dáil, enabling citizens in the north and the diaspora to vote in Presidential elections, nominating northern representatives to the Seanad, including northern citizens in recent citizens' assemblies and so on.

The government could and should remove the brief for the north from the Department of Foreign Affairs, the north is not foreign, it's an integral part

of our nation!

They haven't done any of these things, never mind put pressure on the British government to set a date for the referendums.

GROWING SUPPORT FOR CHANGE

We are in changed times. There is now a critical and growing mass of citizens who are questioning the constitutional status quo. This is best demonstrated by the range of civic and academic initiatives which are developing across the island.

Civic nationalism, dismayed by the Brexit fiasco and the cavalier actions of a bellicose Tory cabinet, has found its voice and is saying 'Enough! British government policy is no longer tolerable in the north'.

It is looking to the Irish government, to champion the Good Friday Agreement, to honour Bunreacht and to plan for the future. This can best be started by establishing a Citizens' Assembly on Irish Unity.

There is also a shift within our protestant neighbours with the growing rejection of reactionary, intolerant, supremacist politics in favour of a much more progressive, sensible and inclusive approach.

All of this, along with many other factors means

2022 Sinn Féin Ard Fheis FRINGE MEETING

Why the Irish Government must establish a

CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON IRISH UNITY

Tionnól na Saoránach ar Aontú na hÉireann

THE EVENT WILL BE CHAIRED BY
DECLAN KEARNEY MLA

WITH GUESTS

**TOM ARNOLD AND
AILBHE SMYTH**



Dodder Suite B

- access through main registration area

During lunch break

1pm - 2pm



#Time4Unity
Am d'Aontacht

that we urgently need to move beyond the talking phase and into the planning phase.

AN ALL ISLAND CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON IRISH UNITY

The reunification of Ireland will be the biggest and most fundamental change for our country since partition was imposed over 100 years ago.

When the referendums on Irish unity are held people should have maximum information on what they are voting for. This was absent in the Brexit referendum and it has resulted in years of chaos which must be avoided.

The issue of Irish unity is bigger than any one political party or organisation and it will affect every person who calls this island home. It is appropriate that citizens are given the ability to inform the discussion.

The Citizens' Assembly would provide a forum for people to contribute their views, hopes and aspirations for the future.

The recent experiences of Citizens' Assemblies are very positive. They provide a democratic space for people from various backgrounds to come together, receive expert presentations, discuss and make recommendations to the Oireachtas.

The Citizens' Assembly should be a space which facilitates participation by all –those who advocate

for Irish unity, those who support retention of the union and those who have not yet come to a fixed position.

A report and recommendations will be produced by the Citizens' Assembly at the end of its deliberations. These should be considered by a committee of the Oireachtas which includes representatives from the north, and the outworking of this committee should form the basis of a governmental strategy paper for Irish unity.

ARD FHEIS FRINGE MEETING

To advance the Citizens' Assembly campaign, a fringe meeting on the Citizens' Assembly will be held during the lunch break of this year's Ard Fheis on 5 November.

The event is open to all Ard Fheis attendees and will be chaired by Declan Kearney MLA. Special guests Tom Arnold, who chaired the 2012 Constitutional Convention and Ailbhe Smyth, a key activist in the Marriage Equality and Repeal campaigns, will address the meeting.

Please 'save the date' for this event and learn how you can play your part in the campaign towards a new United Ireland. The party is also currently producing a guide to the Citizens' Assembly and this document will be available in advance of the Ard Fheis.

CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE DOMINATED DEBATES AT FÉILE



Tom Hartley, Clíodhna NicBhranair, Liz Gills, Cormac Moore, and Lorcan Collins

Jim Gibney is special advisor to Seanadóir Niall Ó Donnaighle and is a member of the 'Debates and Discussions' group which organises the Féile an Phobail summer school.

Like most of the rest of the world the pandemic prevented Féile an Phobail for meeting in the normal way for two years. Refusing to acquiesce to this Féile succeeded during that time to run many events in its summer school, especially its political debates, on its virtual website. But this year it was back to business as normal and Féile was back bigger and better than ever before.

The Féile's 'Debates and Discussions' group worked hard to ensure that once again its summer school is the largest and the best in Ireland. There were 80 debates and discussions on offer. Many focussed on aspects of Irish Unity and the need for constitutional change. Four specifically examined constitutional change from the perspective of women and others discussed the need for women to be written back into the history of struggle going back one hundred years.

Of particular interest was the event titled, 'Border Poll and Referendum'. The audience debated a report from the Ulster University Transitional Justice Institute, titled, 'Gendering

Constitutional Conversations – A report of women's inclusion through constitutional Discussion'.

Fidelma Ashe authored the report, Eilish Rooney designed the structure of the workshop discussions using adult education techniques which formed the report's findings and Joanna McMinn facilitated all of the workshops, the majority on zoom. The workshop discussions took place between February 2021 and July 2022, north and south and in the border regions, involving six to twelve women in each; when the Covid virus restrictions were lifted discussions were held with Traveller and Roma women in Pavee Point Dublin.

The comprehensive report made a number of observations, recommendations and principles to guide gender inclusion with the following key point, 'Due to historical power relationships between men and women constitutions have been largely 'man made'.

The report argued that stakeholders 'should recognise differences between women including but not limited to national



identification, social class, location, sexuality and gender identity, age, disability and ethnicity; they must prioritise and actively facilitate the inclusion of women in constitutional debate; locate debates on constitutional change within the sphere of peace building and that gender expertise in the area of constitutional change should be viewed as an important resource for policy makers'.

Andree Murphy, Director of 'Relatives for Justice', writer and commentator and Martina Devlin award winning journalist discussed with Robbie McVeigh, author, writer and commentator the need to create a 'without fear climate' of respect and tolerance around the debate on a future constitutional referendum.

'Preparing for a new Ireland' drew an all-female panel from the Oireachtas which included, Louise O Reilly Sinn Fein TD and Seanadóirí Erin McGreehan of Fianna Fail and Marie Sherlock of Labour. The trio agreed that the conversation about the future had to be national and inclusive of all opinions.

Writing women back into the history of the republican struggle was peppered throughout the discussions around three books launched at Féile: 'The Armagh Women: The story of protests in Armagh Women's Prison' by Gerry Adams and Richard McAuley; the republished 'Unmanageable Revolutionaries' by the redoubtable feminist Margaret Ward, who was interviewed by Mairead Farrell, Sinn Fein TD and niece of IRA volunteer Mairead Farrell and

'On Dangerous Ground: A Memoir of the Irish Revolution' by Máire Comerford. The book's author, Hilary Dully, was interviewed by life-long republican stalwart Eibhlin Glenholmes, who was the subject of a high-profile extradition trial in 1986 and now works with Sinn Fein's legacy unit.

Long-time friend of Ireland and regular visitor Tim O Grady relaunched his book, 'Curious Journey' which he co-authored with Kenneth Griffith to coincide with its fortieth anniversary. The book is oral history based on interviews and the personal experiences of nine IRA and Cumann na mBan activists during the War of Independence. The parallels between then and now are obvious in the accounts and the sub-text of the book is 'unfinished revolution'.

A new campaign was launched under the banner of 'Our Ireland Also' challenging the partitionist policies of successive Irish governments; the media and the state institutions which present the 26 - county state as the 'nation'; thereby excluding almost two million people from the north; especially those from a nationalist background who are Irish and are, and see themselves, as an integral part of Ireland – the nation.

Chairperson of the event, Cliodhna NicBhranair, introduced three historians, Liz Gills, Cormac Moore, Lorcan Collins and Tom Hartley who made a compelling case against the state-sponsored exclusion of the north and its population.



Drawing from his republished book, 'The Good Old IRA', author and commentator Danny Morrison told a Féile audience of the insidious impact of what he described as 'Free Statism.' He traced this to partition and the establishment of the southern state which actively promotes the idea that Ireland consists of twenty-six counties and that the nation stops at the border – views which complimented the 'Our Ireland Also' campaign.

In the introduction to his new book, 'United Nation: The case for integrating Ireland' the prolific author, writer, commentator and leading trade unionist Frank Connolly wrote about how he had 'engaged with influential figures in the unionist community who are open to discussion about Irish unity but who are also concerned about their identity, traditions and rights are respected in any such process as guaranteed by the GFA'.

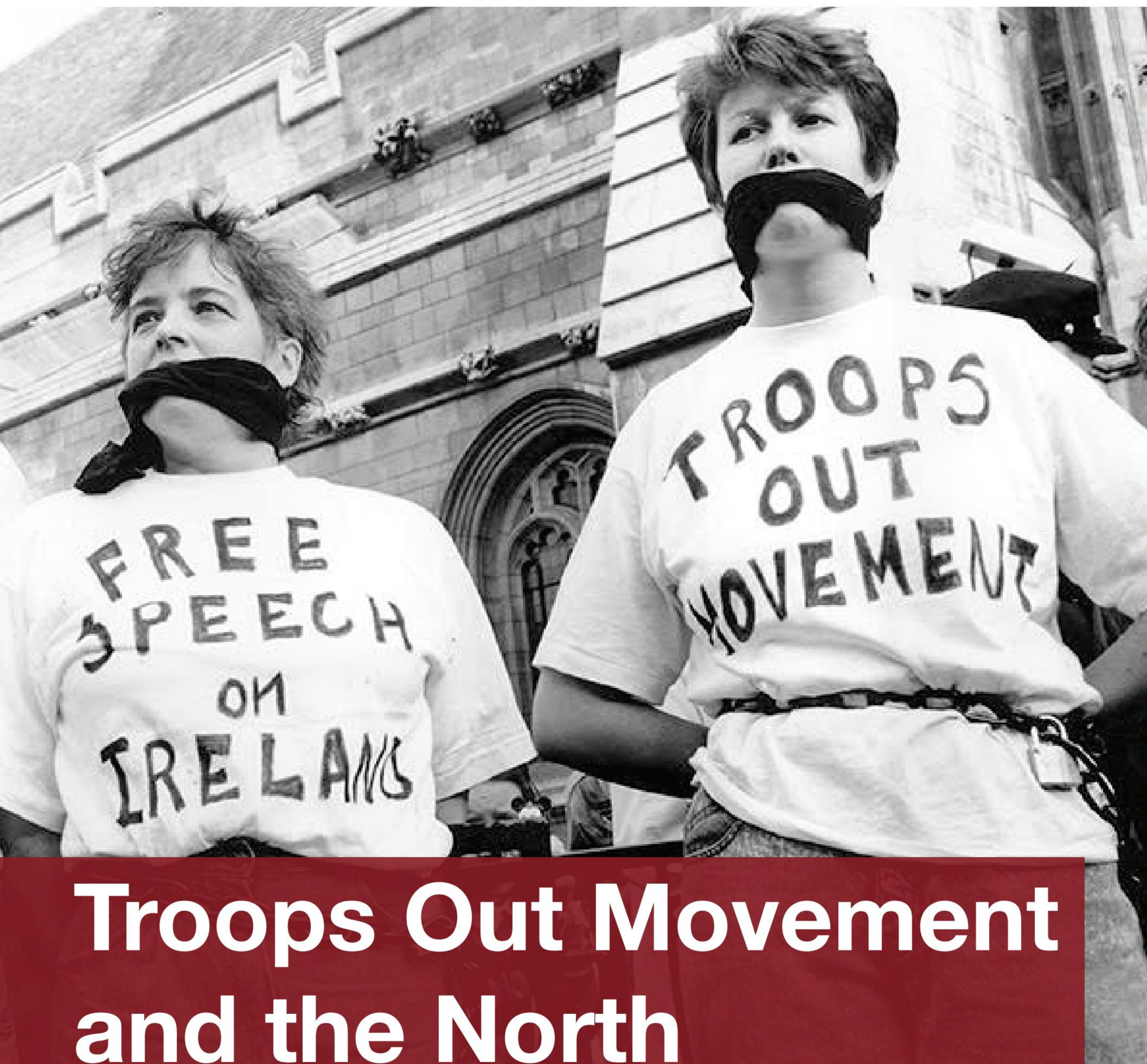
One such figure was Denzil McDaniel who said at the Féile event discussing Frank's book, that there were many strands of Protestantism; that nationalists needed to get to know Protestants better; that he was a Protestant nationalist and there were others; that there were conversations going on about the future and that there was a big difference in the tone of what was being said in the west and east by Protestants; that Frank's book was valuable because it was giving people a voice and that it was important that the Irish government planned more about the future.

Gaels le Chéile brought together around 100 Antrim Gaels to discuss the need for the Irish government to plan for Irish Unity. The attendance reflected a cross section of GAA members in Antrim. Since they first wrote to An Taoiseach Micheál Martin in May 2021 over 12,000 Ulster Gaels have written to him urging him to establish an All-Island Citizens Assembly "reflecting the views of citizens North and South to achieve maximum consensus on a way forward" toward an "agreed shared Ireland."

The letter states: "It is the responsibility of the Irish government to ensure that the democratic rights of all citizens are respected and protected, regardless of where they live on the island ... " Thus far An Taoiseach Micheál Martin has refused to comment on the initiative or respond to the many letters he has now received.

The impressive Ireland's Future event in the 3Arena in Dublin, the successful Belfast Peoples' Assembly that took place on 12 October at the Waterfront Hall in Belfast and the Ireland's Future event in Belfast on 23 November in the Ulster Hall, are some of the recent examples of the growth of interest in and the conversation taking place around Irish Unity. Féile an Phobail's summer school was very much a part of this process of dialogue. It is clearly a dialogue that is growing in strength.





Troops Out Movement and the North

BY ALY RENWICK

Aly Renwick is a founding member of the Troops Out Movement. Next year marks 50 years since its establishment. This article is drawn from a speech he gave at a conference: '50 years on from the Troops Out Movement: Lessons for the British Left.'

Delegations from the Troops Out Movement were a regular feature on the streets of the North providing much needed solidarity during the decades of conflict. Delegations regularly joined protests at conditions

in the prisons, against plastic bullets and at British Army forts. They met with local community representatives. They also organised protests, political tours and conferences in Britain.

The Troops Out Movement was started by people who were born around the end of the Second World War and who spent their formative years in the Sixties. I'd entered that decade respecting and trusting

the establishment and joined the British Army aged 16 in 1960. After experiencing 'Cold War' North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) manoeuvres in West Germany and South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) operations in north-east Thailand during the height of the Vietnam War, I started to question the officer-class and the politicians at Westminster. As Britain had entered the 1960s the country was emerging from a long period of rationing and austerity that had lasted from the end of the Second World War – from which the UK had emerged victorious, but also deeply in debt. To preserve their power and wealth post-war the British establishment set about squeezing every last drop of profit from the Empire. As workers and student struggles erupted in Europe and across the world, in Derry and Belfast Civil Rights protesters were being batoned off their streets by the RUC - the local armed colonial-style police force and its backup the B-Specials. The Civil Rights Movement in the north of Ireland took its inspiration from the 60s' radical upsurge in general and the black struggle for Civil Rights in America in particular. Towards the end of the 1960s, under the title of Land Operations, the British Army rationalised its secret tactical manuals into a series of volumes. Volume III, called Counter-Revolutionary Operations, was produced in August 1969 and drew together all the Army had learned post-



WW2 during the run-down of Empire - in its series of small wars in places like Malaya, Kenya, Cyprus and Aden. On Thursday, 14 August 1969, soldiers of the first Battalion, the Prince of Wales' Own, were sent out onto the streets of Derry. The left in Britain was at this time concentrating on worker's struggles, student agitation and anti-Vietnam War activities. But a few of us started to keep an eye on the worsening situation in the North of Ireland – and, in 1969, to support the Civil Rights struggle the Irish Civil Rights Solidarity Campaign (ICRSC) was formed in Britain. In August 1971, as the struggle in Ireland escalated, internment without trial was introduced, and, to protest against it, the Anti-Internment League (AIL) emerged – first in the North of Ireland and then in Britain. In January 1972, after British Army paratroopers in Derry had shot dead fourteen peaceful protesters on 'Bloody Sunday', there was an angry response across the world. The Irish in Britain were prominent in the protests and marches that flooded onto the streets, including a 30,000-strong

demonstration in London, organised by the AIL. Police refused permission for thirteen coffins to be carried into Downing Street and clashes broke out, when mounted police charged into the crowd. A number of people were injured and 122 demonstrators were arrested. Early the next morning three Irish members of the AIL's central committee were arrested at their homes and charged with 'conspiring to contravene the Public Order Act of 1936'.

Many soldiers were now being killed and wounded and British domestic opposition to the war began to rise. Peggy Chaston, the mother of a serving soldier, started a national petition calling for 'Our boys to be brought home'. The statement of a soldier who had fled to Sweden to escape serving in the north of Ireland was printed in Peace News:

"I came to Sweden for asylum because of Northern Ireland. I do not think that what is happening there is very good. As I see it, there must be a simpler way of ending the fight without more people being killed. So, I have left rather than fight in something I think is wrong."

Statement by Lance Corporal Kevin Cadwallader, Royal Engineers, in Peace News, 8 June 1973.

Ironically, by the middle of 1973, there had been a downturn of work on the North of Ireland by the radical groups, who were concentrating on the industrial struggles in Britain which were to bring about the three-day week, a miners' strike and the



end of the Heath Conservative government in early 1974. I had been a member the ICRSC and was still a member of the AIL, but it was now more or less on its last legs. So, in August 1973, I became part of a small group of anti-imperialist activists who began to meet regularly in west London to plan the forming of a new organisation - one which would be keyed into the increasing dissent about the aggressive use of British troops in the North of Ireland, and also - like the anti-Vietnam War movement in the US - the concern about their mounting casualties.

We decided to call the new organisation the Troops Out Movement (TOM) and to give ourselves a firm anti-imperialist base we adopted 'Troops Out Now', based on 'Self-determination for the Irish People as a whole' as our two demands. The TOM's first bulletin, 'Tom-Tom', stated: "The Troops Out Movement was formed in West London in September 1973 by a group of

trade-unionists, housewives, students and ex-soldiers."

Unlike the ICRSC and the AIL, which had mainly shown the Irish face of protest in Britain, we wanted one of the TOM's main focuses to be that of British people protesting about the use of their own troops in Ireland.

We knew there was a long and honourable tradition in Britain of anti-imperialist opposition to the colonial-wars and the military occupation of Ireland. This went back as far as the English Civil War of 1642-to-51. When some Leveller soldiers mutinied, rather than go with Cromwell's army to Ireland, they were arrested and three were executed at Burford church near Oxford.

Two centuries later, Karl Marx observed that:

"Ireland is the only excuse of the English Government for maintaining a big standing army, which in case of need they send against the English workers, as has happened after the army became turned into praetorians in Ireland..."

Marx meant this as a warning and his words were later shortened into: "A nation that oppresses another forges its own chains."

A century later in Britain we saw evidence of Marx's warning coming true again. During the Miners' Strike in 1984, police from various areas of the country were organised as a militia against the strikers - in a modified form of what was already occurring in the North of Ireland. Many of the Security Services other covert procedures from Belfast and Derry were also used, like surveillance, phone tapping and the use of agents, informers and provocateurs.

At the time of its inception, the Troops Out Movement had taken its inspiration and methods from the anti-Vietnam War protests in the US. So, we set about mobilising opposition to the UK government's use of military force in the North of Ireland - and we'd warned that similar methods would be used against workers in Britain. During its decades of

campaigning the Troops Out Movement can be compared to the more recent Stop the War Coalition, set up in 2001 in Britain, after the US President, George W. Bush, had announced his 'war on terror'. Organised as broadly-based movements TOM and Stop The War had an affiliation of local and national groups and individuals and they both:

- Under-mined the propaganda of the UK government and military.
- Showed concern for the welfare of individual soldiers and provided a platform for dissident military personnel.
- Encouraged and drew out dissident opinion by building and highlighting the widespread opposition in Britain to conflict and the lack of peace talks.

Over three decades the Troops Out Movement organised regular yearly visits to the North of Ireland that built lasting links with those subjected to daily contact with British troops. Throughout those years, against the background of the war – a bombing campaign in Britain, attacks on our demonstrations by the far Right, state harassment and

state-agents sent to infiltrate TOM – we sought to keep the withdrawal of British troops at the forefront of local and national politics.

We also campaigned against plastic bullets, no-jury courts and the H-Blocks. And for free speech, prisoners' rights and in support of the hunger strikers. National demonstrations in London and other big cities, combined with local meetings, leafleting, petitions and pickets of Army Recruitment Offices strengthened the roots of the organisation.

During the time of conflict in the North of Ireland, opinion polls consistently showed a majority of British people wanting to see the withdrawal of their troops. In 1984, for example, a report on British Social Attitudes, published by the independent academic institute Social and Community Planning Research, found 58 percent in favour of the 'reunification of Ireland' and a majority wanting 'the withdrawal of troops from the north'.

However, while people were willing to express this view in private, many were not willing to support it in public. It is

difficult now for anyone to realise how hard it was then to explain the nationalist case, criticise the government or even suggest that talks should take place.

Anyone who did so was liable to be identified and vilified in the media, and Ken Livingstone, who spoke out over many years, was constantly denigrated in the right-wing papers. But Ken was not alone, three other London Labour MPs - John McDonnell, Dianne Abbott and Jeremy Corbyn - also helped TOM and spoke on our platforms – despite the treatment dished out to them by the media. The Troops Out Movement, by openly campaigning for a British withdrawal, helped keep this issue in the minds of the public and therefore also kept it as a part of the political agenda. TOM also helped to make it acceptable for people to express their wish to see an end to the Partition of Ireland and to look forward to a United Ireland in the future. These issues are of course unfinished business - and I urge everyone to get involved in today's campaigns to support Irish unity and end Partition.



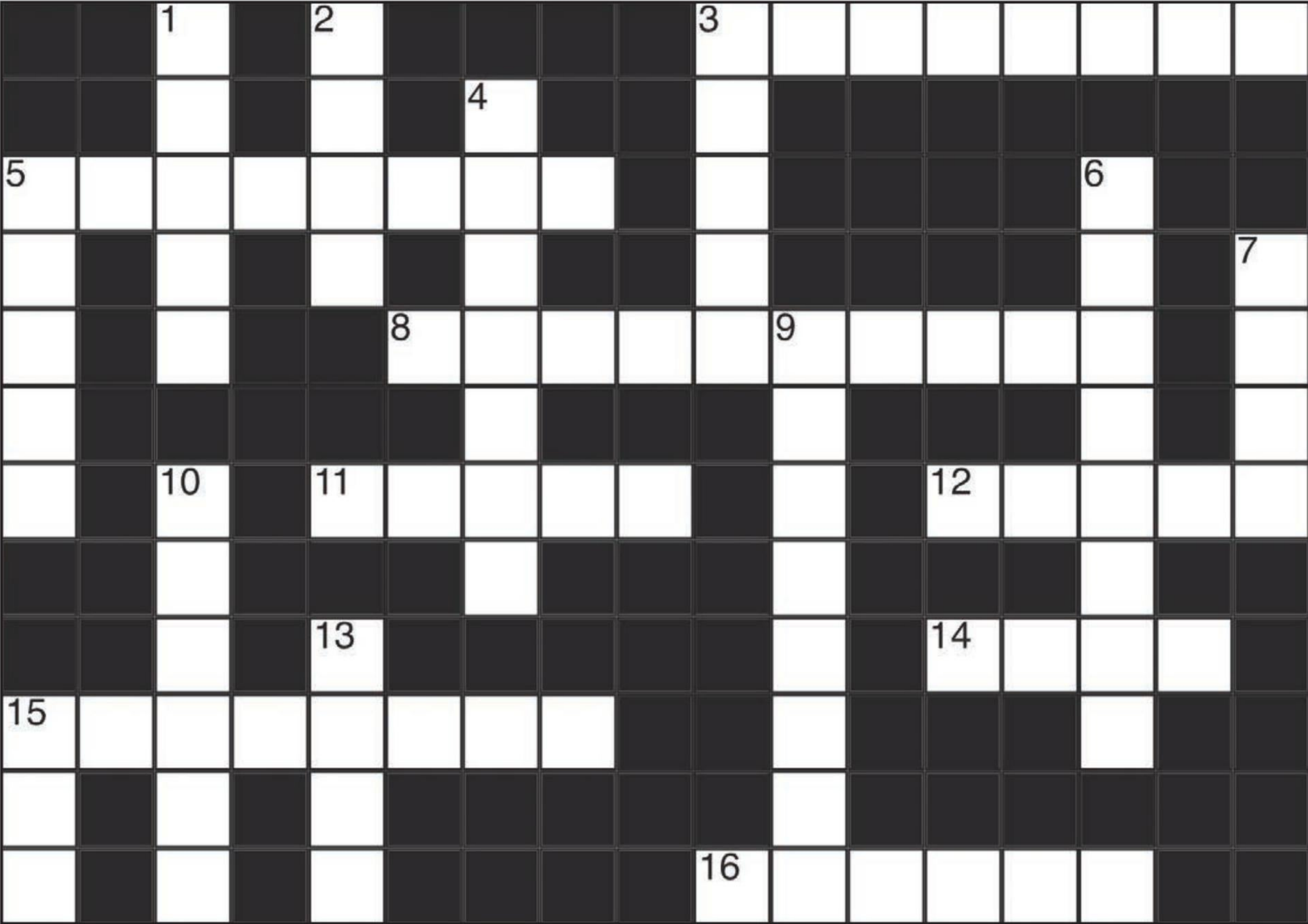


Crossword



Crosfhocal

BY EOGHAN Mac CORMAIC





scribble pad

Clues

ACROSS

- 1 Republican greeting abbreviated (3)
- 3 Birthplace of Raymond McCreesh (8)
- 5 (& 3 down) Constituency which elected Kieran Doherty TD (5,8)
- 8 Slum housing area in Derry where Mickey Devine grew up (8)
- 9 Mother of Patsy O'Hara (5)
- 12 Constituency (with Leitrim) where Joe McDonnell stood for election (5)
- 14 Election agent for Bobby Sands ---- Carron (4)
- 15 Birthplace of Francis Hughes and Tom McElwee (8)
- 16 Prison where women POWs also fought for Political status (6)

DOWN

- 1 British army chief at time of Internment in 1940 Group which immortalised Joe McDonnell in song: Wolfe ---- (5)
- 2 Place where POWs with status were held in Long Kesh (4)
- 3 (& 5 across) Constituency which elected Kieran Doherty TD (5,8)
- 4 Birthplace of Martin Hurson (7)
- 5 (& 10 down) Football club a young Bobby Sands played for (6,5)
- 6 Birthplace of Kevin Lynch (8)
- 7 Native county of Frank Stagg and Michael Gaughan (4)
- 9 British judge who recommended ending Special Category Status in 1975 (8)
- 10 (& 5 down) Football club a young Bobby Sands played for (6,5)
- 13 An Fhuiseog, bird which inspired Bobby Sands (4)
- 15 --- nó bás, victory of death, motto of the hunger strikers. (3)

Issue 3
Crossword
answers



You don't need to be a rocket scientist to know a Unity Referendum is coming

BY CIARAN QUINN, Sinn Fein North America Representative

The DART departed California ten months ago. It was years of planning and preparation. The objective was to knock an asteroid out of its orbit. A test to see if technology could alter the course of any future asteroid heading toward earth. None is expected but it is always best to prepare.

This was an incredible exercise in scenario planning for a highly unlikely outcome.

In the same week, the census report in the North was released. In 1926, the first census, after partition, found that the gerrymandered state of the six counties had a two-thirds majority of Protestants to Catholics. It was described as a protestant state for a protestant people with absolute majority rule.

In the recently released census, Catholics (45.7%) now outnumbered protestants (43.5%). The responses from differing shades of unionism were informative. One decried the reporting of the findings as sectarian with no impact on the status quo conveniently forgetting that the state was established solely on a sectarian headcount.

Some pointed out that not all Catholics are united Irishers. It was a breath away from saying that some of my best friends are Catholic and are all right. Of course, the corollary is that not all Protestants are unionists. As an American friend of mine always points out, "anecdotes is not the plural of data."

Alongside the religious makeup of society, the census also asked a question of identity. The results are a soup of identities, 31.86% identify as British Only, 29.13% as Irish only, 19.78% as Northern Irish, 7.95% as British and Northern Irish, and the remaining 11.28% are a combination of the above or other.

There is no definition of Northern Irish. Identity is fluid and changes over time. The idea of being Northern Irish did not even exist at the time of partition. The inclusion of such an ill-defined question is



always open to interpretation.

Some deny any link to constitutional positions based on religion but take succour from the findings believing that the Northern Irish identity is the same as support for the union with Britain. A very dubious conclusion given the options available.

Alongside the census returns let's look at the recent election results of May of this year.

When all the votes were counted, pro-partition (Unionists) parties secured 42.1%. Pro Irish Unity Parties 41.5% and non-aligned 16.2%.

Less than 1% separates the pro-partition parties from the united Ireland parties. Unionist parties are one seat ahead.

The non-aligned parties remain non-aligned.

However in two polls, Lucid Talk and the University of Liverpool, in the week before the election, found the Alliance vote second preferences breaking 2:1 in favour of Nationalist parties. It would seem that while the Alliance party is agnostic on the constitutional question, their voters are not.

Sinn Féin is the largest party, and Michelle

O'Neill is the First Minister (elect) of the Executive. All has changed and changing. While there have been polls with conflicting findings, the census and the election results are the largest datasets available. Yet they remain open to interpretation.

So set aside the anecdotes and assumptions, the only true measure of the intentions of the people is to ask them in a referendum. Yet a Unity Referendum is always presented as a last resort. Asking the people about their constitutional preferences should only

take place when legally unavoidable

It is not some asteroid hurling through space to hit the six counties. It is an exercise in democracy

The British government refuses to countenance a referendum because the legal threshold (questionable given the election and census) has not been met to compel them to hold a referendum.

They never answer why there should not be a referendum at this time. A referendum is a democratic way forward. It is the only way to get behind the assumptions and stop second-guessing people's hopes for the future.

Some claim that a referendum would be divisive, a strange approach to democracy, and a denial of our present society.

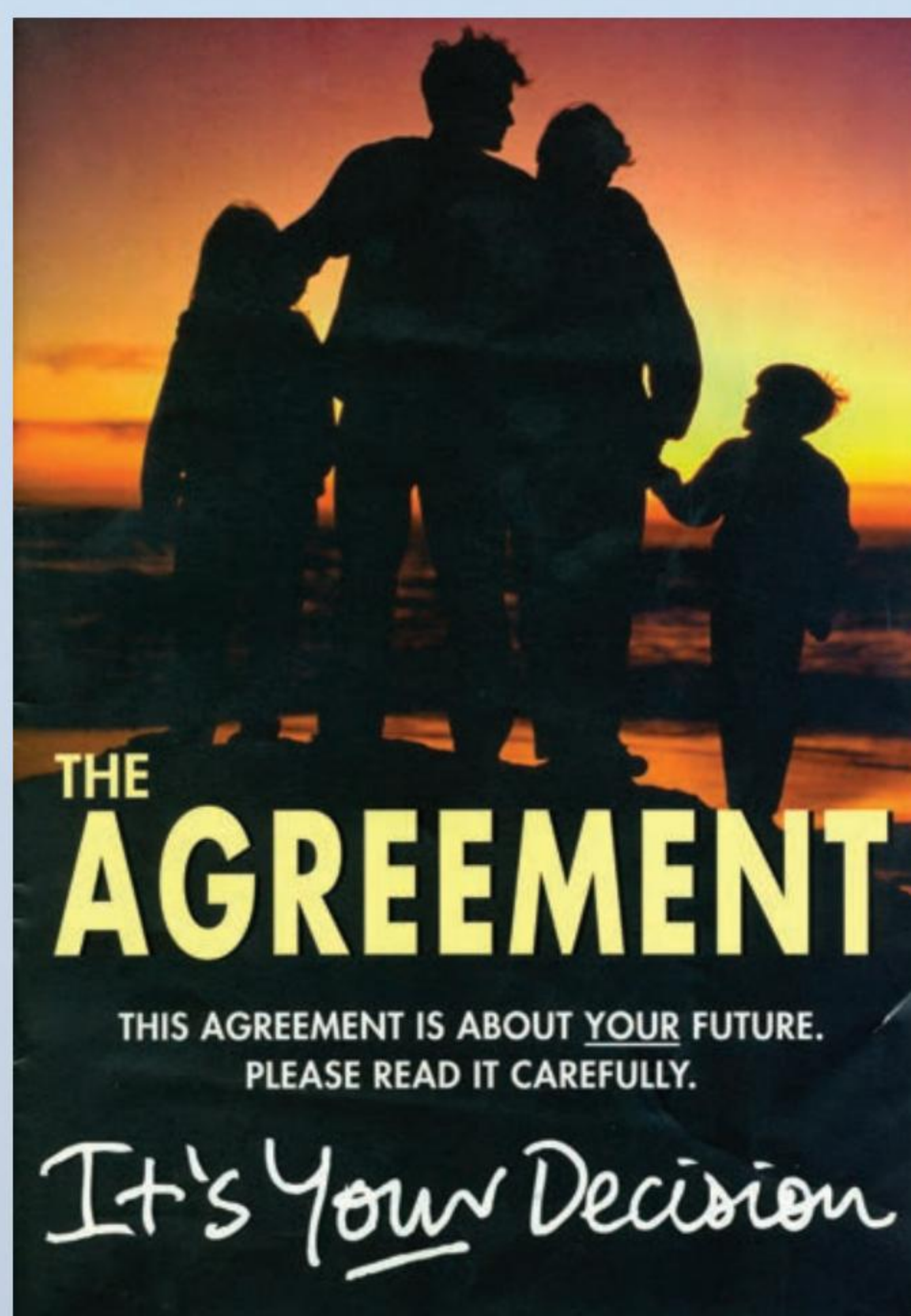
The will of the people is nothing to be frightened of and denied. It will resolve a contested future democratically and peacefully. It will allow space for an informed and inclusive discussion and a vote. The outcome is binding equally to all.

The British Secretary of State has the power

to call a referendum at any time. The Agreement lays out when they must trigger a referendum, "if at any time it appears likely to him that a majority of those voting would express a wish that Northern Ireland should cease to be part of the United Kingdom and form part of a united Ireland."

We know the parameters for when the British Government "Must" call a referendum but not when they "Should" call a referendum.

The agreement is silent on what actions the British Secretary of State should take in the circumstance



There is no definition of Northern Irish. Identity is fluid and changes over time. The idea of being Northern Irish did not even exist at the time of partition. The inclusion of such an ill-defined question is always open to interpretation.

“...if at any time it appears likely to him that a majority of those voting would express a wish that Northern Ireland should cease to be part of the United Kingdom and form part of a united Ireland.”

where nationalism and unionism are equal. To withhold a referendum in these circumstances would be undemocratic and unsustainable. To have continued partition as the default to refusing to ask the question holds the nationalist position to a higher bar than the Unionist position. A position that is at odds with the equality obligations of the Good Friday Agreement.

Equality between the two traditions is a foundation of the agreement and a current obligation of the British Government.

“The sovereign government with jurisdiction there shall be exercised with rigorous impartiality on behalf of all the people in the diversity of their identities and traditions and shall be founded on the principles of full respect for, and equality of, civil, political, social, and cultural rights, of freedom from discrimination for all citizens, and parity of esteem and of just and equal treatment for the identity, ethos, and aspirations of both communities”

The British Secretary of State has the power to call a Referendum at any time. They have significant flexibility in this regard. However, they also must be “rigorously impartial” and exercise power with “equality”, “parity of esteem, and “just and equal treatment of the aspirations of both communities.” The decision

to hold or withhold a referendum is bound by these obligations.

The North has changed. The old assumptions do not hold. Consecutive elections and the census demonstrate that a threshold has been crossed. Unionism and Nationalism are equals.

Nowhere else in the world would a government deny the right of the people to determine their future on the basis that they don't know what the people will say!!.

The simple default in the absence of a clear way forward is to ask the people. The will of the people is sovereign. For the British and Irish Governments to sit down and work out dates for the referendums, North and South, which will to provide time for a reasoned, informed, and respectful discussion.

Planning and preparing for the future is not rocket science. It is common sense.

Preparation and planning should not be left until a referendum is unavoidable. I was always told of you don't know the answer, then ask someone who does. The answer to the future constitutional position is in the hands of the people.

Twenty-five years on from the signing of the Good Friday Agreement it is time to take account of changes, plan for the future and let the people have their say in a referendum.

UNITED NATION: THE CASE FOR INTEGRATING IRELAND

by Frank Connolly

Reviewed by MAIREAD FARRELL TD

“It would be useful if people knew what they were voting for when asked to make such a historic and transformative choice.”

Frank Connolly’s latest publication *United Nation: The Case for Integrating Ireland* allows people to focus their minds on the concept of what a United Ireland may look like.

There are many ways that such an analysis could be broached, it could have been done through a statistical analysis which could have risked losing people in the numbers, it could have been approached through an historical analysis but this may not have been forward-looking enough. As a trained investigative journalist, however, Connolly plays to his strengths by interviewing key experts from across the island and interrogating various dynamics of the United Ireland question – particularly the economic aspect, the social aspect and the cultural aspect. He brings all this together in a lively, conversational tone, which the average reader can easily get to grips with.

Through conversations with contributors from a variety of backgrounds and viewpoints the author gives an insight into the different hopes and expectations that our society has for what lies ahead.

By not shying away from the more contentious topics, such as the economy, policing and indeed the constitution itself, it also allows the reader to challenge the established narrative, the conventional wisdom and their own preconceived ideas. The book doesn’t need to be read in sequence, the reader can dip into individual chapters that might interest them more than others and for that reason this book will continue to influence as both a handy activist’s guide and a valuable reference book.

Connolly helps to lay out key debates in the various areas without forcing his own viewpoint. He presents clearly the viewpoints and arguments of Unionist contributors without attempting to speak for these contributors and allows their voices to be heard.

An interesting analysis by one contributor notes that:

“It’s important to note that no single voice speaks for unionism (...) the concept that unionism isn’t one monolith, like republicanism and really every entity.”

It is made quite clear that in fact no cultural background is a monolith and that we are all influenced by our own personal identities and life experiences which, in turn, are shaped by a wide range of factors including class, gender, sexual orientation, religion and more besides. All of these impact on the kind of society in which we wish to live and indeed the type of society we believe best provides for the needs of all in the world around us. If we want to progress the debate on Irish Unity and nation-building in general it is crucial that we realise this and allow for a more nuanced discussion rather than simple black and white analyses and juxtapositions.

This is a very timely contribution coming, as it does, while public meetings continue to be rolled out across the island by Ireland’s Future, the Seanad Public Consultation Committee has begun work on this topic and Sinn Féin have launched the party’s ‘Commission on the Future of Ireland’. This should be required reading for those who wish to increase their engagement on this issue and who would like to play their part on how we move from conversation to concrete action.

This book presents a contemporaneous, realistic narrative as to what has happened and what is now happening, but it also outlines what the next steps towards Irish

UNITED NATION

THE CASE FOR INTEGRATING IRELAND

FRANK CONNOLLY

THE BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF NAMA-LAND AND TOM GILMARTIN

Unity would, or should, be. This book is not a roadmap for Irish Unity nor does it claim to be, it is a publication that sets out to detail the core issues that need to be grappled with as part of the unity debate. Connolly himself acknowledges that while the book is a key part of the debate, much of the important preparation and discussion needs to be done at governmental and civic society level, involving all voices and sectors within society. I think post-unification this book will be admired for its prescience and will provide an insight for the modern reader into the contemporary views and assessments of Irish re-unification during the final years of Ireland's century of partition. For that alone it deserves great credit.

By not shying away from the more contentious topics, such as the economy, policing and indeed the constitution itself, it also allows the reader to challenge the established narrative, the conventional wisdom and their own preconceived ideas.

United Nation: The Case for Integrating Ireland by Frank Connolly

It is available at all good bookshops and online through

<https://www.sinnfeinbookshop.com/> and at www.thelarkstore.ie

and <https://www.facebook.com/AnFhuiseog/>

TAP
QR
CODE





Seanad Consultation begins on

Constitutional Change

By **GRACE McDERMOTT,**
Uniting Ireland Project

Several months ago the Seanad launched a public consultation on the Constitutional Future of the Island of Ireland. The Seanad committee invited submissions from groups and individuals, and held three public consultations.

This is the first time in the history of the Oireachtas that one of its institutions debated this live and important topic. The consultation process majored on key themes; the criteria for a referendum on Irish unity, lessons we can learn from other jurisdictions, the views of young people and different sections of our community, as well as the opportunities and challenges that constitutional change could present.

The first of the consultations was held on the 30

September and several others have taken place since then. In the first session the Seanad Committee heard from young people and youth groups and others, including the ICTU and Rev Kyle Paisley. Rev. Paisley told the Seanad committee that; “The prospect of the emerald isle becoming a single political entity is not so easily talked down as it used to be.” He identified the economics of unity as a major issue and he raised unionist concerns about the impact of constitutional change on their sense of identity and Britishness.

In his contribution to the conversation Sinn Féin Seanadóir Niall Ó Donnghaile called for the creation of a Citizens Assembly with the resources to ensure that we have an informed debate on this vitally important issue. In its submission The Council for Public Affairs, authorised by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) put forward to the Committee a number of observations, including:



- Careful conversations on the constitutional future of the island of Ireland should not presume a pre-determined direction of travel and must also allow for discussion about the changing nature of relationships across these islands, east and west, as well as north and south.
- Practical considerations regarding constitutional change will be based on unstable foundations if the hurt and pain of the past is not acknowledged and recognised alongside very real fears about the future.
- A singular focus on practical considerations risks side-stepping the harder conversations about cultural and social differences, and the even more difficult work of engaging hearts and minds
- Finding ways to include perspectives from 'New Irish' communities will enrich the Committee's process.

Speaking after the hearing, Rev Daniel Kane, Convener of PCI's Council for Public Affairs, said: "Given a denomination of such size and geographical spread, there is no 'one-size-fits-all' view on the constitutional future of the island of Ireland amongst Presbyterian people. Whilst it may be broadly correct to assume that Presbyterians in the North generally identify with a unionist perspective, and those in the South are more sympathetic to a narrative of constitutional change, it would be wrong to conclude that there is homogeneity among Presbyterians in either jurisdiction."

Other submissions in the course of the hearings included several from economists and academics. Among these was Professor Brendan O'Leary from the University of

Pennsylvania. He focussed on two key issues. The first is the need for "adequate planning." He told the Seanad that to prepare properly "is the minimal courtesy owed to Irish citizens and possible future citizens among Northern unionists, others and Northern nationalists. Nothing less than a ministry of national reunification is required... It should be complemented by a standing constitutional forum organised by both Houses of the Oireachtas that sits in plenary for one month of every year, empowered to assess opinion and propose appropriate legislative or constitutional change."

Professor O'Leary also called for the creation of a "sovereign wealth transition fund for short-run transition costs and for all-island infrastructure, broadly conceived. Though the scale of the subvention of Northern Ireland by Great Britain is exaggerated, it is prudent to be prepared for adverse possibilities. Minimally, the fund should receive 25% more than we give annually in international aid."

His second key issue posed the question: should the Irish government propose a specific constitutional model of Irish unification? Professor O'Leary said that any such specific model "would have to be accompanied by contingent constitutional amendments or draft legislation to go into effect after the positive votes in favour of unity. The key advantage of this approach to all voters is that they would know what they were getting - either the maintenance of partition or the specific model. The UK's referendum experience of 2016 would be avoided. The change to the status quo would be clearly defined."

In his submission Brendan O'Leary suggested the



establishment of a “constitutional convention, presumably elected by the single transferable vote, which would draft a new constitutional order to be put to the all-island citizenry for ratification.”

Sinn Féin Submission to Seanad

Sinn Féin has welcomed the consultation process by the Seanad and has made a submission. Our priority is clear – it’s time for the Irish government to start planning for constitutional change.

“The Irish Government is constitutionally obliged to plan for Irish Unity and best equipped to lead the necessary planning. All governments plan for the future. In an Irish context that means planning for possible constitutional change. The Irish Government should move now to establish a Citizens’ Assembly on Irish Unity.”

Sinn Féin Submission to the Seanad Public Consultation on the Constitutional Future of the Island of Ireland

Every government plans for the future and it is beyond time that the Irish government begins to plan for our future and Irish unity. We need to start planning now and that planning has to be citizen led and government resourced. The Irish government must establish a Citizens’ Assembly on Irish Unity. We need now to think and plan our way forward.

Irish unity provides us with the opportunity to right the wrongs of partition, to end division and to unlock the potential of our people and our island. It also creates the possibility of building something better for us all – to build a new Ireland, with fairness equality and citizens’ rights at its core. We can build an all-island National Health Service, address the housing crises and unleash the social and economic potential of our people.

Planning for unity now also allows us to avoid the catastrophic mistakes of Brexit, and move to a referendum on Irish unity with a confident and informed electorate.

Sinn Féin in government will establish a Citizens’ Assembly on Irish Unity. We have allocated €1.5 million in our alternative budget submission to adequately fund this process. Irish unity is the big idea whose time has come – it’s time to start planning.

Context

Sinn Féin is an Irish Republican political party, organised and active across Ireland. Sinn Féin is the largest and

oldest political party on the island of Ireland. Our principal political objective is the reunification of Ireland and the creation of an egalitarian republic with equality, fairness and social justice at its core. Our vision for a united Ireland is one in which the economy serves the needs of the people, and not the other way around. We want to build a republic that puts the welfare of its citizens above vested interests and makes Ireland the best country in which to live, work and grow old in.

Key Elements of the Sinn Féin Submission, at a glance
Below are excerpts from Sinn Féin’s submission to this consultation.

1) **Setting the Scene**

The Good Friday Agreement provides the basis and the foundation for any discussion on our constitutional future. It states;

“...it is for the people of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively and without external impediment, to exercise their right to self-determination on the basis of consent, freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a United Ireland...”

Sinn Féin’s considered position, in respect of immediate necessity, is that the Irish Government begins to plan for constitutional change.

2) **An all-island Citizens’ Assembly on Irish Unity**

The Irish Government is constitutionally obliged to plan for Irish Unity and best equipped to lead the necessary planning. All governments plan for the future. In an Irish context that means planning for possible constitutional change. The Irish Government should move now to establish a Citizens’ Assembly on Irish Unity.

This forum, appropriately resourced, will engage with citizens, on a representative basis, to begin to shape a plan and prepare for our future. Establishing a Citizens’ Assembly on Irish Unity would provide a democratic and inclusive forum for the people of this island to contribute their views, hopes and aspirations for our future.

Additionally, a citizens’ assembly would be a safe space for priorities, ideas and concerns to be voiced. All effort should be expended in ensuring the forum is as representative as possible, with a particular focus on

encouraging those of a British identity to participate.

3) **State Led Planning**

The Irish Government should move forward with the establishment of a Joint Oireachtas Committee on Irish Unity. The scope and remit of the Shared Island Unit must be expanded and appropriately resourced. The government should use its full diplomatic resources to advocate for constitutional change and seek international allies for this. Following adequate consultation and preparation, the Irish Government must publish a White Paper on Irish Unity and secure a referendum on Irish Unity, as provided for in the Good Friday Agreement.

4) **Planning Is Needed Now**

No one is demanding a referendum before the necessary planning is done. This is why the establishment of a Citizens' Assembly on Irish Unity is essential. Citizen led, state resourced planning is a prerequisite to constitutional change. Those who frustrate or oppose planning for constitutional change whilst insisting that a referendum cannot be held until the preparation is done, do a disservice to the aspiration of their parties and the people they represent.

5) **A Safe Space For All**

Many unionists are deeply committed to the union. Political unionists in particular may feel that they should not engage in any discussion in respect of planning for our future. A number of factors, however, including the outworking of the Brexit process, the behaviour of the British Government and huge societal changes that have taken place across the south, have moved a growing number of citizens from within the unionist community to consider how the future may be shaped. Therefore space must be created to encourage their participation and contribution to this conversation. Everyone is entitled to be part of the planning of our future, and equally entitled to the ownership of it.

6) **An Idea Whose Time Has Come**

Irish Unity is an idea that's time has come. It provides us with a unique opportunity to unlock the full potential of our people and our island, as well as fundamentally address, and reverse, the present failures of the status quo. Economic, social and political reunification offers the best opportunity to tackle these issues in a way that can benefit the people of the island of Ireland. The economic benefits of Irish Unity include the

introduction of decision making by locally elected representatives and bespoke macroeconomic planning, coordinated economic development resulting in greater investment, more employment and higher potential tax revenues - and full EU membership for the whole island.

7) **The Opportunity To Build Something Better**

Sinn Féin is committed to the creation of an All-Ireland National Health Service - the provision of universal healthcare, accessed on the basis of need, free at the point of delivery and funded through progressive taxation. A united Ireland creates the opportunity for the implementation of such a system.

Already there are many examples of cross border cooperation in healthcare, principally; the sharing of radiotherapy and paediatric cardiac services; health promotion focussing on alcohol, tobacco and obesity; cancer research; mental health and suicide prevention. Current cross border cooperation is extremely important but it needs to be mainstreamed, strategically planned and supported. The optimum scenario for doing this is within a united Ireland.

Unity presents us with opportunities to correct the failures of the status quo and improve the lives of all who call this island home. By unlocking the potential of our island we can address more comprehensively the climate crisis we collectively face. United, we can lead a just transition to a net zero carbon society on the island of Ireland by at least 2050, that will create warmer homes, good green collar jobs, healthier and more efficient means of travel, cleaner and cheaper energy, and decent public transport for all.

8) **Conclusion**

This consultation is both timely and a welcome development. This submission seeks to address the issues outlined in the consultation and is by no means an exhaustive catalogue of the issues raised by constitutional change. We look forward to discussing these matters in more detail in the planned upcoming public sessions. The constitutional future of the island of Ireland is a live and growing topic of discussion right across the county. It is prudent now for all stakeholders to begin planning for constitutional change and the referendums required to initiate it. There is an onus and an obligation on the Irish Government to begin the process of planning for the future. The first step in this process should be the establishment of an all-island Citizens' Assembly on Irish Unity.



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