**January 21st 2017**

**Imagining a New Republic**

Ar dtús baire, ba mhaith liom fáilte mór a chur roimh gach aon duine anseo ag an Mansion House um tráthnóna.

Tá fáilte roimh uilig.

Before I begin I want to take a moment to thank my friend and comrade Martin McGuinness for his decades of leadership and commitment to Irish Republicanism and to the struggle for equality and fairness, and a United Ireland.

I have known Martin for over 45 years. He is a remarkable and gifted human being and a great leader and a patriot. His patience in the face of 10 years of working with a succession of DUP leaders has been enormous.

As you all know he has been ill for some time.

He and his wife Bernie are overwhelmed by the messages of solidarity and support he has been receiving.

Martin is receiving the very best of medical care and with time and patience we are all hopeful he will make a full recovery.

I spoke to him this morning.

He had wanted to be here with us today but he asked me to pass on his very best wishes for an important debate on the future direction of the island of Ireland as we move forward to a United Ireland.

**The Democratic Programme of the First Dáil**

Today’s conference is about how this generation of Irish citizens can conclude the unfinished business of 1916 and 1919 and create the conditions for a United Ireland.

For those who say it can’t be done.

Of course it can.

It needs political will, and thoughtful strategies to win popular support on the one hand and on the other political, economic and inclusive arguments that can persuade Irish people, whatever their current political aspiration, that a United Ireland is in their self-interest.

That means in the first instance setting the issue in its historical and contemporary context.

Tharla go leor eachtraí stairiúla san áit seo thar na blianta.

Ach tharla ceann de na heachtraí is tábhachtaí cothrom an lae seo ocht mbliana is nócha ó shin.

It was here in the Mansion House on January 21st 1919 that the First Dáil met and asserted the national freedom and independence of the Irish people.

The vision of the Proclamation; the courage and generosity of the men and women of 1916, and of those who met in this building three years later, contributed to the production of the Democratic Programme of the First Dáil.

That Democratic Programme envisaged a Republic, where people are citizens, not subjects; where they have fundamental rights, not arbitrary privileges; where there is equality, not elitism; and where there is unity, not partition and division.

Reflecting the language of the Proclamation the Democratic Programme declared “the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies to be indefeasible …”

It also called for, “our country to be ruled in accordance with the principles of Liberty, Equality, and Justice for all …”

The Democratic Programme embraced equality and the belief that citizens have rights and that the state has a responsibility to deliver and defend those rights.

The Programme called on the Government of the Republic “to make provision for the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of the children, to secure that no child shall suffer hunger or cold from lack of food, clothing, or shelter, but that all shall be provided with the means and facilities requisite for their proper education and training as Citizens …”

And to “safeguard the health of the people.”

**Partition**

Almost 100 years later the two states created by partition have failed to meet the objectives set by the Proclamation and the Democratic Programme.

Partition created two narrow, mean-minded, conservative, elitist, sectarian regimes.

In the North a deeply sectarian unionist regime institutionalised decades of inequality and injustice.

In this state Poverty, emigration and inequality was rampant.

There was the horror of institutional abuse.

Censorship in the arts and culture of this state and its politics was pervasive.

Some of our greatest writers were banned.

The old, imperial administration was replaced by new, native political and economic elites.

They, like the political establishment, believe that our sovereign nation stops at the border.

Partition has had a hugely negative impact.

It created a duplication of public and private services, two sets of currencies, and two tax systems, laws and regulations.

It also sustained decades of conflict, inequality and sectarianism.

The conflict has now thankfully come to an end but partition and the divisions it has fostered still exist.

**A New Ireland**

Sinn Féin has a vision of a new Ireland in which neither gender or race, age or disability, sexual orientation or class, or creed or skin colour or location can be used to deny citizens their full rights and entitlements.

Áit a mbeadh na cearta is bunúsaí suite sa Bhunreacht - ceart ar phost, ar theach, ar ardchaighdeán oideachais agus sláinte agus cothrom na féinne don Ghaeilge.

We are for a new Ireland that builds reconciliation between Orange and Green.

A society that is democratic and inclusive, and based on equality, freedom and social solidarity.

A new Republic that embraces the ethos of the Proclamation and the Democratic Programme and shares its wealth more equitably, looks after its aged and its young, provides full rights for people with disabilities, liberates women, and delivers the highest standards of public services.

There are immediate challenges facing those of us who want a united independent Ireland.

These include getting the Irish government to change its policy from one of acquiescing to the union with Britain to one of becoming a persuader for Irish unity; getting the Irish government to begin preparations for Irish unity; and lastly engaging with Ulster unionism on the type of Ireland we want to create.

**Winning Unionist support for Unity**

We need to address the genuine fears and concerns of unionists in a meaningful way.

We need to look at what they mean by their sense of Britishness and be willing to explore and to be open to new concepts.

Caithfimid amharc ar na bealaí ar féidir leis na hAontachtóirí áit a bhaint amach dóibh féin in aon Éire nua.

There are many issues for republicans and unionists to talk about.

However, it is worth noting that within the British system, unionists make up less than 2 per cent of the population.

As 20 per cent of a new Ireland, unionists will be able to assert their full rights and entitlements and exercise real political power and influence.

The changing demographics of the North must also be considered.

The census results published in December 2012 saw a significant change in the political make-up of the North’s population.

Ireland was partitioned on the basis that within the six counties unionism – as defined by the Protestant population - would have a secure permanent two thirds majority.

Four years ago this was reduced to less than 50%.

For the first time statisticians asked about identity - setting to one side the sectarian labels of Catholic and Protestant.

48% stated that they had a British only identity or a British/Irish identity.

A quarter (25%) stated that they had an Irish only identity and just over a fifth (21%) had a Northern Irish only identity.

That means that 46% had some form of Irish only identity.

Statisticians and politicians are still arguing over the significance of this.

**Brexit**

But what is clear is that partition has failed unionists.

It has failed nationalists.

It has failed the people of this island.

And ending partition has now taken on a new imperative following last summer’s Brexit vote.

The citizens of England and Wales voted to leave the EU.

The people of Scotland and of the North voted to remain.

Don chéad uair ó Chomhaontú Aoine an Chéasta tháinig riar maith de vótóirí Náisiúnacha agus Aontachtacha le chéile ar aon tuairim ag an toghchán.

As the dire economic implications of Brexit take shape there is an opportunity to promote a new agreed Ireland.

Sinn Féin’s proposition that the North be accorded a designated special status within the EU will not affect the constitutional question.

Taking the North out of the EU will.

It will destroy the Good Friday Agreement.

Clearly the preferred option of many unionists and many nationalists is to remain within the EU.

The speech by Theresa May will have reinforced this.

The dangers of a hard Brexit are now more obvious than before.

The North needs a special designated status within the EU.

The Irish government needs to adopt this as a strategic objective in its negotiations within the EU 27 as they negotiate with the British Prime Minister.

I have raised this consistently with the Taoiseach.

However, as we saw this week in the Irish governments response to the speech by Theresa May there is at this time no strategic plan coming from the government.

That is a cause of real concern.

The British government’s intention to take the North out of the EU, despite the wish of the people there to remain, is a hostile action.

Not just because of the implications of a hard border on this island but also because of its negative impact on the Good Friday Agreement.

The British Prime Minister repeated her intention to bring an end to the jurisdiction of the European Court.

Along with her commitment to remove Britain from the European Convention on Human Rights this stand threatens to undermine the fundamental human rights elements of the Good Friday Agreement.

The British position also fails to take account of the fact that citizens in the North, under the Agreement, have a right to Irish citizenship and therefore EU citizenship.

All of this, and the current crisis around the RHI scandal is creating new political conditions.

I believe that if we properly frame the positive arguments the potential of a new, reimagined, confident Ireland within the European Union, will prove attractive to some unionists.

This too is an opportunity and a challenge that political leaders in this state need to rise to.

Caithfimid uilig bogadh ar aghaidh ón bhaothchaint amháin maidir le hAontú na hÉireann.

That would be helped by those parties and organisations and individuals on this island agreeing steps that advance the goal of unity.

Regrettably at this time neither Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael or Labour have a strategy to achieve Irish unity and the PBP/AAA alliance are against it.

This has to change.

Irish unity makes sense. Political sense. Economic sense.

And it is in the best interests of the people of this island.

Sinn Féin is prepared to work with all parties with a professed United Ireland objective.

There is an onus on the Irish Government to prepare a real plan for unity.

A first step in this would be the development of an all-party group to bring forward a Green Paper for Unity.

In addition, plans should be developed for an all-island National Health Service and for all island public services through a ‘United Ireland Investment and Prosperity Plan’.

Now is the time for all parties who support Irish unity to come together to design the pathway to a new, agreed, inclusive united Ireland – an Ireland that is built on equality and which is citizen-centred and inclusive.

**The financial cost of a United Ireland**

People in the 26 Counties also need to be convinced that a United Ireland is affordable.

People in the six counties need to be convinced that unity will work and that the loss of the British subvention will not impoverish them.

In 2015 economist Michael Burke produced a paper: The Economic Case for Irish Unity. His conclusion at the end of a detailed analysis was that: *“Quite simply put, the whole population of Ireland would benefit economically from reunification.”*

*He added that the two economies on this island “have clear synergies. These are all significant factors that, if the potential is realised through investment, could substantially raise the prosperity of the whole island.”*

And then Professor Kurt Huebner of Vancouver University produced his paper: [*Modeling Irish Unification*](http://prcg.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Modeling-Irish-Unification-Report.pdf).

Three unification scenarios were presented, with the most aggressive estimating a €35.6billion boost in an all-island GDP in the first eight years of unification.

It found that there would be long-term improvement in the economy of the North as a result of the removal of currency, trade and tax barriers which currently impede economic growth.

**Reimagine Ireland**

So, we now have the opportunity to re-imagine Ireland, an Ireland where conflict and violence are in the past, an Ireland that reflects our genius and diversity, our dignity and our strengths. Join us.

Before Christmas Sinn Féin launched ‘Towards a United Ireland’.

It is a detailed discussion paper setting out the arguments for a United Ireland and which addresses, from a republican perspective, the impact on the economy, on inward investment, on exports, on the health service, on the border region and much more.

Téann sé i ngleic go díreach cruinn leis an tuairim nach bhfuil muintir an deiscirt agus an tuaiscirt in ann Éire aontaithe a bhaint amach.

Téann sé i ngleic leis agus scriosann sé an tuairim sin.

The Good Friday Agreement and Brexit are changing the relationships within and between the North and South and with our nearest off-shore island.

The determination of the British government to impose Brexit on the North, despite the vote of the people, underlines the undemocratic nature of partition and the unequal relationship between London and Belfast.

The future constitutional position of the North lies in the hands of the people of the north and of the south.

First Minister Sturgeon in her recent address to the Seanad said, *‘we are living in unprecedented times and those unprecedented times require imagination, open minds and fresh thinking’.*

She is right.

It is the time to look to a new future, a different future.

Brexit has demonstrated again the failure of partition.

Now is the time to look to the future and to talk about, to plan and to deliver a new and united Ireland.