

Full Text of the Bodenstown speech June 19, 2005 by Conor Murphy MP

A chairde,

It is a great honour for me to be asked to address this commemoration today. I have been coming to Bodenstown, to the grave of Tone, since I was a teenager and I have always found it to be a place of inspiration, just as I have always found the deeds, the ideas and the words of Wolfe Tone to be inspiring to me as an Irish republican trying to make my contribution to this great historical struggle.

Tone famously said;

"From my earliest youth, I have regarded the connection between Ireland and Great Britain, as the curse of the Irish nation; and felt convinced, that, whilst it lasted, this country could never be free nor happy."

These words have been repeated by republican speakers, many times, in this graveyard. We come here to the graveside of Wolfe Tone each year to renew our pledge to the ideals of republicanism. We come here each year to take stock and gather strength from each other and for the struggle ahead.

The denial of independence to the Irish people and the involvement of Britain in Irish affairs are at the core of the conflict and political instability in these islands and between Ireland and Britain. When at the start of the last century, in the wake of the 1916 Rising and the Tan War, the Irish people seemed about to achieve the dream of Wolfe Tone, a united Irish republic, the British government rekindled the old fires of division and sectarianism which Tone and his comrades set out to extinguish in their day. A political arrangement based on the sectarian division of Ireland and the people of Ireland was imposed upon us by force.

Let there be no doubt that the primary aim of our party is the unity and independence of Ireland as a sovereign state. This means setting aside that failed partitionist arrangement. It needs to be replaced with a new political settlement worked out democratically and peacefully between Irish people. And it means in the interim political, social, economic and cultural change across a range of issues. It also means that the Irish government

needs to assert the rights of nationalists just as the British government asserts the rights of unionists.

Green Paper on Irish Unity

Earlier this year Sinn Féin launched a campaign calling for the publication of a Green Paper on Irish unity by the Irish Government. This call was made not only because the primary objective of Sinn Féin is Irish unity but because Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, the Labour Party and the SDLP all say they are in favour of it.

If that is the case then surely the logical next step is for all of us to sit down and set out a strategy to bring this about. So to members of Fianna Fail, SDLP, Fine Gael and Labour I say, join with us in planning for a new all-Ireland republic. I call on you to stand up to those, some of whom are in the Irish government, who believe that Ireland stops at the border.

Building Political Strength

While Irish reunification is our ultimate objective we are not prepared to wait, nor should we have to, for basic rights and entitlements - for decent hospitals and schools, for decent healthcare and housing. For a fair share of the wealth which exists on our island. If the British Direct Rule ministers in the Six Counties and the Fianna Fáil/Progressive Democrat coalition government have one thing in common - it is that they have both failed to deliver for the people of this island. Instead, despite economic growth, we have a widening gap between rich and poor, ongoing attempts to sell off public services, overcrowding in our schools, hospital waiting lists and tax breaks for the rich.

Sinn Féin stands as a real alternative to all of that. We believe that economic growth should be used to the benefit of all of us living on the island. We want equality to be a cornerstone of Irish society. We want to see investment in health and education, rights for the disabled, an end to poverty. We want to see government priorities change from investing in the rich to investing in the people.

To achieve these modest demands. To advance our strategy for delivering freedom and independence we need to build the support for our agenda for change among as many people as possible across this island.

I want to send congratulations and thanks to all of the people who stood for our party and worked tirelessly on the ground in the Westminster and six county local elections. You knuckled down and did the work on the ground to confound our opponents and deliver what was a fantastic result.

And we should not be naive about this. The clamour of resistance to our agenda by those who seek to prevent or minimise change has and will increase in direct proportion to our successes at the ballot box.

EU Constitution

This fear of the electorate was all too apparent in the Irish government's decision to postpone the referendum on the EU Constitution to allow for what they call a 'period of reflection' This of course is complete nonsense. They don't want a proper debate because that is what happened in France and the Netherlands.

What they are really hoping is that the electorate forget that the people of France and the Netherlands came out in record numbers and voted against the Constitution. They are very naive if they think that will happen.

It is worth nothing that the French and Dutch did not rush to Brussels to apologise for their countrymen and women 'making a terrible mistake' as happened here in Ireland after the defeat of the Nice Treaty referendum.

I am calling on the Irish government to treat the electorate in this country with the same respect and hold the EU Constitution referendum this autumn. Let's have the debate now. Let the people decide.

It's time for the truth

Over the last few weeks we have seen another issue - the Morris Tribunal - at the top of the political agenda. The report made for shocking reading, detailing as it did the prejudiced investigations, lies, the destruction and falsification of records, reports and other evidence.

Everyone involved in this serious misconduct must be held to full account. That means the 19 former and serving Gardaí named in the Morris Tribunal reports should be immediately suspended pending decision by the DPP. That means the senior management, those responsible in the Crime and Security Branch and the Garda Commissioners. That means the Attorney Generals who advised successive Governments and the three Ministers for Justice who presided over this state of affairs without taking the decisive action needed. Retirements and transfers are not only insufficient, they stink of cover-up. All involved at every level of this scandal must be relieved of duty.

Many questions about serious Garda misconduct remain unanswered in this whole affair and many questions also remain unanswered in relation to how the murder of Eddie Fullerton was investigated by some of the same Gardaí in Donegal.

When we asked that the murder of Sinn Féin Councillor Eddie Fullerton be included under the remit of the Morris Tribunal, our demand was refused by the Justice Minister Michael McDowell. The corruption exposed in the Morris reports tells us the real reason why this request was refused - to prevent the truth coming out.

Last Friday the family of Eddie Fullerton were forced to come to Leinster House to once again demand that the truth about his death, about the collusion between loyalist death squads and British Intelligence and the role of the discredited Donegal Gardaí. The only way the truth will come out is through a full independent public inquiry into Eddie Fullerton's murder. I want to take this opportunity to once again commend Eddie's family and indeed all of those families seeking to uncover the truth about collusion and state murder and to offer them our continuing support in the time ahead.

Collusion, state murder, the vilification of freedom fighters. These are the stock in trade of those who want to prevent change.

However the reality is that none of these attacks on the Irish republican struggle have worked. They are an echo of the failed policies of the past, which sustained conflict over decades.

Céad Bliain

This year marks the centenary of the foundation of Sinn Féin. Cead Blain events have taken place across the island and we will be holding a national rally in Dublin on Saturday 24th September. Our 100th anniversary must be a year of education, of re-popularising the republican struggle, a year of analysing and learning the lessons of a century in struggle. We also need to start preparing to mark the 25th Anniversary of the 1981 Hunger Strike next year and the 100th anniversary of the 1916 Rising which gave Michael McDowell and his pals their freedom.

As part of an overall and necessary regeneration much work has also gone on over the past year in restructuring An Phoblacht. The people who keep the paper going deserve our support and we intend to relaunch the paper in the coming months and I am appealing to the wider republican community to embrace and support this important republican project.

The Peace Process

The downward spiral of recrimination and blame in the months following the negotiations of last December threatened to destroy the enormous progress we have collectively made over recent years. The only person to show leadership in this poisoned atmosphere; the only person to stand above the personal abuse and invective was the president of Sinn Fein. On April 6, Gerry Adams made a direct appeal to the men and women volunteers of the IRA to embrace purely political and democratic activity.

The IRA leadership responded to this appeal by initiating an internal debate and we await the conclusion of those discussions. I have no intention today of commenting on this internal discussion. That is a matter for the IRA and, as Gerry Adams has repeatedly said, that organisation should be given the space to thoroughly debate these matters.

Of course it is clear that a positive response from the IRA would have an immediate and enormous impact on the political situation. It would restart the faltering peace process; remove from unionists their excuse for non-engagement and it would put enormous pressure on the DUP to come on board the peace process for the first time.

Of course the DUP may choose not to do so. Their current public position gives little cause for optimism. Their record of sectarian bigotry and intolerance, their offensive and provocative language, their association with loyalist paramilitaries and Ulster Resistance in particular, their 'Smash Sinn Fein Campaign' which accompanied the loyalist onslaught on our party members are all well documented. A campaign which saw Councillor Eddie Fullerton, Cllr John Davey, Cllr Bernard O'Hagan, Sheena Campbell and many other members of this party and family members and friends killed by unionist paramilitaries working hand in glove with the Crown forces.

But despite all of this Sinn Fein is prepared to do business with the DUP because they have an electoral mandate; just as they must do business with Sinn Fein because we have an electoral mandate; because we are the largest nationalist party in the north; the largest pro-Agreement party in the north and the third largest party on the island of Ireland.

At some point the DUP will have to enter the world of real politics. They will have to learn that there is no alternative to sharing power with Irish republicans; that there is no alternative to the all-Ireland architecture of the Good Friday Agreement and that their brand of politics, based on crude sectarianism, bigotry and intolerance, is a political cul-de-sac. I am firmly convinced that it is not a matter of if the DUP do a deal but when. And while the DUP comes to terms with these political realities, the two governments must push ahead with the agenda of change set out in the Agreement. They have been mandated to do so by the people of Ireland.

Marching Season

Critically, as we face into the marching season, there must be no repeat of the decisions made by the British government last year which led to near disaster in Ardoyne. We have seen on Friday night how eager the PSNI are to provoke confrontation with nationalist residents. This issue is the very immediate test which the new British Secretary of State, Peter Hain, faces in the next few weeks.

Over recent weeks it seems that the Orange Order has taken a decision to increase tensions around the marching issue this summer. The only purpose of this is to poison further an already strained political atmosphere. They have filed for parades along a number of contentious routes and continue to refuse to engage with local communities.

It is very obvious that a difficult and contentious marching season will not be helpful to efforts to make political progress, whereas a peaceful and quiet summer would have the opposite effect. The Orange Order know this to be the reality also.

The strategy which they have embarked upon has the potential to undermine efforts to see political progress and many would contend that this is the motivation behind it. At a time when the Sinn Fein leadership and others are trying to put the political process back on track and when the IRA has embarked upon a process of internal consultation it is up to the Orange Order to explain in very clear terms the motivation and purpose of their strategy.

I would also congratulate the discipline and restraint shown by nationalist and republican communities who have had to endure provocative marches through their areas year in and year out.

And in the time ahead we must see progress on demilitarisation, human rights, equality, the Irish language, policing and justice. For what is beyond any doubt is that nationalists and republicans are determined that there will never be a return to the days of second-class citizens. And the people gathered here today and the thousands of republican activists across Ireland are the best assurance that our future on this island will be very different from our divided and painful past. The growing support for Irish republicanism across the island will continue to be the dynamic for progress towards equality, justice and peace. And, ultimately, it is the best guarantee of a united, independent Irish republic.

Sinn Fein stands over and is proud of the contribution we have made to the peace process and in transforming the political situation, not just in the north, but also throughout the

island of Ireland. But there is much more work to be done. That is the challenge facing all of us gathered here today. There will be difficult times ahead. There will without doubt be more difficult decisions to be taken. We must rise to the challenges before us. We must take ownership of this process and we must not allow our opponents to distract us from our task in the time ahead.

Irish republicans have demonstrated time and time again our capacity to overcome adversity and advance our struggle for freedom and justice against enormous odds. We are deadly serious about turning the vision of 1798 into a reality. It will not be easy. The immediate weeks and months ahead present enormous challenges to everyone but especially for Irish republicans. I believe we are up these challenges. I believe we can complete the work of previous generations. I believe we will build the united independent Ireland- the new Ireland - which Wolfe Tone and all of those other generations fought for."ENDS