



## **Annual Bodenstown Speech 1994**

### **Address by Sinn Féin General Secretary Lucilita Bhreatnach**

June 1994

As Sinn Féin General Secretary, as an Irish republican and as a woman, it is an honour for me to have this opportunity to address republicans at the grave of Wolfe Tone.

#### **ELECTIONS**

Despite very low turnouts and antipathy towards the EU poll, the Sinn Féin vote held up across the country and in some key areas including Monaghan, Cork and Dublin made some gains. Sinn Féin's vote also improved in four out of five Southern EU constituencies and held firm in the fifth. In the Six Counties the three Sinn Féin candidates polled well. Their total vote share at 9.9% was an increase of 0.7% on 1989.

Good results for Sinn Féin in the 26 County local elections reflects the party's efforts at local level. Sinn Féin increased its public representation, securing 24 seats on local authorities in Cork, Clare, Donegal, Galway, Kerry, Kildare, Louth, Meath, Monaghan, Offaly, Sligo and Tipperary.

The most outstanding local success was in Monaghan, where representation on urban Councils and local commissions was increased by 100%. Eight candidates stood and eight were elected. Our Monaghan comrades deserve our special congratulations. The election results prove that Sinn Féin is relevant in Ireland today where activists through their work make it so.

In this county, Chill Dara, Paddy Wright retook his seat and brought a second candidate Mossie Reilly in with him. We wish them and all our elected

representatives well and we thank all our supporters and activists who worked so hard and voted for us.

#### **WOLFE TONE**

We republicans come to Bodenstown each year to renew our pledge to the ideals of republicanism, here at the grave of Wolfe Tone. We come here to take stock and gather strength from each other for the struggle ahead. Theobald Wolfe Tone grew up in an Ireland that was rigidly run by the British through class and religious discrimination.

The Penal Laws were still in force and as a young Protestant barrister, Tone tried to represent the interests of Catholics who had no other redress. He was clear about the divisions in Ireland and the reasons for them and he set out to break the connection with England the unending source of all our ills and through that to unite Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter in the common cause of asserting the independence of their country.

This is the legacy of Tone. He rejected division, advocated independence and urged recognition of human rights for all. Division and partition are the legacy of British interference in Irish affairs.

#### **REALITY OF CONFLICT**

As we approach the 200th anniversary of the 1798 Rebellion the British retain control over part of Ireland. Their legacy is one of failure. Seventy years of partition of repression, censorship, discrimination, of shoot-to-kill, hunger strikes,

plastic bullets, collusion, miscarriages of justice, all have failed to break the spirit of freedom because nothing can. We must look on the last year as a testimony to the strength, the ability and the commitment of the freedom struggle to see that phase of the struggle through to a successful conclusion. That it has been a time of great danger is all too obvious.

On the day when nationalists reclaimed their right to walk in their own city of Belfast a loyalist death squad struck at the family of Sinn Fein councillor Bobby Lavery killing his son Sean. Bobby's words afterwards were of forgiveness and recognition of the damage inflicted on our people by the very nature of the Six County statelet. He placed the blame squarely at the door of the British government. Theresa Clinton also died at the hands of a loyalist death squad, her death sentence passed on the basis that she married a Sinn Fein member.

Nineteen people have died so far this year at the hands of the British inspired and supplied death squads simply because they were Catholics or nationalists. The proven links between British intelligence agents, the RUC, British Army and loyalist death squad must be broken. There is substantial evidence that collusion with loyalists is an integral part of Britain's counter insurgency strategy. Collusion at all levels must be stopped. We must not allow this scandal to be ignored or buried by the media.

The weapons and propaganda of loyalism today may be modern. The intent and purpose for their existence and activities and their sponsors and backers remain the same as ever. It is important also to understand that while the loyalists have their own agenda, their attacks also fit into British strategy. This is why there has always been collusion, both at an official and unofficial or personal level. Examples of this collusion are many, from the Dublin and Monaghan bombings to the Brian Nelson affair. Attempts by the British to distance themselves from, or to deny involvement in loyalist terrorism are totally at variance with the historical and contemporary record. Collusion is sadly a fact of life and death in Ireland under British rule.

## **IGNORING THE REALITY**

They all thundered against the unionist state and

the poor persecuted nationalists. And they all of course claimed their bit of the Rising and the Tan War! But when the persecuted nationalists rose up and said we will not live this way - when it seemed that the rhetoric might have to be translated into some sort of action - then we witnessed the damage that partition had wrought on the hearts and minds of those who were in power in the southern state. The persecuted nationalists were abandoned to their fate.

The rise of the revisionists was assured as those quickly washing their hands of the north looked for justification for their indifference. As the years went on it became easier and more opportune to stand history and logic on its head.

That is why the Dublin and Monaghan bombings of 1974 which claimed 34 lives were never fully investigated. The fear of those in the southern establishment about the exposure of British intelligence involvement was too great. It was swept under the carpet. Twenty years later an inquiry has been promised. The relatives of those killed are still waiting for justice.

20 years ago Irish republican prisoner Michael Gaughan died from the effects of force-feeding in Parkhurst Prison, protesting for the right to repatriation - a right still denied to Irish prisoners in English jails today.

Michael Gaughan's funeral saw a spontaneous display of mourning by people across Ireland. The treatment two years later of the body of hunger striker Frank Stagg by the then Coalition government showed that repression and fear of public support for republicanism were the dominating factors in Dublin government policy on the North.

In the intervening years British and Unionist politicians have used the threat of 'loyalist violence' to 'warn off the Dublin government and southern people in general from raising the whole question of the need for change. They have succeeded with the John Bruton's, the Mary Harney's and the De Rossa's. This is evident in their reaction after the loyalist attack on the Widow Scallan's in Pearse Street where IRA Volunteer Martin Doherty died preventing the deaths of many others. The revisionists have no positive contribution to make towards the peace process. They sit on the sidelines making negative noises and scoring

cheap political points. Do they really want a durable and lasting peace or will they simply continue to support the failed policies and structures of the past.

Yet despite partition, repression and the efforts of the revisionists the determination and tenacity of the struggle has succeeded in putting the whole question of national self-determination at the top of the political and media agenda.

## **IRISH PEACE INITIATIVE**

Just over 12 months ago the news of the discussions between SDLP Party leader John Hume and Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams became public. Between them an agreement was reached which was based on a set of broad principles. The Hume/Adams agreement was supported by nationalists all over Ireland and beyond. The political landscape appeared frozen over. The Hume/Adams agreement offered the hope of a potential breakthrough.

Since then the whole question of the north and the vital necessity for a peace process has been at the top of the political and media agenda in Ireland and Britain. There has also been considerable international interest. The positive attitude of Dublin to these developments added to the momentum for peace. Significantly the IRA responded to the Irish Peace Initiative saying that "If the political will existed or could be created then it could provide the basis for peace."

The Irish Peace Initiative forced the issue of peace to the top of the British government agenda.

## **DOWNING STREET DECLARATION**

Against this backdrop the Downing Street Declaration emerged. In spite of the growing momentum for peace the British government stalled and refused to respond to the reasonable Sinn Fein request for clarification of the Downing Street Declaration.

This refusal was accompanied by dismissive speeches and provocative language by both Major and Mayhew. But Sinn Fein persevered and five months later, the British government did finally respond to a series of questions put to it by Sinn Fein.

As was noted at the time by Sinn Fein whatever about the quality of the British answers the quantity was clearly at odds with London's previous assertions that no clarification was needed.

The significance of the British response to clarification, which came as a result of a Sinn Fein initiative, lay as much in the fact that the British responded as in the substance of the responses themselves. Indeed many republicans and nationalists registered disappointment and frustration at the gaps in the British responses and at the omissions and points simply left unanswered.