

TAOBH ISTIGH

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WHY IRELAND SHOULD MATTER TO THE BRITISH LABOUR MOVEMENT **PAGES 10-14**

REVIEW: THE GHOST LIMB - ALTERNATIVE PROTESTANTS AND THE SPIRIT OF 1798 **PAGES 31-33**

**New
IRELAND**

GEIMHREADH
2024
WINTER
EAGRÁN ISSUE 6



**éire
NUA**

**A decisive
year
for
Unity**



2024 is
shaping
up to be a
decisive year
for change
and for
Irish Unity.

SEE PAGE 2



**#Time4Unity
Am d'Aontacht**



**KEEP TALKING
ABOUT
PALESTINE**



**CEASEFIRE
NOW**

Clár an Abhair

GEIMHREADH 2024 WINTER EAGRÁN ISSUE 6

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A Decisive Year for Unity

2 024 is shaping up to be a decisive year for change and for Irish Unity. It will determine the political direction of travel for this island for the foreseeable future. The many challenges facing all of us are enormous but so too are the considerable opportunities for change and progress.

The situation in the North is clearly a source of concern. The DUP refusal to work the institutions is causing real hardship for working families and as Michelle O'Neill said gives rise to a belief that the DUP is engaged in a "dangerous attempt underway to discard the democratic outcome of the Assembly election" and is refusing to "to accept a nationalist First Minister." She warned that the recall sitting of the Assembly that took place on Wednesday 17 January "may well be the final one."

However, the next 12 months will see at least four major elections and these will provide opportunities for building on the momentum for Irish Unity.

There will be a British general election. The Tories are facing significant losses. Will a Labour government be better for the North? The jury is out on that. Past Labour governments have been just as poor as the Tories. So it will be over to the electorate of the North again to elect Sinn Féin MPs and send a clear message to London that constitutional change – that Irish Unity – is the best way forward

In the South there will be local government elections in June and elections to the European Parliament on the same day. These will be a crucial test for all of the parties as they prepare for the general election in that jurisdiction which must be held by February next.

In recent weeks Taoiseach Leo Varadkar has been setting out his vision for the next five years – more of the same. A Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil, Green Party government with the leaders carving up the ministerial posts as Varadkar and Micheál Martin play tweedle dee and tweedle dum over the role of Taoiseach. For the first time there is the real possibility of a government without either of them.

Successive elections over the last decade have witnessed the consistent growth in the Sinn Féin vote. In 2020 it emerged with the greater share of first preference votes. The party is now the largest in the Oireachtas. As Uachtarán Mary Lou McDonald wisely put it her aim is to deliver real change with a fresh government that will have neither of these parties in it.

So the challenge for Sinn Féin is to present and deliver a new vision of the new Ireland that a Sinn Féin government will seek to construct. That means clear policies on the economy, on housing, on health and mental health, on the environment, on investment in and the transformation of education and childcare and supports for carers. A programme for change that has fairness and equality at its core. Much of this work is well underway.

But it especially means for the oldest Republican party on this island that there is an onus on us to map out the kind of United Ireland we are for – inclusive, with equality at the heart of policy making and delivery, anti-sectarian, pro-working family, standing up to the fascists and right wing who seek to whip up violence and division, and defending the rights and entitlements of all citizens.

Much progress has been made. But we

need to do more. Civic organisations and academia are already planning more positive reports and events in support of Unity. Ireland's Future will be holding its 'Pathway to Change' event in the SSE Arena in Belfast on 15 June. Sinn Féin's Commission on the Future of Ireland will be holding more of its successful People's Assemblies and Friends of Sinn Féin is planning similar events in North America.

An Irish government has the political and diplomatic resources to advance all of these propositions – if it has the political will. Irish governments have paid lip service to a united Ireland. That has to change. 2024 can see that change.



So the challenge for Sinn Féin is to present and deliver a new vision of the new Ireland that a Sinn Féin government will seek to construct.

#Time4Unity
Am d'Aontacht



ABAIR LEAT HAVE YOUR SAY HAE YER SPAKE

THE NEW IRELAND IS FOR EVERYONE



BELFAST PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY



ARMAGH/DOWN/LOUTH PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY



CONAMARA GAELTACHT PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY



DERRY - EXPLORING NORTHERN PROTESTANT IDENTITIES AND CULTURE IN A SHARED IRELAND



DUBLIN YOUTH ASSEMBLY



DERRY PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY

Commission on the Future of Ireland

In 2022 Sinn Féin established the Commission on the Future of Ireland. The aim of the Commission is to undertake a broad and deep consultation with people all across the island and beyond on our shared future. So far, there have been 11 public initiatives which have included People's Assemblies in Belfast, Donegal, Louth, Waterford & Derry, a Belfast women's assembly, an engagement exploring northern Protestant identities & cultures, a youth assembly, engagement with the agricultural sector & those from rural communities and a Gaeltacht Assembly in Conamara. All of these initiatives have been hugely successful in terms of engaging with wider civic society on the topic of Irish Unity.

Information on all past events can be found here www.sinnfein.ie/futureofireland



Throughout 2024 the Commission will continue to hold public and private events, to produce reports and videos of events, to communicate with past attendees and to gather written contributions.

We are pleased to announce the first of our events for 2024 have now been scheduled.

The Fermanagh People's Assembly will take place in the Westville Hotel, Enniskillen on Thursday 22nd February.

The following week the West Tyrone People's Assembly will take place in the Fir Trees Hotel, Strabane on Tuesday 27th February. Both events will begin at 7pm.

Registration will be open on Eventbrite soon.

SAVE THE DATE | SÁBHÁIL AN DÁTA



**WEST TYRONE
PEOPLE'S
ASSEMBLY**

**TUESDAY, 27TH FEBRUARY 2024
FIR TREES HOTEL, STRABANE
7PM**

HOSTED BY SINN FÉIN'S
COMMISSION ON THE
FUTURE OF IRELAND

Sinn Féin
www.sinnfein.ie/futureofireland

SAVE THE DATE | SÁBHÁIL AN DÁTA



**FERMANAGH
PEOPLE'S
ASSEMBLY**

**THURSDAY, 22ND FEBRUARY 2024
WESTVILLE HOTEL, ENNISKILLEN
7PM**

HOSTED BY SINN FÉIN'S
COMMISSION ON THE
FUTURE OF IRELAND

Sinn Féin
www.sinnfein.ie/futureofireland

ABAIR LEAT HAVE YOUR SAY HAE YER SPAKE

THE NEW IRELAND IS FOR EVERYONE



DONEGAL PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY



WOMEN'S BELFAST ASSEMBLY



PLOUGHING CHAMPIONSHIP - RURAL COMMUNITIES



WATERFORD PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY

Preparing for reunification is critical

Chris Donnelly is a political commentator and regular contributor to the Irish News

The final weeks of 2023 have come and gone, like those that came before them, and we are still not certain whether or not the DUP, under Jeffrey Donaldson's leadership, is finally prepared to return to the Executive and power-sharing institutions. The opportunity to save some face was missed when the party did not move when the Windsor Framework was announced almost a year ago. Anything the British Government can offer at this stage is unlikely to convince even the most fervent of party loyalists that anything substantial has really changed, so the party leadership will be left effectively managing a climbdown to help get Stormont up and running once again. For all the talk of disagreements at the top of the party, it remains very unlikely that a return to government will lead to significant

resignations hitting the DUP, never mind defections to the TUV. At election after election, Jim Allister's party has failed to make a breakthrough in spite of the extraordinarily generous media coverage consistently provided to the hard man of unionism. The lesson to be learned from that is very clear: unionism knows that Allister's politics won't deliver for them in the changed world in which we live in 2024.

For Sinn Fein, 2023 was a very good year across the country. In the South, the party remains consistently the most popular in the jurisdiction, and by a clear margin. Mary Lou McDonald's stature continues to grow, and the Republican party's politics continue to influence upon decisions at policy level of their main political opponents.



In the North, Michelle O'Neill led the party to unprecedented success during the local government elections in May. The result was a landmark because, for the first time in the history of the state, more pro-Irish unity councillors were elected than nominally pro-Union councillors, signalling the extent of the political and electoral change taking place in front of our eyes. Whilst Stormont remained moth-balled throughout 2023, Sinn Féin proved successful at contrasting their desire and interest in working to improve this society with the sullen and rejectionist approach of a DUP-led unionism that has marginalised itself from the bulk of what may be perceived as non-aligned voters, a dangerous position for unionism to be in as we move inexorably closer to a border poll.

The key challenges likely to face Sinn Féin in 2024 are perhaps greater than anything faced by the party during the current year when Sinn Féin was forced to remain outside of government in the North whilst leading the Opposition in the South. The return of Stormont at some point in 2024 would appear likely, for unionism has nowhere else to go. A revived Stormont Executive will have many daunting decisions to take due to the dire financial situation within which the North finds itself, and retaining the party's unparalleled levels of popular support in such conditions will prove very difficult.

Meanwhile, the preparation for government in Dublin will continue apace, with Sinn Féin knowing that it needs to be in a position to demonstrate by actions and results how the election of a left wing party-led coalition for the first time in the history of the state can make a difference. A radical plan to address the chronic housing crisis will be required which demonstrably delivers for citizens, whilst continuing to lead on immigration, countering the Far right's dangerous and despicable rhetoric and actions will be necessary.

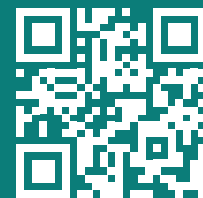
In all of this, continuing to lead the charge on planning and preparing for reunification will be absolutely critical, and Sinn Féin will know that getting its strategy and action plan right in the time leading up to the moment of taking office is essential.

The objective of securing power simultaneously in both Irish jurisdictions is within Sinn Féin's grasp now. Making sure that the power and influence obtained as a result will significantly advance the cause of constitutional change must be a singular priority now. There is much work to be done, but the prize is great.

JOIN THE **PARTY OF CHANGE!**



www.sinnfein.ie/join



**Time for
real change**

**Tá se in am
don athrú dís**

Know your rights!
See Sinn Féin's privacy policy at sinnfein.ie/privacy



The cause of Labour? Why Ireland should matter to the British Labour movement.

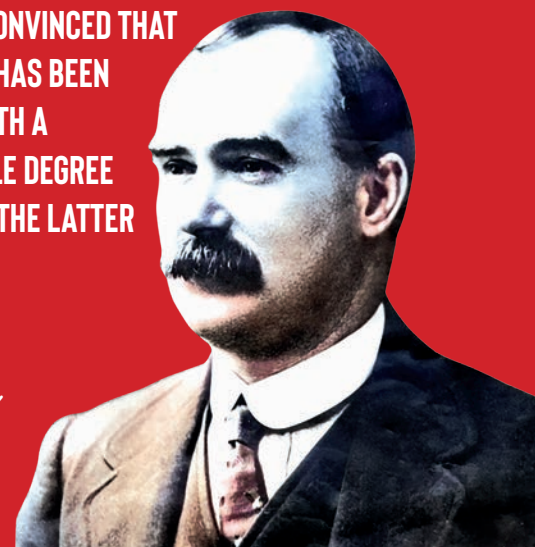
By Joe Dwyer,
Sinn Féin Political Organiser (Britain)

It is no exaggeration to say that Ireland has often proven to be a blind spot for the left in Britain. But arguably this is particularly true today. Besides some notable exceptions, Ireland is seldom found on the agenda at gatherings of the 'British left'.

Very often, socialists in Britain will have a far greater awareness and knowledge of events in the Middle East, or Central Asia, or

"I HAVE SPENT A GREAT PORTION OF MY LIFE ALTERNATING BETWEEN INTERPRETING SOCIALISM TO THE IRISH AND INTERPRETING THE IRISH TO THE SOCIALISTS. OF THE TWO TASKS, I CONFESS, THAT WHILE I AM CONVINCED THAT THE FORMER HAS BEEN ATTENDED WITH A CONSIDERABLE DEGREE OF SUCCESS, THE LATTER HAS NOT."

*James Connolly,
1913*





Latin America than they do for their nearest neighbour. A neighbour where the British State still maintains a presence.

Today, advocates for Irish unity face a two-fold challenge when appealing for solidarity from the British left. Chiefly, an older generation of activists who consider the cause of Ireland to be (by-and-large) resolved; partnered with a younger generation of activists who do not even consider 'the cause of Ireland' to be a live issue. Both trends are understandable. For more seasoned comrades the attainment of the Good Friday Agreement, and the establishment of a political process in the North of Ireland, marked a comfortable endpoint. As a generation who had spent decades campaigning against miscarriages of justice, detentions without trial, strip-searching, Diplock Courts, the Prevention of Terrorism Act, and allegations of British State collusion and shoot-to-kill; they could finally celebrate 'a win'. The violence ended. Prisoners were released. The British Army was off the streets and a democratic pathway forward was established.

For this generation, the politics of the North

became gradually less pressing. Indeed, the politics of the North became more pedestrian and 'normal'. And thankfully so.

Equally, as Ireland receded from the headlines, other international concerns and causes, understandably, took precedent. This new terrain produced the second trend. As this older generation disengaged from the politics of Ireland, a new generation of activists arose that has only ever known an Ireland at peace. For these activists, the conflict in Ireland is a feature of history books and television shows. Gerry Adams is better known for his twitter account, than overdubbed media appearances. They are aware that there was violence. They know that it ended twenty-five years ago, during their childhood, with a peace agreement. But many understand it as a religious or sectarian conflict. The part of the British State as an active participant and instigator is rarely considered. For younger comrades, the role played by Tony Blair, Alastair Campbell, and others, has led them to conclude that the Good Friday Agreement is not something to be endorsed. In many instances, they have not meaningfully

engaged with the majority opinion of Irish republicanism in the North. Instead, in search for radical politics, they take a steer from unrepresentative groups that shout loudest online. Groups who repackage political obscurity as political purity.

Many make the mistake of assessing the Good Friday Agreement as a final settlement. When the agreement was never a settlement. It was always a process.

The 1998 Agreement is essentially a political apparatus for managing change within a contested space. It is a product of Britain's inability to militarily defeat Irish republicanism. It provides agreed structures and mechanisms for navigating shifting sands.

Despite the document's admitted shortcomings, it has afforded a new means of struggle and the advancement of Irish self-determination. It has reduced Britain's territorial claim over the North of Ireland to a single hinge.

The Agreement has also compelled political unionism to accept fundamental changes. Changes that have entirely undermined the sectarian basis that underpinned the 'Northern Ireland' statelet. From mandatory coalition to parity of esteem, to all-Ireland institutions, and the equality agenda. To this day, we are seeing the ramifications of this new dispensation play-out before us.

The North, as it stands, is a long way from being "as British as Finchley." It is a long way from being the Orange State that it once was. The North, like the rest of the island, is now a modern and outward-looking space. It is progressive and forward looking. It is removed from the 'Little Englander' mentality that has captured national politics in Britain.

In spite of this, on occasion we still hear voices from the British left, from certain quarters, suggesting that Irish nationalism is inherently reactionary. As ever, there is a chauvinist presumption that British socialists are better equipped to direct the struggle for a united Ireland than those that are actually conducting it.

Such analysis ignores the political reality that the antithesis of internationalism is not nationalism, but rather imperialism. The struggle for national liberation is inherently anti-imperialist. Advocates for Irish unification require no lectures on the perils of nationalism. They have lived with the consequences of imperialist British nationalism for centuries.

However, rather than pick over the past, as often happens when Ireland is discussed in Britain, we should examine the present and realistically look to the future.

Ireland, both North and South, has undergone momentous change over recent years and this process of change shows little sign of abating. The nature of such change is slow, and it is cautious. But the signposts for it are there for those paying attention.

Perhaps most notable sign is that Sinn Féin, a party that once occupied the political fringe, is now the largest party across the island. Sinn Féin is the leading party in the North and, once the Northern Assembly is restored, its Vice President, Michelle O'Neill, will become First Minister. An Irish republican First Minister in a statelet deliberately designed to prevent republicans from ever holding high-office.

Meanwhile, in the South, Sinn Féin is leading the opposition. It is routinely polling at a high of thirty per-cent in opinion polls. The party is widely tipped to lead the next government in Dublin, with its leader, Mary Lou McDonald, as the first woman Taoiseach.



Not too long ago all of this would have been considered pie-in-the-sky by most political pundits.

Sinn Féin is arguably the most successful left-wing party operating in Europe at present. A feat that's even more impressive when one considers that the party is forced to organise across two jurisdictions.

Unity is now being considered in parts of the North where it wouldn't have been countenanced before. A conversation is taking place, and it is a live conversation. So, when Keir Starmer says that a referendum on Irish unity is "not even on the horizon" all he highlights is his own detachment and lack of engagement with the North. A generous reading



And yet, how rarely does the British left, or the English left to be specific, ever consider Sinn Féin as a template or model for success? Recent electoral trends have demonstrably shown that there is no glass ceiling when it comes to Sinn Féin's appeal.

In tandem with this growth in support for Sinn Féin, last year's local elections in the North saw more people voting for avowedly pro-Irish unity parties than pro-union parties.

While the Alliance Party might not take a position on the constitutional question, Alliance voters overwhelmingly transferred their votes to pro-Irish unity parties.

Britain's decision to exit the European Union has redefined parameters and presumptions surrounding the unity debate in the North. The topic of Irish unification is now routinely heard on the airwaves and in television studios. A plethora of books exploring the topic have been published in recent years. Demonstrating that there a growing market and appetite for such discussion.

would be that perhaps people just don't see what they're not looking for.

It is little surprise that the public discourse in Britain is so behind the curve. British commentary on politics in the North is littered with outdated clichés and stale analysis. It is worth recalling that for many British commentators the 1998 Agreement almost appeared as if out of nowhere. Most had not been attentive enough to follow the subtle shifts and moves that had taken place from the late-1980s onwards.

Similarly, during the Brexit process, only once negotiations were well underway did many in the British establishment suddenly wake-up to the reality that the border in Ireland was the principal wedge. If they had paid any attention to the debate in Ireland during the referendum campaign, they might have been better prepared for what was to come.

Hemingway's observation that things happen 'slowly, then all at once' rings true. No less so when it comes to constitutional change.

Those who advocate for a mature discussion on constitutional change between Britain and Ireland today, will ultimately be proven correct tomorrow. Just as those on the British left who first called for dialogue with Irish republicanism, from the early-1980s onwards, were subsequently vindicated by events. People living in Britain who support the right of the Irish people to determine their own future cannot ignore the smoke signals on the horizon. Any future referendum will necessitate an appropriate response from Britain. It cannot be left for the campaign to be already upon us before such discussions begin. That is the lasting lesson of Brexit.

Consideration of constitutional arrangements have often been sidestepped within the broader British labour movement. Dismissed as a divisive distraction. But ultimately, it will prove far more divisive and disruptive if such matters are not appropriately aired.

It is understandable that there might be hesitancy, from certain quarters, about unsettling the unionist population of the North. But it should be noted that every significant step forward has only ever come about when a British Government moved political unionism further along than political unionism necessarily wanted to go.

So, there is a part for Britain to play. While the ultimate terms and nature of the debate will be shaped and led on the island of Ireland. There is a role for communicating, amplifying, and relaying the debate for a British ear.

While the final word on constitutional change will be exercised by the people of Ireland, North and South - free from external interference - the people of Britain can assist by encouraging the discussion for audiences in Britain.

Without setting the terms of the debate or being prescriptive, it makes sense that British people share an interest in Ireland's future once Britain has left. There is a pragmatism in exploring what Britain's future relationship might be with a fully independent Ireland.

Proximity and history necessitate that a mutual interest should be taken.

In previous decades, the conflict made it virtually impossible for British society to reasonably discuss the ending of partition. But we've now enjoyed twenty-five years of relative

peace and momentous gestures of goodwill between Ireland and Britain.

Those British Labour Party politicians who wish to avoid any mention of Irish unity must recognise the likelihood, in the not-too-distant future, of a Sinn Féin Taoiseach pulling up at 10 Downing Street and asking a Labour Prime Minister what preparation work is being done for navigating potential change.

If, as is expected following the next Westminster election, the British Labour Party does become the leading party of government; there needs to be a broad discussion, within the wider British labour and trade union movement, on the topic of constitutional change in Ireland.

As the largest party in Ireland, Sinn Féin speaks with an authoritative mandate on the issue.

However, there are many opinions that should also be heard. No single party or group has a monopoly on the future.

Most British politicians like to pride themselves on their pragmatism. But yet, when it comes to Ireland, British politicians routinely fail to be pragmatic. The British left has the opportunity to stake out a pragmatic and mature case for Irish unification.

There is the potential to, once again, set a tone that others within the labour movement will later echo.

In 1916 James Connolly wrote, "The cause of labour is the cause of Ireland, the cause of Ireland is the cause of labour. They cannot be dissevered." Well, contrary to some reports, the cause of Ireland hasn't gone away. It still remains the cause of labour and it is past time that labour treated it as such.

Irish America *building momentum for Unity*

Greg O'Loughlin

In April 2023 hundreds of Irish Americans, Irish expats, and supporters of the Irish Peace Process gathered for an event in New York City at the Great Hall at Cooper Union. Many more joined online from all over the country.

The Great Hall has played host to such luminary speakers as Abraham Lincoln, Fredrick Douglass, Mother Jones, W. E. B. Du Bois, Barack Obama, and many more. On this night, the assembled crowd gathered to hear from former President Bill Clinton and former Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams. The two men were addressing the crowd with memories and stories of the Irish Peace Process that resulted in the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

The event was packed with insight and stories from inside of the process that resulted in an agreement. After the speeches and presentations, the stage was reset for a panel discussion with the heads of the seven largest Irish American organizations in the country. They recounted the work that was done in the United States to support and embed the peace process. Thanks to the moderation of Congressman Richie Neal, the members of the panel all had a chance to share what the process looked like

**Greg O'Loughlin is the Executive Director,
Friends of Sinn Féin USA**



from the perspective of their members and the work needed to ensure America's role as guarantor of the peace process.

The opportunity to reflect on the progress was significant, and perhaps more importantly, served as a reminder that the work is not yet done.

During his address Gerry Adams said, "It is important to understand that the Good Friday Agreement is not a settlement. It never was. It doesn't pretend

to be. It is an agreement to a journey without agreement on the destination."

That is a truth as worthy of analysis now as it was twenty five years ago. We are not marching towards a predetermined future, marking progress by measuring our proximity to a prescribed settlement. We are all on a journey towards a new and yet-to-be-made, shared future. A future that has the potential to create an independent Ireland in which, as Gerry Adams continued, "all citizens are respected; where the failed policies of the past are addressed; and where justice, equality and democracy are the

guiding principles. It also provides for the first time a peaceful democratic pathway to achieving Irish independence and unity."

The stories that were shared that night brought back many memories for me, too. Twenty five years ago, I was working

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with Rita O'Hare in the Friends of Sinn Féin office in Washington, DC. For years, we worked together to brief congressional staff, US Senators, Representatives, State Department officials and the staff of Presidents Bill Clinton and later George W. Bush. Our work also focused on keeping a clear and open channel with the steadfast and hard-working Irish American community - essential drivers of the push to Irish Unity, peace, and justice. We dedicated every ounce of our effort to ensuring that the Peace Process was fully embedded and supported by Americans at every level of influence and engagement.

After a long hiatus, during which time I became a teacher and teacher trainer, I now again serve as the Executive Director of Friends of Sinn Féin USA.

Stepping back into this role after more than a decade away has made it clearer than ever that

this work is indeed a journey. A journey that has taken us to a moment in history that sees us closer than ever before to a new and united Ireland, thanks in no small part to unwavering American engagement and support. Just as it was then, work towards a new and united Ireland garners national bipartisan support. I once again spend some of my time working with congressional staff and the larger Irish American community to ensure engagement, participation, and influence on the process. Now our work is focused on the goal of achieving constitutional change, as well as providing for equality and a future that

guarantees that all communities receive fair and equal treatment.

Part of my work now includes traveling with Sinn Féin representatives when they visit the States for stops in cities all over the country. From Cincinnati to Boston, from Midtown Manhattan to Capitol Hill, conversations are focused on the mechanics of Irish Unity and the role America can play on the journey to that destination. Some days we are meeting with a United States Senator who wants to discuss the likelihood of a return to Stormont as part of a vital step to demonstrating the effectiveness of politics. Other times we are talking with members of the Ladies AOH Freedom For All Ireland Committee who want to learn more about the process of calling for a referendum. Still other times, participants at an Irish American community event want to know how to effectively communicate with their representatives about how important truth and justice are to the process.

No matter where we go, the conversation is focused on the future and working to answer the question: “What can we do to guarantee a new and united Ireland?”

The good news is that there are countless ways to get involved, and the voice of Irish America and of its effort and participation is vital to the journey.

Friends of Sinn Féin USA has recently utilized new systems that allow supporters to contact their Senators and Representatives directly. Already hundreds and hundreds of letters and emails have been sent.

Irish American organizations are working together to host another historical event in New York in early March that will provide an opportunity to learn and connect with leaders and activists.

From coast to coast, labor unions, state representatives, nonprofits, and Irish American organizations are organizing around a shared goal, fully aware of the importance of progress on our journey. We can all play an important role in ensuring that progress continues. Work in America continues apace. Get involved and be a part of this historic moment.

IRISH UNITY SUMMIT
FOR A NEW AND UNITED IRELAND

MARCH 1ST 2024

THE GREAT HALL AT COOPER UNION NYC

SPECIAL GUESTS, PANELS, MUSIC, & MORE
INCLUDING



BRENDAN O'LEARY
AUTHOR & PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL SCIENCE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

A COLLABORATION
ANCIENT ORDER OF HIBERNIANS
BREHON LAW SOCIETIES OF NYC & NASSAU
FRIENDLY SONS OF ST. PATRICK LONG ISLAND
FRIENDS OF SINN FEIN
IRISH AMERICAN UNITY CONFERENCE
JAMES CONNOLLY IRISH AMERICAN LABOR COALITION
LADIES ANCIENT ORDER OF HIBERNIANS

ADMISSION IS FREE
REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED
TICKETS WILL BE AVAILABLE ON JANUARY 15, 2024

IRISH UNITY SUMMIT
FOR A NEW AND UNITED IRELAND

MARCH 1ST 2024

THE GREAT HALL AT COOPER UNION NYC

SPECIAL GUESTS, PANELS, MUSIC, & MORE
INCLUDING



GLENN BRADLEY
FORMER BRITISH SOLDIER
PEACE ACTIVIST

A COLLABORATION
ANCIENT ORDER OF HIBERNIANS
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THE GREAT HALL AT COOPER UNION NYC

SPECIAL GUESTS, PANELS, MUSIC, & MORE
INCLUDING



MARY LOU MCDONALD
PRESIDENT OF SINN FEIN

A COLLABORATION
ANCIENT ORDER OF HIBERNIANS
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THE GREAT HALL AT COOPER UNION NYC

SPECIAL GUESTS, PANELS, MUSIC, & MORE
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OLA MAJEKODUNNI
BROADCASTER, WRITER,
PRODUCER, & BOARD OF FORAS NA GAELIGE

A COLLABORATION
ANCIENT ORDER OF HIBERNIANS
BREHON LAW SOCIETIES OF NYC & NASSAU
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TICKETS WILL BE AVAILABLE ON JANUARY 15, 2024

SHIPS AND BOATS AND SUBMARINES:

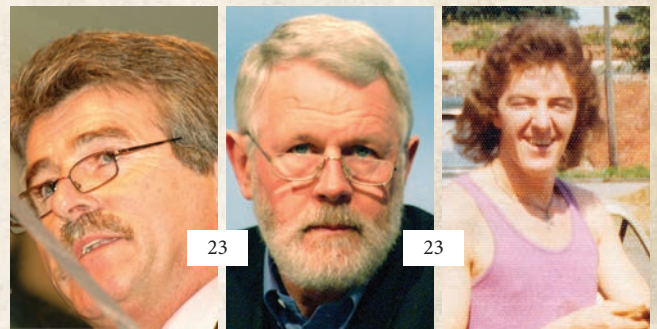
An alternative look at

Irish history

- 1 Bobby Sands' song Back Home in Derry is believed to be set to the tune of which famous shipwreck song?
- 2 What ship carried John Devoy, O' Donovan Rossa and three other Fenian prisoners to exile in New York in 1871?
- 3 Two ships were sunk by the IRA in Lough Foyle in 1981 and 1982. The second was named the St Bedan. What was the ship sunk in 1981 called?
- 4 In May 1915 an ocean liner was torpedoed eleven miles off the coast of Kinsale with the loss of 1200 lives. What was its name?
- 5 What was the name of the prison ship used to hold prisoners off the coast near Larne in 1922-24?
- 6 Guns were brought in to Howth by the Irish Volunteers in July 1914. Two other boats were also used to bring in guns to the Wicklow coast on the same day, The Chotah and The Kelpie. Name the yacht used in the main Howth gun-running.
- 7 Name the whaling ship used to help bring six escaped Fenians from Freemantle to New York in 1876.
- 8 Name the mail-boat which sailed daily from Kingston (Dún Laoghaire) to Holyhead, sunk by German torpedoes in 1918 with the loss of 500 lives.
- 9 What was the name of the gun-running boat used by the UVF to bring arms into Larne in April 1914?
- 10 Name the ship captured in the Bay of Biscay by French naval services in October 1987 carrying arms for the IRA.
- 11 This ship was bought by the Free State and renamed An Muirchú but under an earlier name it was used to shell Dublin during the 1916 Rising. What was its name?
- 12 What was the name of the ship used to hold internees in Belfast Lough in 1971 from which The Magnificent Seven escaped on 17th January 1972?
- 13 IRA Chief of Staff Seán Russell died on board a German submarine, numbered the U65. However, what was the number of the German submarine which brought Roger Casement to Ireland 25 years earlier?
- 14 The LE Emer and the LE Aisling captured which ship containing an IRA arms shipment in September 1984?
- 15 Name the ship, scuttled at the entrance to Cork Harbour, loaded with weapons intended for the 1916 Rising.
- 16 What was the name of the ship on which Wolfe Tone was captured in Lough Swilly in 1798?
- 17 Name the ship on which Joe Cahill was captured in 1973.
- 18 What was the name of the ship on which 500 Blueshirts sailed from Galway to Spain in 1936?
- 19 What was the name of the ship used to hold internees off the coast at Killyleagh, Co Down in 1940-41?
- 20 What was the name of the submarine designed by John Holland, and intended to be used by the Fenians to attack the British navy in Canada in 1882?
- 21 Name the prison ship used to hold United Irishmen prisoner in Belfast Lough in 1798.
- 22 Name the British boat attacked by the IRA unit led by Richard Behal in Waterford in 1965.
- 23 Name three TDs arrested on board boats between 1977 and 1984, and imprisoned.
- 24 What was the name of the last boat to transport Irish prisoners to Australia during Fenian times?
- 25 Name the Famine Ship which made 16 trips between Tralee and Quebec, Canada between 1848 and 1855, carrying thousands of emigrants without, it is believed, any loss of life on board.



5

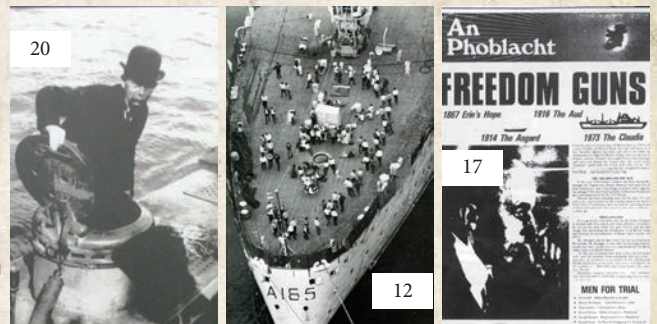


23

23



7



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17

12

ANSWERS: 1. (The Wreck of the) Edmund Fitzgerald 2. The Cuba 3. The Nellie M 4. The Lusitania 5. The Argenta 6. The Asgard 7. The Catalpa 8. RMS Leinster 9. SS Clyde Valley 10. MV Eskund 11. The Helga 12. The Maidstone 13. The U19 14. The Maria Ann 15. The Aud 16. La Hoche 17. The Claudia 18. SS Urundi 19. Al Rawdah 20. The Fenian Ram 21. The Postlethwaite 22. The Brave Borderer 23. Paddy Agnew, Arthur Morgan, Martin Ferris 24. The Hougomont (in 1867) 25. The Jeannie Johnstone

ARINS

Analysing and Researching Ireland North and South

Academic Research on Reunification

The ARINS Project

by Rosa Mc Laughlin

The ARINS (Analysing and Researching Ireland North & South) Project is a substantial piece of work being carried by the Royal Institute of Ireland and Notre Dame University in the USA. It was launched in 2021 and brings together a wide range of academics and experts with a view to providing evidence based research on the substantial issues and policy areas surrounding the future of the island, North and South.

The stated aim of the project is “to provide authoritative, independent and non-partisan analysis and research on constitutional, institutional and policy options for Ireland, north and south in a post-Brexit context”.

In its overview ARINS points to the constitutional flux in the aftermath of Brexit but also the need to

understand and assess the functioning of the Good Friday Agreement and how it might be improved and developed.

With this in mind ARINS is trying to map interdependencies and connections between the North and South and with Britain. It also specifically references the possibility of a referendum on the constitutional position of the North and that the absence of prior research and informed debate on the options and their consequences, would be disastrous.

Their research and analysis focuses on three broad areas:

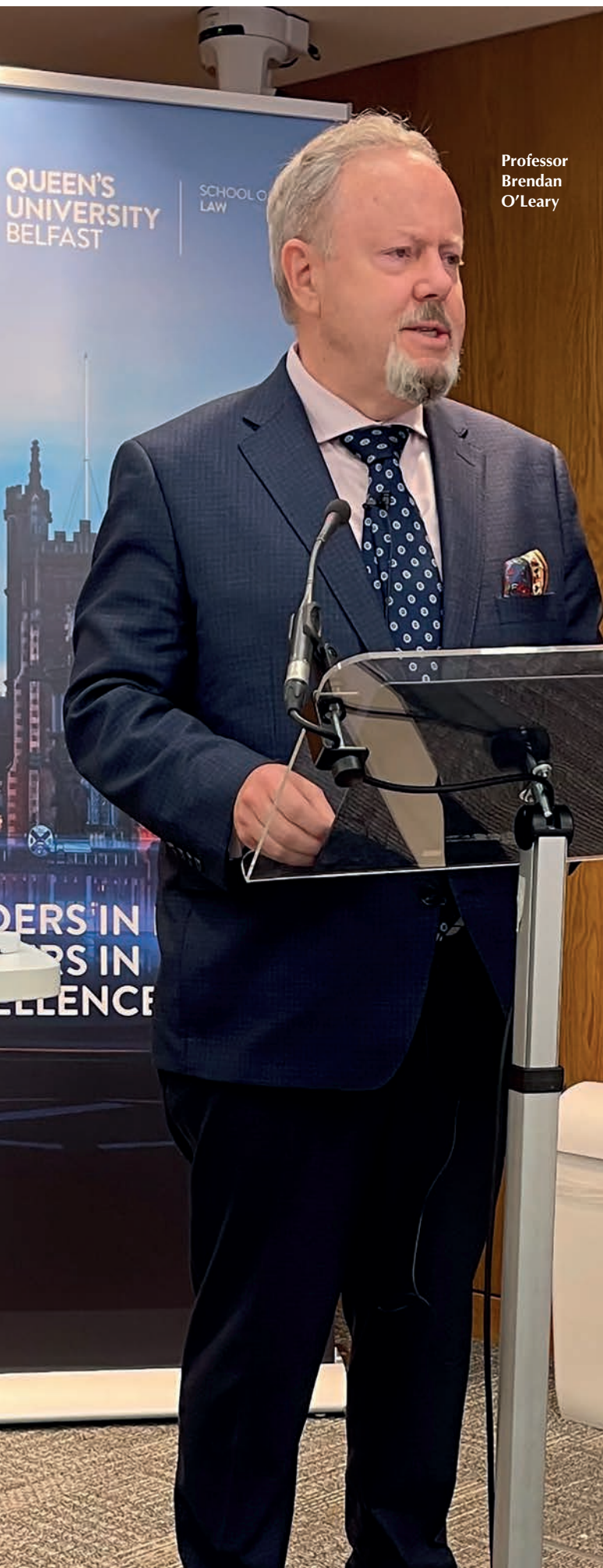
- Political, constitutional and legal questions;
- Economic, fiscal, social and environmental questions;
- Cultural and educational questions.

ARINS says that it does not seek to support any one position but to create the conditions for a

better quality of debate and decision making.

Articles are published through the Royal Irish Academy Journal ‘Irish Studies in International Affairs’ and are accompanied by written responses and peer reviews from other academics. To date, there have been about thirty articles written by a range of academics from across Ireland, North and





Professor
Brendan
O'Leary

South. Some are political scientists who look specifically at the overarching constitutional and strategic approaches needed, while others are experts in their own academic fields who provide important analysis of the current policy and practice in both jurisdictions and how to merge both going forward.

The first article published under the ARINS umbrella was by Professor Brendan O'Leary from the University of Pennsylvania. O'Leary is an established academic and former policy advisor to shadow Secretaries of State in the British Labour Party. He has written widely about Ireland and conflict resolution in the Middle East. His paper, which is really the introductory paper to the ARINS project is called: 'Getting Ready: The Need to Prepare for a Referendum on Reunification'.

This paper looks at a number of issues including how and why the referendum could be triggered and that it must be based on a majority of 50% + 1. He makes strong arguments against others who have suggested otherwise. He goes on to argue that people are more likely to vote in favour of change if they understand what it is they are voting for and suggests models of unification that could be considered. In the absence of that approach he lays out the process needed prior to the referendum through the creation of an all island constitutional convention. Either way he argues very clearly for a well thought out strategic approach in advance of a referendum.

This paper is worthy of a read by all who are interested in how we move forward towards a referendum on reunification and the paper will be the focus of this column in the next edition of Éire Nua.

Rory Montgomery, former diplomat and Steering Committee member for ARINS echoes those of O'Leary and goes on to pose really important questions about the preparation of a referendum and the aftermath in his article 'The Good Friday Agreement and A United Ireland'. Montgomery rightly points out the many issues that were not covered in detail in the GFA and that need to be considered by both governments.

O'Leary's analysis is continued further in a joint piece of work between himself and Professor John Garry of Queens University Belfast in collaboration with the Irish Times. The project

consisted of two major opinion polls conducted North and South as well as a number of focus group discussions. The project's aim was to gather independent and unbiased information regarding public opinion on the constitutional future of the island; what influences their views; how their views might change; and what are the issues that could change their mind.

There are several other papers that look at the constitutional issues and how to engage with the different stakeholders, in particular the unionist community and these are important but there are also a number of contributors who look specifically at certain policy areas and reflect on how to merge them or move forward. There are two papers on the area of health by Deirdre Heenan, Professor of Social Policy at the University of Ulster, whereby she points to the shared values and principles and the shared problems and challenges. She then identifies areas for shared policy prioritisation by both systems. Ciara Fitzpatrick and Charles O Sullivan compare social security provision North and South and set the scene for the issues that need to be discussed to create an all Ireland social security system. Adele Bergin and Seamus Mc Guinness comprehensively examine

the differences in the standards of living between both parts of the island and explore a range of economic and social dimensions, such as income and social wellbeing. Other papers include an all-island welfare system, human rights, policing, sport and the environment. In all, the ARINS project is an impressive and wide ranging body of work from some of the finest and best known academics on the island of Ireland. It is the beginning of a process to eliminate what is at best guesswork and at worst propaganda within certain elements of the media and political landscape. If more accessible to the general public this body of work would allow society to have a knowledgeable and informed debate regarding reunification.

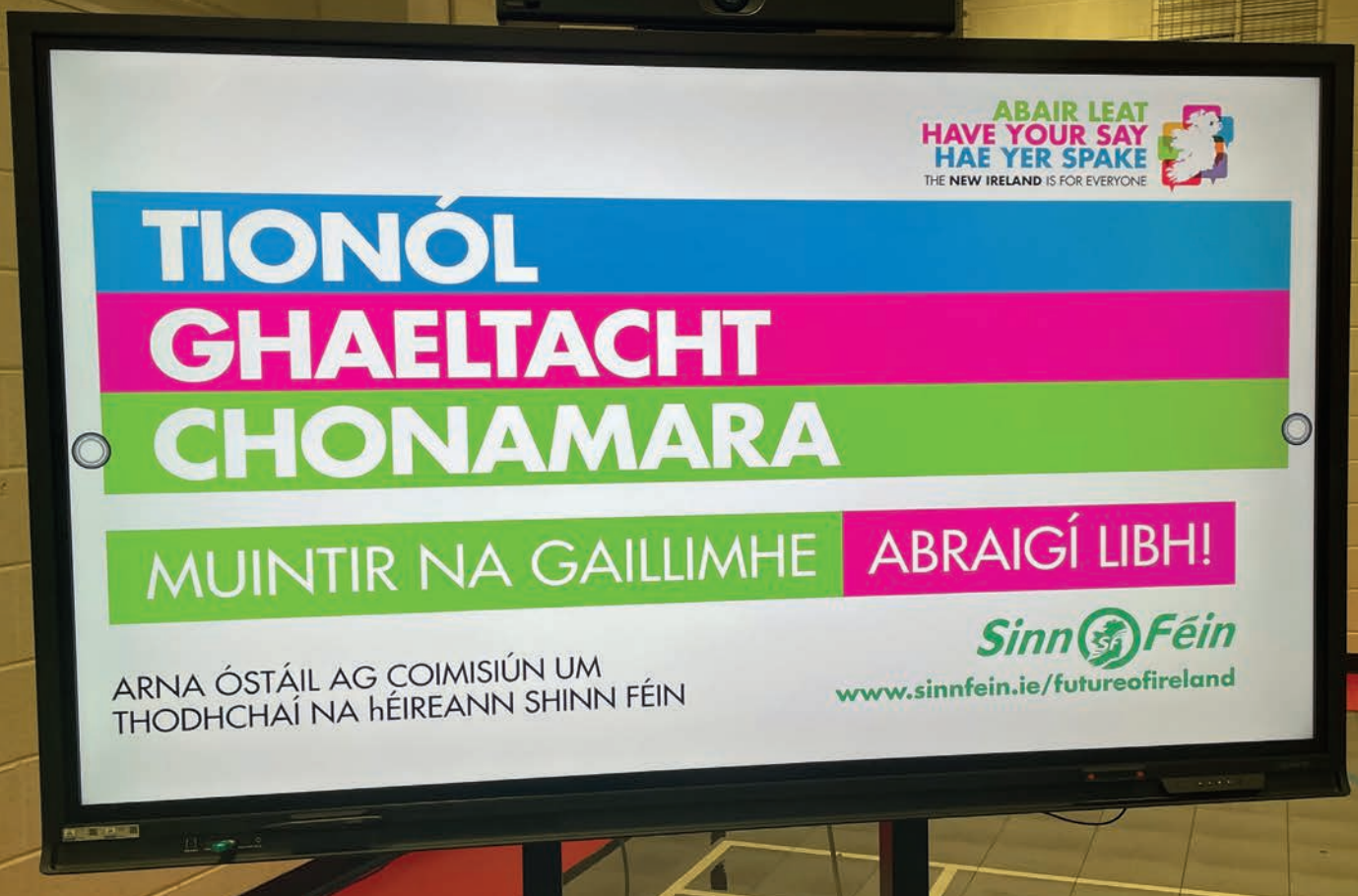
More importantly, ARINS is a substantive start to the preparatory work needed in advance of a referendum on reunification. It deals with many of the important issues regarding the preparation and holding of a referendum. This element of the ARINS project is vital and should be carefully considered and studied by both governments and all interested political parties.



To access ARINS, go to <https://www.ria.ie/arins>
 Professor Rory Montgomery also hosts a podcast series of interviews with ARINS authors about their work. It can be found at; <https://open.spotify.com/show/08pJYRfzjn4XKKUqRql1IA>

Rosa Mc Laughlin is a member of the UI committee.





Ó Shlógadh 1993 go **Tionól Pobail** na bliana 2023

- níl teora leis an phlé i gConamara!

Eoghan Gino Mac Cormaic

Blianta fada ó shin, d'fhreastail mé ar Shlogadh Shinn Féin in Óstán an Dóilín sa Cheathrú Rua. Ní raibh sé, mar a deirtear, faiseanta ná brábúsach sna laethanta sin roimh an sos cogaidh agus an Proiséas Síochána d'óstáin na tíre seo a bheith ag fearadh fáilte roimh imeachtaí poblachtánacha, ach is cuimhin liom an fáilte a chuir Josie, uinéir an óstáin, romhainn chuig an Ghaeltacht. Plúr na ndaoine.

Is oibrí forbartha Gaeilge, file, údar agus dearthóir crosshocail par excellence é Eoghan Gino Mac Cormaic.

Deireadh Mhí na Samhna 2023, tháinig na sluaite arís ó fud fad Chonamara, ó na hoileáin, ó Cheantar na nOileán, ón Chlochán, ó Rosmuc, ó Bhóthar Chois Farraige, agus go deimhin ó níos faide i gcéin, soir sa chathair féin agus ó Oirthear an chontae chuig imeacht eile sa Cheathrú Rua. Bhí siad ag tionól le páirt a ghlacadh san ócáid is déanaí i sraith cruinnithe an Choimisiúin um Thodhchaí na hÉireann a gairmeadh in Ionad an Chrompáin sa bhaile Gaeltachta ar an 27 Samhain. Páinéal de thriúr cainteoirí a bhí ann: Máirín Ní Choistealbha-Seoighe, Breannbán Ó Beaglaioich agus Róisín Ní Chinnéide. Is gníomhaí pobail í Máirín agus is ceoltóir den scoth agus feachtasóir um cheartaí pleanála sa Ghaeltacht é Ó Beaglaioich. Oibríonn Róisín Ní Chinnéide mar Bhainisteoir Abhcóideachta le Conradh na Gaeilge. Bhí an oíche agus an páinéal faoi stiúir an iriseora aitheanta Máirín Ní Ghadhra. Chuir an Teachta Dála Piaras Ó Dochartaigh tús leis an phlé, ag labhairt faoin eispearas atá ag muintir na nGaeltachtaí a bheith i mbun agóidíochta agus streachailte le fada. Deis a bhí sa Choimisiún, dar leis, le bheith cinnnte go bhfuil pobal na Gaeltachta ullmhaithe agus réidh le buntaistí a bhaint as Éirinn Aontaithe. Dúirt sé go raibh an Coimisiún dírithe ar an óige, ar mhná, ar ghnónna, ar fhostaithe, ar oibríthe srl agus go mbeadh fáilte roimh a dtuairimí ar fad ag an imeacht, ach go raibh dualgas ar an Choimisiún, chomh maith, spás a chruthú do dhaoine nach n-aontaíonn le fíis na hÉireann Aontaithe sa todhchaí nua. Tugadh deis do na cainteoirí páinéil iad féin a chur in aithne ach i ndáiríre is beag 'cur i láthair' a bhí de dhíth. Is minic iad sna meáin ina bhfeachtas féin ar ndóigh. Tá Ó Beaglaioich ag troid in aghaidh rialachas pleanála le roinnt blianta anuas a chuireann bac ar mhuintir na Gaeltachta tithe a thógáil ar a dtalamh teaghlaigh féin, bagairt, dar leis, do thodhchaí na Gaeilge féin. Ní hé amháin a labhair faoin bhagairt seo agus an titim ar líon na dteaghlach atá ag tógáil a bpáistí le Gaeilge. Chuimhnigh sé gur mhair an Ghaeilge sa Ghaeltacht le linn an Ghorta, le linn réimeas Shasana agus le linn an Tíogair Cheiltigh agus nár cheart dúinn í a ligint le sruth anois. Ach má bhí an Coimisiún ann le ceistanna an todhchaí a phlé, ba léir go raibh cuid mhaith den chaint le bheith faoin lá atá inniu ann,



faoin aimsir láithreach. Ionadaíocht. Dílárú cumhachta. Tuiscint leochaileach ar riachtanais na Gaeltachta comhaimseartha. Pléadh ionadaíocht do phobal na Gaeltachta. Ar chóir, mar shampla, struchtúir Údarás na Gaeltachta a athdhéanamh go mbeadh cumhachtaí pleanála, mar Chomhairle Contae don Ghaeltacht amháin, a bhunú? Ar chóir, a d'fhiafraigh cainteoir eile, go mbeadh Ionadaí Teanga sa Dáil féin? Tarraingíodh na ceistanna seo ar ais, ar ndóigh, d'fhocas ar an tréimhse romhainn. Chuir cainteoir amháin i gcuimhne don slua go mbeadh Éire Aontaithe ag brath ar chomhoibriú agus ról na n-aontachtóirí. Fealsúnach atá ann, dar leis an cainteoir, nach raibh sásta cearta teanga a ghéilleadh gan troid fhada do phobal náisiúnach ó thuaidh agus ba cheart do mhuintir na Gaeltachta bheith ag cuimhneamh air seo agus iad ag plé a bhfís-sean don Éire nua. Ní thagann cearta gan streachailt. Bhí rannpháirtíocht mhaith ón lucht éisteachta le hionchur ó dhaoine idir ógagus aosta, agus ó na paróistí éagsúla agus Gaeltachtaí éagsúla sna ceistanna a tógadh, agus bhí spéis, cinnte, ag deireadh na hoíche leanúint leis an phlé sin. Gabhadh buíochas le Sinn Féin ón ardán don onóir a tugadh don Cheathrú Rua as an chéad Coimisiún sa Ghaeltacht a ghairm sa cheantar. Bhreathnaigh mé timpeall an tseomra agus chonaic mé roinnt daoine a bhí linn sa Slógadh thiar in 1993. Chuimhnigh mé nárbh é seo an chéad ócáid mhór phoblachtánach sa cheantar. Bígí cinnte de nach mbeidh sé ar an cheann dheireannach. Bhí fuinneamh sa seomra, agus tiomantas don obair romhainn.

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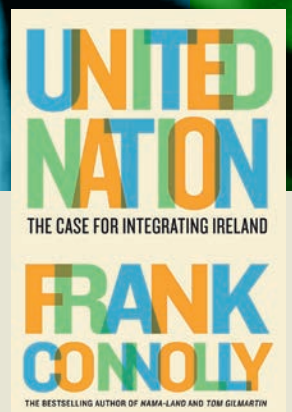
A NEW

IRELAND

for all the people must be of the people

By Frank Connolly

Dramatic political, cultural, demographic and economic changes in Ireland over recent years have combined to make a united Ireland achievable within this decade. The 2016 Brexit referendum saw a seismic shift in the political and economic realities of the island. Over 56% of voters in the North voted to remain in the EU, including many from Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist (PUL) communities. A similar percentage voted for parties that supported the NI Protocol, since refined as the Windsor Framework, in the Assembly election in May 2022.



Frank Connolly is the author of 'United Nation - the case for integrating Ireland' (Gill Books, 2022) <https://www.kennys.ie/shop/UNIT-ED-NATION-Frank-Connolly>

Unionism has lost its traditional majorities, perhaps forever, in local government, in the devolved Assembly in Belfast and at the Westminster Parliament.

Various polls indicate that numbers expressing support for a unity vote in a forthcoming referendum in the North continues to grow. Many former PUL voters are shifting to the Alliance Party, reflecting a more relaxed attitude to the prospect of a new, integrated Ireland.

Studies have identified the financial benefits of creating single institutions of governance and administration to meet the requirements of a growing and diverse population of more than 7 million (5 million in the South and almost 2 million in the North) rather than the existing two separate entities.

Meanwhile, demographic changes show the number of 'cultural' Protestants falling behind the number of their Catholic counterparts for the first time. Children from a nationalist background significantly outnumber those from the PUL community across the school system. These are the voters who will strengthen the pro-unity vote when a referendum is called, as required by the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. The decision to call a referendum rests with the British Secretary of State and will be based on whether the conditions are ripe for a majority of people in the North to vote for unity. The GFA provides for a majority of 50 per cent plus 1 in concurrently held referendums, North and South, to deliver a result.

Under the terms of the GFA, a further referendum must be held no more than seven years later, if the option for unity is rejected first time around. For this reason, it is no longer a question of if, but when, the political reunification of Ireland is secured.

In my book 'United Nation - the case for integrating Ireland', I outline the challenges that must be addressed in advance of any such referendums. I interview economists, doctors,

educators, artists and constitutional lawyers. Leading political figures, including from diverse persuasions and parties in the North and South, as well as from the EU and the US, contribute their views.

The book was written against the background of the difficult and prolonged negotiations between the EU and the UK for new trade and security agreements following the Brexit vote and of the Covid-19 pandemic and the impact of both on the people of Ireland.

It examines the prospect for an all island health service, education system and civil, political and legal administration as well as integrated policing and judicial authorities.

Currently, the public health services, North and South, endure perennial crises with long waiting lists and a shortage of health providers and infrastructure. The pandemic cruelly exposed the devastating and fatal effect of the virus on an island with two separate, and dysfunctional health systems.



As public health expert, Dr Gabriel Scally, confirmed in his interview, many of the excess fatality rates could have been avoided if a nearly and sustained all island strategy

was adopted to mitigate the spread of Covid-19. This would have involved a unified response to inward travel, the localised tracking of the virus and on the acquisition and distribution of medical equipment and vaccines, particularly during the early stages of the crisis.

A recent study has found that New Zealand, an island of comparable geography and population, protected its people far more effectively with its model based on sealing its borders and spent less time in lockdown than applied in Ireland. These issues should be addressed in the recently announced inquiry into the official response to the Covid-19 pandemic in the South.

In education, there has been a steady secularisation in the ownership and administration of schools across the South. In the North, there is also broad agreement among educators that segregation of school children, which was heightened during three decades of political conflict, should be eliminated. In the South, the continuing failure to address income inequality has meant that children in more deprived communities continue to have poorer educational outcomes. However, they progress to higher education in greater numbers than those in the North, particularly in working class Protestant areas.



Armagh school principal and GAA president, Jarlath Burns, provides a critical insight to both schooling systems and, with other educators, offers a unique perspective on how a democratic, all island model of education can evolve.

Writer, Brian Keenan, poet Paula Meehan, artist Emma Campbell and singer Christy Moore explore how the healing power of culture, during and since the conflict, can reveal what brings together rather than divides our people. Movement towards an all island economy is already underway, with an exponential growth in trade between North and South and vice versa since Brexit. The economy in the North has enjoyed the benefit of the new arrangements in the Windsor Framework which allow manufacturers, farmers and other businesses to trade freely with both the UK and EU.

The potential cost of unity for the people of the South is no longer as demanding as previously estimated. The €400 billion annual value of the economy, boosted by international investment in key sectors such as pharma and IT, puts the subvention of the North by the UK to maintain the North's public services into perspective. After removing liabilities that will remain with the UK after unity, including public pensions, defence spending, debt interest and

other obligations, it is now estimated that the annual subvention of some €12 billion could be reduced to less than €4 billion, which is relatively insignificant in relation to the overall finances of the Irish state.

A united Ireland would automatically obtain membership of the European Union under the terms of a 2017 agreement with the trading bloc, making it a more attractive prospect for many of those in the North who opposed Brexit. The further collapse in the economic fortunes of the UK since the decision to leave the EU is disproportionately felt in the North. With lower productivity, income per capita and life expectancy in comparison with the South, many people in the unionist and wider community maybe likely to reconsider their traditional allegiance.

There is no question that a significant number of unionists and loyalists will continue to resist and oppose the prospect of a united Ireland. By definition, unionists are committed to the union and remain to be persuaded that the long term interests of their community, their children and grandchildren are better served in a new and united Ireland.

The GFA gave unionists the right to retain their British citizenship after unity just as it guaranteed nationalists theirs to be Irish. It allows everyone the right to both. Already, many from the PUL community have obtained Irish passports, providing easier access to the EU and its benefits.

How unionists might be represented and their identity protected in future all island political structures is a subject of much debate, which would be enriched by greater engagement with their representatives.

In this regard, campaigning groups, including Ireland's Future, the trade union and women's movements are among those who have sought to engage many people across the PUL communities, With Sinn Féin expected to lead government in both jurisdictions over the coming political cycle, there will be an intensified and renewed focus on a unity referendum. Already, the party has set out a series of objectives that will mark its early years in government as it moves to achieve its long term goal of Irish reunification. As Mary Lou McDonald explained to me, this will include seeking agreement with the British

government on the specific conditions required for the holding of unity referendums and on the wording and procedures to be followed. Wide consultation with civic society through rolling citizens assemblies on various topics across the island will be encouraged in order to ensure maximum participation in the process.

In the South, a dedicated department of government along with a cross party committee of parliament will be required to prepare a detailed roadmap for unity. This would include a timetable for the completion of 'all of government' approach and action across the range of challenges to achieving a smooth transition to a new, all island polity, economy and society.

A functioning executive and assembly in the North would be expected to prepare for a referendum in co-ordination with the governments in Dublin and London and assist with a wider democratic and open debate across the communities.

Independent academic and state sponsored research is already underway on building the potential of the all-island economy. These include developing high speed rail and other transport networks as well evolving single models of health, education, social welfare and other public services.

While there will be significant costs associated with the unification process there are also undoubted benefits, including the indigenous and international investment that can accrue to a regenerated all island economy within, and supported by, the EU.

Studies have identified the financial benefits of creating single institutions of governance and administration to meet the requirements of a growing and diverse population of more than 7 million (5 million in the South and almost 2 million in the North) rather than the existing two separate entities.

The question of a united Ireland's defence and security capacity in the context of enduring military neutrality must be addressed, not least because of the current status of the North within NATO as part of the UK. Issues such as the national flag and anthem will also be on the table, as will other potentially emotive subjects such as enhancing all island sporting and other bodies.

Success in the unity referendums and the

historical opportunity to construct a new society on the island is clearly a monumental task. There are political and other interests in both jurisdictions which will resist change. The recent referendums that liberalised laws for women and gay people in the South were the product of organised campaigns and achieving these and the previous introduction of divorce and contraception required solid coalitions built over decades.

If we want a new Ireland for all the people, it must be of the people. A broad, popular alliance of working people, women's organisations, teachers and students, artists and academics, farmers, church groups, human rights, cultural and pro-unity activists is required alongside the political forces.

It will require the energy and imagination of all progressive people to convince sufficient numbers of those who do not yet accept that a new Ireland will benefit everyone on the island.

The new Ireland must be underpinned by guarantees to recognise the rights of workers, of women, of children, of minorities and of those for too long prevented from reaching their full potential because of their class, ethnic, political or religious background.

The new Ireland must be underpinned by guarantees to recognise the rights of workers, of women, of children, of minorities and of those for too long prevented from reaching their full potential because of their class, ethnic, political or religious background.

As President of Ireland, Michael D Higgins, said:

"I want to encourage the maximum openness of mind in relation to institutional change and a discussion on the issues upon which we're united. We need to recover a form of utopian thinking. People think that utopian thinking is abstract. In fact, it is from the Greek word 'eotopos', which means a good or better place. We need to have courage and find that better place."

Irish Unity and the EU



By Chris MacManus MEP

In April 2017 the European Council stated that in the event of the reunification of Ireland, that the North of Ireland would automatically re-join the European Union. This was a significant statement, known as the “Kenny Text”.

On the 23 June 2016, a majority of people of England and Wales voted to leave the European Union. The people of the North voted to remain and their vote was then ignored by the British government. The Brexit vote defined the following years of political discourse in Brussels, Belfast, Dublin and London. There were many lessons to be learned from the Brexit referendum campaign. Key among them - it is never a good idea to ask people a question without having a plan in place for each potential answer.

The Brexit campaign was

ultimately fought and won with billboards, soundbites and ads on the sides of buses. There was never a deep conversation on what it would mean socially and politically, particularly in the context of the island of Ireland and our hard won peace process.

It was Sinn Féin MEPs that continuously and consistently raised the potential threats a vote for Brexit could pose to the Good Friday Agreement and our peace process. The political and media establishment in London paid little heed to these warnings and carried on with their battle for little England nationalism.

Cue Brexit. Cue the fallout

Sinn Féin, and in particular our MEPs, aggressively advocated for the protection of Ireland’s interests and expressed concerns

about the potential impact Brexit was having.

The party’s MEPs defended the Good Friday Agreement, and opposed any possibility of the return of a hard border on the island of Ireland. It was Sinn Féin MEPs who first advocated that a designated special status be given to the North and for human rights to be at the core of any agreement. This is largely reflected in the current settlement known as the Irish Protocol/Windsor Framework.

Without that strong team of Sinn Féin MEPs led by Martina Anderson, and its constant lobbying of the Brussels institutions, and the work of the Dáil team in consistently challenging the Irish government and the Assembly team



travelling regularly to Brussels and Strasbourg to meet the EU Commission and its officials, it is likely that the protections now in place would not have been achieved.

One additional consequence of Brexit is that it contributed in no small way to the growing momentum in the public discourse around the potential for a united Ireland. Over half of people in the North, including a significant number of people from the unionist/ Protestant section of our people voted to remain. In the years since, that group has increased as the Brexit debacle has become more evident.

In addition as the debate around Irish Unity grows it is self-evident that the European Union will play a crucial role both in the conversation about reunification and in facilitating Irish Unity. The EU can make an important contribution to the transition from partition to reunification.

What can it do?

Funding and Investment: The EU can allocate financial resources and investment to support economic development. This assistance can help bridge economic disparities and create a more stable foundation for reunification.

Structural Funds: Utilising structural funds, such as the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund, could address regional inequalities and promote economic convergence North and South.

Community Development:



Peace funding has been instrumental in supporting community development projects in areas affected by the conflict. These projects aim to address social and economic disparities, promote community cohesion, and improve the overall quality of life for citizens. Similar programmes would be absolutely crucial in a United Ireland.

It is quite clear that Dublin alone will not put any pressure on Brussels to engage in the planning or preparation for reunification. As it was during the Brexit negotiations, the job keeping EU officials across the situation in Ireland will fall once more to MEPs. Ireland needs MEPs that are ready and willing to keep the pressure on the EU Institutions to provide the required and relevant information in the lead to the inevitable and eventual referendum on reunification. This is crucial, as everyone needs full knowledge of what they are voting for in such a referendum.

In June there will be European elections in the South and Sinn Féin will be contesting every constituency. A strong and increased Sinn Féin representation in the European Parliament holds the potential to yield positive effects on both EU-Irish relations and broader regional stability. It also sends a clear signal to Brussels that the Irish electorate want to amplify the growing conversation on Irish Unity.

Sinn Féin's proactive approach will further stimulate constructive dialogues within the EU regarding the reunification of Ireland. By enhancing engagements with fellow MEPs and EU institutions, Sinn Féin can contribute to shaping discussions that prioritise peaceful and democratic solutions.

Returning a strong Sinn Féin team to the European Parliament eight years after the Brexit vote will be the best way to ensure this.

A portrait of Emma McArdle, a woman with long, wavy, light brown hair and blue eyes, wearing a blue, textured knit sweater. She is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background is a blurred wooden wall.

THE GHOST LIMB

Alternative Protestants
and the Spirit of 1798
by Claire Mitchell

Emma McArdle reviews Claire Mitchell's fascinating account of the journey of 'alternative' northern Protestants who have been inspired by the radical philosophy of 1798.

Stories come in all shapes and sizes. Their contents vary from simple tales well told to labyrinthine plots over numerous instalments. Some have a moral message and others are pure entertainment. Some books are pleasant and help you drift off to sleep - a bit of Maeve Binchy escapism at the end of the day. Some take you on a great journey to other worlds and suddenly you're standing on top of a galloping horse firing arrows in Ghengis Khan's Mongolian army.

Good books are great friends that you pick up many times during your life. But the absolute best books are the unexpected, the challenging,

the ones that catch your breath and shake loose some of the imprints on your DNA. These are the books that change you, turning the 'facts' you'd never given a moment's thought to on their head and opening up brand new avenues of thought.

Two books have affected me in this way, the first was Louise O'Neill's 'Asking for it' a crushing, bruising, pain in the stomach, book about misogyny in Ireland. The other, and the subject of this article, is Claire Mitchell's 'The Ghost Limb – Alternative Protestants and the Spirit of 1798'.

The Ghost Limb is a collection of discussions

Claire has had with Protestant people, like her, who are on a journey of reconnection with a past that has been obscured in the modern Protestant psyche.

Many of the testimonies make a dreamy loop back to the United Irishmen and their quest to unify 'Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter', examining their ideals in today's world.

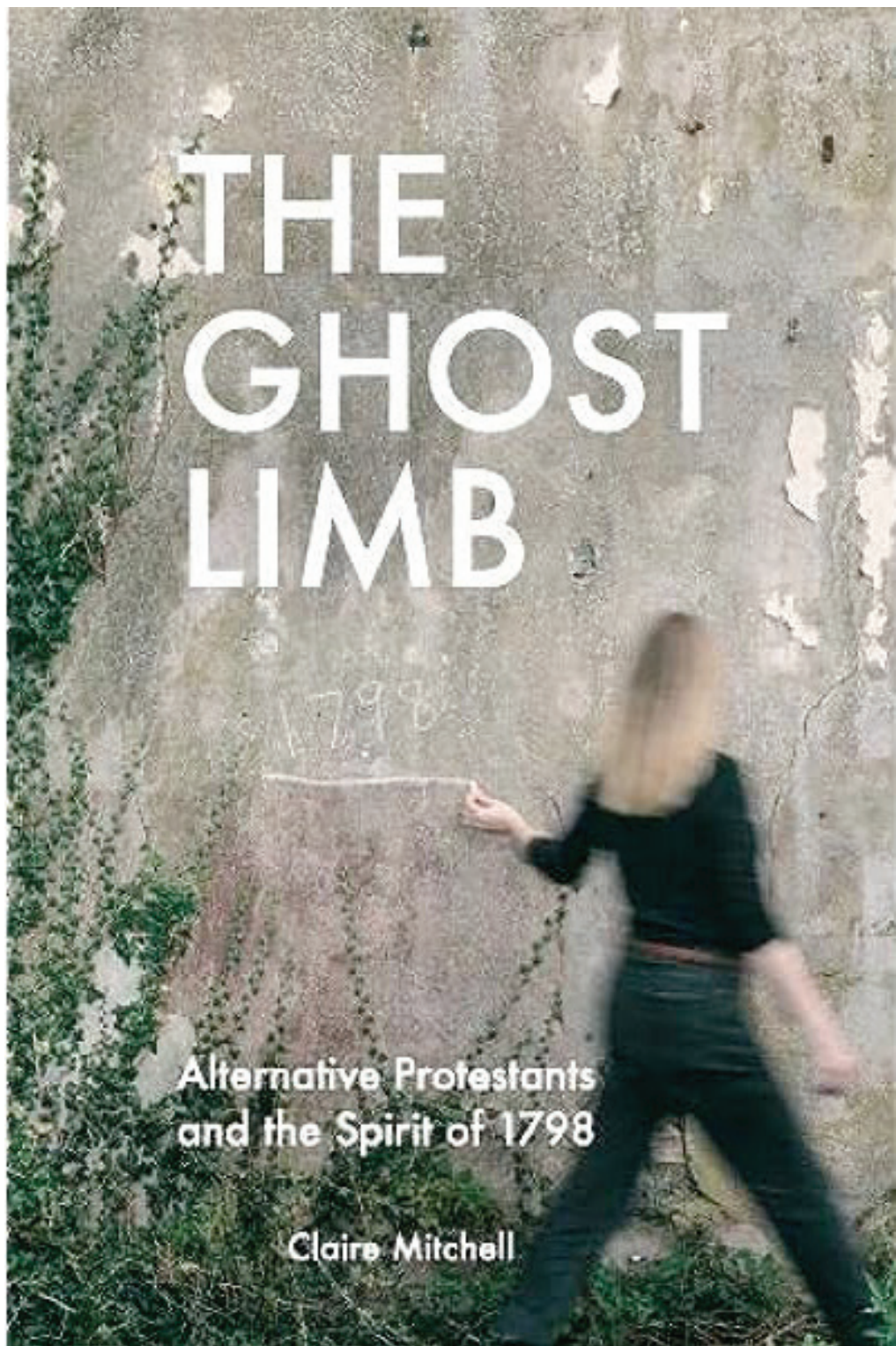
Others focus on peoples journeys in the Protestant faith, some questioning the parameters and confines of organised churches who saw a threat in outreach and reconciliation work.

Some contributors, Protestant lefties, spoke of their experiences in the sliver of political space available outside of the main unionist parties. They joined the Young Socialists or People's Democracy or local trade unions and their stories display an affinity with the British left that is alien to me.

As I read the interviews contained in *The Ghost Limb* I am challenged.

I realised just how scant my knowledge was of the rich linguistic, political, faith and historical traditions of the Protestant people. I was aware that there had to be variety and difference among people from Protestant backgrounds, just as there is among people of any grouping, but I thought that this was a more modern development. Yes I knew that Presbyterians were involved in the United Irish Rebellion of 1798 but I assumed radical republican Protestantism died as the rebellion was crushed.

I wasn't deliberately ignorant of my fellow country women and men I just didn't come across enough Protestants throughout my life to know very much about what makes them tick. I was in university before I met a Protestant and



in the newly post conflict society of the early 2000's people very much self-siloed sticking to the clan they knew.

I still don't have a huge lived experience of the Protestant part of our community, but having read Claire's book I am considerably better placed to begin that discovery journey, to welcome future engagements and to meet people devoid of the baggage I had unconsciously lumped around myself.

Several passages in the book resonated with me.

Those concerning Ulster Scots were revelatory and exhumed a dormant bias I didn't know I had.

The book quotes Antrim collector and poet James Fenton who says of the Ulster Scots language;

'Yins that are against it, would try to argue that it's an invention for Protestants. And yins that are for it, would maybe try to give the impression that it's their tongue and naebodie else's. Both views are a nonsense, its rubbish. It's oor tongue. And by oor, I mean us al.'

My own witlessness put me in the category of sincerely believing that Ulster Scots was an invention intended to balance the weighing scales and even up the distribution of public funding.

I knew nothing of the poets mentioned in the book -Samuel Thompson or James Orr. Knew nothing of their association with the rebellion of 1798.

I was blindsided. I was, as we might say in Ulster Scots - scundered!

I was also intrigued about my own history. It took a book about alternative Protestants to spur me towards the 1901 and 1911 censuses to try to piece together my historical relationship with an teanga – but the well is dry. I can locate people who might be ancestors but it seems all the Quinns', Watters', Morgans and McMahons were non Irish speakers.

I wonder when did my lot lose the language? What happened to them to make them stop speaking Gaeilge?

I read the testimony of Linda Ervine and the link she made between class and education and language and accent and shame, and it catapulted me back to the early 90's when I started in Our Lady's Grammar, Newry.

Because I had passed the 11+ I didn't go to the local secondary school, instead, along with many others from the South Armagh border area, I got the bus to and from Newry every day which in those days took almost an hour.

I definitely felt the otherness of that experience, the distrust and difference grew between me and the kids I had gone to primary school with. I had lots of friends from the area who also went

to school in Newry, but I did lose contact with many neighbours who went to school locally during those formative years. It's a distance that can't be bridged.

In Newry meanwhile we were the 'culchies' with our broad accents and weird makey-up words. I can't say exactly that we didn't fit in there, but we definitely stuck to our own. I can identify with Linda when she writes about the experience of feeling inferior in an educational environment because of how she speaks.

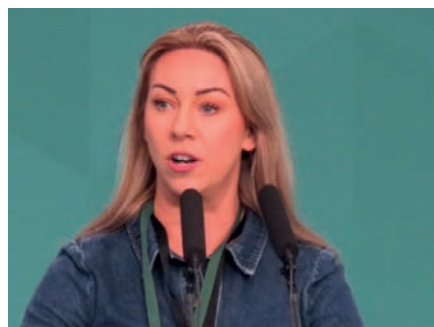
Now I love all the old words that I grew up hearing and I love the fact that even though I can't speak Irish, I speak hiberno-Irish and even that knowledge, gives me a stronger link to the past and a more rooted present. Turns out some of the words I had thought unique to the Crossmaglen area are actually from Ulster Scots.

Claire Mitchell's dreamy book paints a very different picture of Ulster Protestantism than the 'Never, Never, Never' characters of my formative years. The diversity is there, it's always been there gasping for air under the 'great, big, soggy wet blanket' of political unionism.

The triumph of this book is that it legitimises all those Protestant questioners who've been examining the political status quo for generations. It will empower others to speak their minds safe in the knowledge that they're not on their own.

It's also an eye opener for republicans and all united Irelanders – not everyone who attends an orange parade is sectarian, not everyone who builds a bonfire for the 12th is bigoted. There has to be a place for these and other traditions in the new Ireland.

This book is essential reading for everyone who's ambition is to build an Ireland that's a warm home for all.



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

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THE NEW IRELAND IS FOR EVERYONE



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