

FORWARD FROM 1966



**Presidential Address of
TOMAS Mac GÍOLLA
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LEACH 24

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By Tomás Mac Giolla

TA an bhliain 1966 ag imeacht uainn agus táimid bailithe le chéile chun í a bhreithniú agus chun pleananna a bheartú don bhliain atá romhainn. Silim go ndéanfar an bhliain 1966 a áireamh amach anseo mar bhliain chinniúnach i stair na hEireann. Chonaiceamar i mbliana an Conradh Saor-Thrádála á shíniú le Sasana agus an chuid d'Eirinn a bhí in ainm agus a bheith saor le 45 bliana á ceangail níos dlúithe fós le Sasana agus saol eacnamaíochta na tíre á chur go hiomlán faoi smacht na Sasanach. Na polaiteoirí atá briste i bpolasaí agus nach bhfuil sásta fillleadh ar phrionsabail an phoblachtais níl le moladh acu anois ach díol na tíre.

Do réir mar bhí an lucht polaitíochta ag tabhairt droim láimhe do na sean-chuspóirí tháinig misneach isteach i gcroíthe na seoiníní ath-uair. D'ionsaigh siad an ghné dár náisiúntacht is tábhachtaí, an Ghaeilge. Maslaíodh an teanga agus maslaíodh na daoine a sheas léi, ar chaoi go raibh ní amháin corp an náisiúin le díol, ach anam an náisiúin freisin.

Ach bhí fórsaí eile ag obair, fórsaí nár tháinig ar an saol inniu ná inné, ach atá préamhaithe go daingean i stair ár dtíre agus atá ag obair i gcónaí. Mar adúirt Traolach Mac Suibhne: "Níor sháraíomar na céadta chun go mbrisfí orainn anois". Spreag cuimhne 1916 go leor Gael chun machnamh, machnamh domhain bunúsach ar cheisteanna náisiúnta. Tá scríbhinní an Phiarsaigh agus an Chonghailigh á scrúdú anois ag a lán daoine óga, éirimiúla, smaointeacha.

AG COSAINT NA GAELIGE

Mar chéad-toradh ar an smaoineamh úr seo chuathas chun troda ag cosaint na Gaeilge. Sheas Sinn Féin an fód go daingean agus seasfaidh sé i gcónaí ar son na Gaeilge. Níor ghlacamar ariamh le maolú ar bith ar na sean-chuspóirí agus ní ghlacfaimid anois. Táimid sásta agus táimid réidh chun ceannas a ghlacadh ar an ngluaiseacht náisiúnta atá de dhíth chun Eire shaor Ghaelach a bhaint amach. Ó 1962 bhiomar lag go leor, ar ár gcosaint, ach táimid gníomhach, ar an ionsaí, anois, tá feachtas mór eagraíochta ar bun againn agus táimid ag bailiú nirt. Tá sé ag éirí níos soiléire lá i ndiaidh lae cé tá ag seasamh ar son na saoirse, na Gaeilge agus cearta an lucht oibre. Cuirimis ár ndóchas agus ár muinín i ngnáth-phobal oibre na hEireann, tuigimis go bhfuil obair mhór romhainn, glacaimis misneach ó eachtraí na bliana seo agus gluaisimis ar aghaidh in ainm Dé.

A truly historic year is now drawing to a close. The 50th Anniversary of Easter Week 1966 mercilessly exposed the sham, hypocrisy and lip service to which the Irish people have been subjected for the past 40 years. It clarified the issue facing the Irish Nation in 1966 by contrasting the magnificent vision of Pearse, Connolly and Clarke with the small-minded parochial wrangling which is regarded as political realism to-day. Most encouraging of all, the past year has demonstrated in most striking fashion

the great influence which the 1916 revolutionaries still exert to-day over the minds of the nation's youth. The national consciousness has been awakened and there is a new revolutionary spirit in the air. It was significant that by far the largest and most enthusiastic commemoration held in Ireland this year was that in Belfast City, Capital of the occupied area, on April 17 while for a rural area the gathering of 20,000 at Coalisland must surely take pride of place. These and other massive demonstrations in the Six Counties nailed the propagandist lie that all the people of the area are content to live under British rule. They also highlighted the hypocrisy of the 26-County politicians who were con-celebrating "the freedom we have won" and claiming to have achieved the objectives of 1916.

INTEGRATION WITH BRITAIN SUICIDAL

Only a few months before Easter the Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael parties joined forces to impose on the 26 Counties an Act of Economic Union with Britain—the Free Trade Area Agreement. Sinn Féin strenuously opposed this Agreement from the time it was first mooted pointing out that it would be disastrous for Irish Industry while bringing little benefit to agriculture. Put briefly it could be said that the 26-County home market was sold to Britain in exchange for deficiency payments on cattle. The Agreement was sold to the people on the basis of its promised benefits to farmers who were assured that they would receive £5 per head extra for cattle when the Agreement came into force. The N.F.A. leaders threw their weight behind the Agreement and the Trade Union leaders remained mute. When the expected £5 a head increase after July 1 turned out to be a fall of £10 a head, the farmers suddenly and too late realised that they had been swindled by another "damned good bargain" with Britain. How long will it be before the Trade Unions also discover how they have been swindled?

Integration with the British Economy is doubly suicidal for the Irish nation—it will be disastrous to the economy and disastrous to National culture. Furthermore everyone with sense is moving away from the sinking ship of Britain lest they be brought down with her. The danger to the pound has been postponed but not averted and devaluation is an eventual certainty. In view of the huge sums of Irish Capital invested in London devaluation of Sterling could mean an overnight loss to the Irish economy of £100 to £150 million. Furthermore it is only a matter of time until Sterling is finished as an international exchange currency. Sterling must bow before the Franc if Britain is to join the Common Market. In these dangerous financial circumstances it is criminal that the wealth created by Irish labour should be used as a prop for a collapsing British currency.

SET UP CO-OPERATIVE BANKS

Those who created that wealth have the remedy in their own hands. The Trade Unions and Farmers' Organisations should demand that all Sterling assets be withdrawn from Britain and invested in the Irish economy and that a ban be placed on the export of capital. Since both Governments in Ireland have proved themselves to be blind puppets of

Britain there is little likelihood of this being done. Therefore the people must be prepared to take practical steps to take in their own hands financial resources which are the lifeblood of the economy. This can be done quite simply by establishing Co-operative Banks and withdrawing deposits from the Commercial Banks. The main farmers' organisations, North and South, could quickly establish a chain of Farmers' Co-operative Banks throughout the country which would soon be in a position to extend credit at low interest rates to farmers and others, who are at the moment facing disaster as a result of a credit squeeze in Britain. The powerful Trade Union Movement is in a position to do the same thing in urban areas through Co-operative Banks and would soon be able to give home-builders loans at reasonable rates of interest. The movement towards co-operative control of money and credit has already begun in a small way at parish level through the Credit Union movement which has for a number of years been given every aid and encouragement by Republicans. A far more urgent and radical approach is now necessary if we are to be saved from the machinations of national and international financiers.

The full effects of Britain's credit squeeze are only beginning to be felt here. Unemployment is gradually mounting and but for the safety valve of emigration would already be approaching the 100,000 mark. A stark and bleak future faces many thousands of workers and small farmers. The building industry has almost ground to a halt although thousands of homeless families are eagerly hunting for houses. Many small factories and businesses are closing down; larger factories are restricting production or postponing expansion and thousands of farmers are ruined and preparing for the emigrant ship. In this situation the Free State Government can only think in terms of closer integration with the economy which is strangling us, while Sinn Féin declares louder than ever, that we must break the connection with England.

SIX-COUNTY UNEMPLOYMENT

The Six-County area, perhaps more than any other, is feeling the full effects of Britain's credit squeeze. The shipbuilding and aircraft industries have been run down for a number of years and with the restriction on credit this process will be accelerated unless they receive massive aid. It has recently been brought home to both management and workers of the shipyards that such aid cannot be got from the British taxpayer but can only be got from the Irish people. Many of the newer industries recently established in the Six-County area are of purely temporary or transitory nature designed to take advantage of the liberal grants and of certain international trading situations. Most are simply branches of British or American concerns and have no roots in this country. Consequently when there is a depression or a credit restriction in the home country, the Irish branch factory is the first to feel the pinch. There have been very many examples of this in the past few months but the B.S.R. factory in Derry can be taken as a typical example. They have laid off hundreds of workers already and many more are threatened with redundancy but the parent

factory in England has had comparatively little curtailment of production. It is evident that the markets previously supplied by the Derry factory have been taken over by the parent company in Britain to ensure continuity of employment for the British workers. In these circumstances the pathetic cry of "Ulster is British" has a very hollow ring indeed.

Although Derry is not the only area of high unemployment in the North it is by far the worst hit and is at present the most depressed city in Ireland. The unemployment figure stands at 5,000 and is growing daily. The average percentage unemployment in the whole of the Six Counties area at present is 7% while the figure for Derry city is 15%. The figure for Britain is 3.8%. This is a problem which concerns everyone in Ireland because these are our people. It is not simply an economic problem to be tackled by purely economic methods. It is almost entirely a social and political problem resulting from the twin evils of foreign domination of our country and the worst excesses of the capitalist system. A small Tory Ascendancy class determined to maintain their own positions of power and wealth promote the myth that the connection with Britain is vital to the economy of the area. These relatively few individuals control a great proportion of the wealth, rule the economic and political life of the Six-County area and succeed in keeping the workers diverted from their true objective by promoting sectarian strife. Is it a coincidence that as the economic situation deteriorates the bitterness of sectarianism increases and Protestant workers are encouraged to shoot down their Catholic fellow-workers? The bitterness thus created, effectively hinders unity of the workers, Catholic and Protestant.

A NEW PALE AROUND BELFAST

When O'Neill and Lemass exchanged visits a great new era was forecast and in the wave of emotion stirred up by the press politicians North and South abandoned their principles and their country under the banner of "Goodwill". Lemass and O'Neill agreed to keep to their own corners and not to rock the boat. The Fianna Fáil Party abandoned all further claims to the occupied portion of the National territory as Fine Gael had done years before. The Nationalist Party fell in line and became "Her Majesty's Official Opposition", and Mr. Patrick Gormley became chief propagandist of the Unionist Party. It was victory all round for Capt. O'Neill and the Unionist Party who conceded nothing to anybody. They still use the same methods to maintain their ascendancy — restriction of the franchise, use of the property and company vote, corrupt political practices, jobbery in allocation of employment and houses and also in allocation of grants to industry and in the siting of factories. The outcry against these practices is growing in volume at home and abroad and it would seem that even the Unionist party see the writing on the wall and realise that they will then lose political control of Derry City and much of Tyrone, Fermanagh, South Armagh and South Down. In anticipation of this a powerful economic Pale is being created within a radius of approximately 35 miles from the city of Belfast or, as others put it, East of the Bann. All major economic and cultural development

is being concentrated in this area. In this context much that seems incomprehensible becomes perfectly plain. What other explanation is there for the determination, despite great opposition, not to build the new University on the logical site in Derry but to place it in a parochial, bigoted, uncultured seaside resort; or the siting of the new town of Craigavon in an already highly populated region; or the decision to stop the M1 at Dungannon; or the cutting of the rail links with Derry? It also explains the elaborate plan to eliminate the small farmers of Derry, Tyrone, Fermanagh and other regions and to amalgamate their holdings into larger farms. These larger farms will of course fall into the hands of the wealthy Ascendancy class while the dispossessed small farmers will be forced into labour in the factories of the Pale or to emigrate to Britain or America. This is the master plan to depopulate the areas with a majority against Union with Britain and to concentrate wealth and economic power in the hands of fewer people in a smaller area. The problems on both sides of the unnatural Border in Ireland are similar. They arise from the same causes and will yield only to the same treatment.

SEATS IN LEINSTER HOUSE

Many people, concerned with the crisis facing the nation and the growing danger of National extinction, are urging Sinn Féin to take part in the political dog-fight in Leinster House in the hope of extracting some concessions from a reluctant establishment. Some go so far as to say that by not doing so we are abdicating our national responsibilities. The question of becoming another Free State political party was discussed openly and at length by our organisation last year and there was an overwhelming decision against it. It was felt that apart from the traditional arguments against such a course it would be a most shortsighted course of action which might bring some temporary benefit to the organisation and even to some section of the community but which could gravely jeopardise the ultimate national objective of establishing a Sovereign Independent Irish Republic. It was felt that we would indeed be abdicating our responsibilities if we abdicated our position as a national revolutionary organisation.

At the same time it was decided that the Sinn Féin organisation must become more active than ever in the Social, Economic and Cultural life of the country. It is our aim and objective to endeavour to put into effect, in so far as it is possible, the ideas and policies laid down in our Social and Economic Programme. To this end our members are becoming very active in Trade Union and Farmers' organisations, in co-operative developments and in Irish language and other cultural societies in order to give to these bodies a national direction. In addition to this the National Organiser launched a re-organisation drive early this year after a decision by the Ard-Chomhairle that general elections should not be contested in the 26 Counties until we were in a position to put forward sufficient candidates to gain an over-all majority if given the support of the people. The success of the re-organisation drive, with a 25% increase in branches in six months and the groundwork laid for a 100% increase next year, encourages us to believe that the original target of three to five years

will be adhered to, when we will be in a position to contest all seats in a general election.

When we go before the people we do not intend to seek a mandate from them to tinker about with the existing economic system within the present political framework. We want to be sure that the people are aware of what we seek so that we will have their full support in putting our policies into effect. We seek a mandate to establish a National Parliament which will actively legislate for the whole nation. We seek a mandate to establish a more just social and economic system by promoting co-operative rather than individual control over the means of production, distribution and exchange. Only by such revolutionary changes can the major national evils be eliminated. Only by such methods can we ensure that the nation's wealth is developed and used for the benefit of all our people. Unless we are prepared to get to the root of the problem our people will continue to suffer from booms and depressions, poverty, ignorance, unemployment, emigration, bad housing and other social evils. Under the present political, social and economic framework in Ireland the only way in which poverty and ignorance can be eliminated is by eliminating the poor and the ignorant and this in fact is the policy which is being encouraged by the "realists" and "pragmatists" today.

LOCAL ELECTIONS IN 1967

Sinn Féin intends to throw the full weight of the organisation into the Local Government elections in the 26 Counties this year and a major effort will be made to gain a greater foothold in local councils. In areas such as Dublin City the whole basis of present planning and development will be challenged and many aspects of our Social and Economic Programme will be put to the citizens for endorsement. We will present a policy which will take into account the needs of the citizens rather than the profits of the developers and we are confident of gaining major support for our candidates. This Ard-Fheis then, can look forward with great hope to the future. The nadir has been passed and the nation is on the upswing. A strong virile united and active Republican Movement can soon gain the support of the mass of the people for its national, social, economic and cultural policies. The 1916 Anniversary Year has brought the nation back to fundamental principles. We may be confident that the Fenian anniversary year of 1967 will lead to further national progress and a determination by the Irish people to take control of their own country. Sinn Féin can lead them to victory.

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