

Michelle O'Neill addresses Sinn Féin's
annual Wolfe Tone Commemoration at Bodenstown



Sinn Féin Leas Uachtarán, Michelle O'Neill, today addressed the party's annual Wolfe Tone Commemoration at Bodenstown, County Kildare.

The First Minister's address in full:

A chairde,

Is mór an onóir dom bheith libh anseo inniu agus muid ag déanamh comóradh ar Laoch na hÉireann agus Laoch an Phoblachtánachais -Theobald Wolfe Tone.

As always, it is a great honour to join you here today in this sacred place – the final resting place of Theobald Wolfe Tone.

We gather to honour the father of Irish republicanism and to recommit ourselves to the unfinished work of building a united, sovereign Irish Republic.
Wolfe Tone's vision was very clear – Irish independence, unity, and equality.

A Republic of equals, built on solidarity between Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter.

His vision was revolutionary then – and remains so today.

His courage and his optimism continue to inspire us in everything we do and say as Irish republicans.

So, we gather here not simply to remember the past, but, most importantly, to shape the future.

Irish unity

Irish unity is our primary objective and it is a tangible and urgent political project, not just for us as Irish republicans, but, increasingly, across all sections of the Irish people.

- The debate is underway.
- The momentum is real.
- The responsibility to prepare belongs to us all – and most particularly for the Irish Government.

Unity is a huge opportunity.

- A new beginning.
- It cannot be approached with wishful thinking.
- It requires planning.
- It requires leadership.
- It requires action.

Sinn Féin is actively and urgently addressing this important work. The party's Commission on the Future of Ireland is doing sterling work in facilitating a structured and national conversation on the future of our island.

- We are lobbying governments across Europe and beyond to promote the benefits of and support for Irish unity.
- We are engaged in active outreach with the Irish diaspora in Britain, the United States, Canada and Australia.
- Most importantly, of course, we are working to ensure there are unity referendums on the island of Ireland in this decade of opportunity.

In Sinn Féin, we are laser focused on Irish unity. It is who we are, and it is what we do, day and daily.

But we also do not have a monopoly on this work.

Others have an enormously important role in all of this and we commend and support their efforts.

Of course, there is a particular responsibility on the Irish Government to plan, to prepare and then to manage constitutional change on this island.

That is the sensible and mature approach.

The Irish Government should convene a Citizens' Assembly on Irish Unity.

- To map out the economic, social and political transition to reunification.
- To ensure that when a Unity referendum is called – as provided for under the Good Friday Agreement – people on both sides of the border can make a fully informed, confident choice about their future.

Change is happening, accelerated by the disaster that is Brexit and the growing realisation in the north that no British government, Tory, Labour or any other, will ever act in the interests of the Irish people.

The process of change must be managed sensibly and with tolerance and patience.

Everyone must be included in deciding our collective future together – and that means listening to and addressing the concerns of the unionist community in a meaningful and respectful way.

It also means that we need to focus on constitutional change, because we all have a stake in our future.

The North

In the North, the political landscape has been transformed in recent years.

I am honoured to serve as First Minister for all, committed to power-sharing and to progress, and committed to representing all equally.

Sinn Féin is in government in the North to make real change and we are delivering.

Acht na Gaeilge is now a reality and in the coming months the Irish Language Commissioner will be appointed.

And in a fair and balanced way Irish language signs such as those in Grand Central Station must be part of our future.

Additional funding was secured for Casement Park which creates renewed momentum.

- The work must now begin.
- This is a vital project not just for West Belfast, not just for the GAA but for sports more widely in the north and across the island.

A top class sporting stadium is a win for all. Sinn Féin is committed to investing in all sporting codes. Casement Park will be built.

Things are certainly changing. Last month the Assembly passed a motion on extending Presidential voting rights to the North, this is something unthinkable only a short number of years ago.

But it is a sign of confidence in our future. A sign of things changing for the better.

A similar motion will be debated in the Dáil this coming week.

It is a decade since a Bill was first passed in the Dáil, but it has been blocked by successive governments.

- Now is the time to act.
- Now is the time to extend voting rights to Irish citizens in the north.

And alongside this we are fighting and delivering for workers and families.

Our finance minister John O'Dowd successfully negotiated increased funding for investing in health, education and all public services.

Our economy minister Dr Caoimhe Archibald is strengthening workers' rights in the most progressive piece of legislation ever seen.

Liz Kimmins, our Infrastructure Minister, is committed to progressing key all Ireland transport projects, like the A5, the A1, and the all island rail review.

Be assured that we will work, day and night, to make lives better.

The reality is also that it is a battle a day within the Executive.

This is a battle a day with a British Labour government pursuing a Tory agenda of cuts and austerity.

However, it's a battle we are up for.

Britain has nothing to offer Ireland – unionist, nationalist or neither – except economic decline, austerity, and indifference.

Every day as their economy falters, the British government makes decisions that are bad for our schools, our hospitals, our infrastructure, that impede our ability to grow our economy.

Here in Ireland, Britain's only interest is in denying families the truth and shielding British state forces from due legal process.

Legacy Act

The British Government's Legacy Act is fundamentally flawed and it is a cynical piece of legislation.

It was designed to protect British forces and British agents and at its core it will deny truth to grieving families.

The Legacy Act needs to be repealed.

Any approach to legacy must be human rights compliant, victim-centred and command maximum confidence.

The disrespect of the British government towards the family of Seán Brown, murdered in 1997, in their pursuit of truth has been disgraceful.

The depth of feeling around this case should not be underestimated – that was reflected in the thousands of people from across Ireland who stood in solidarity with the Brown Family in Bellaghy only a few weeks back.

The Brown family deserve to know the full truth about what happened to their much loved husband, father and brother.

Today my message is clear:

- The Taoiseach must now make urgent representation to the British Prime Minister that he directs a public inquiry into the murder of Seán Brown without further delay.
- It is time for truth.
- It is time for a full public inquiry into the murder of Sean Brown.

The refusal to hold a public inquiry into Seán Brown's murder will have serious implications for wider legacy discussions involving the Irish and British governments.

For our part we will continue to stand with victims and families in their campaigns for truth, justice and acknowledgement.

Racism

I also want to speak today about the violence, attacks and intimidation seen recently in Ballymena Portadown and other areas.

Let me be absolutely clear.

This was raw, unadulterated racism, fuelled by sectarian, supremacist loyalism, involving, in many cases, paramilitary elements, much of which was mirroring ultra-right English nationalism.

Families, women, children and babies were targeted, terrified and driven from their homes.

- That is wrong.
- That is unacceptable.

There is no place for racism in Ireland – not on our streets, not in our communities, and not in our politics. We say no to racism.

Gaza

We live in a time of global injustice, inequality and rising militarist agenda.

Today, and every day, we stand firmly with the Palestinian people, especially those in Gaza, who face the horror of ethnic cleansing, starvation and the most catastrophic humanitarian crisis of our time.

The genocide in Gaza must end, and Israel must be held to account for their actions, or they will continue to act with impunity.

Their actions are not simply wrong, they are criminal and genocidal.

Here in this state, the Occupied Territories Bill must be passed.

Neutrality

Ireland must be a voice for peace, not war.

We oppose the increasing militarisation of the European Union, and we reject efforts to dismantle Irish neutrality.

We are absolutely opposed to any attempt to overturn the Triple Lock – the safeguard that ensures Irish troops can only be deployed overseas with UN approval, a government decision, and Dáil support.

The Triple Lock is a democratic protection for our neutrality, and we will defend it against those who want to drag Ireland into foreign wars.

Wolfe Tone's first pamphlet, The Spanish War, was published in 1790 and argued for non-involvement of Ireland in Britain's wars.

Today the Irish people wish to remain independent and neutral.

We stand against imperial ambitions, and we want this country's foreign policy to be firmly anchored in peace building, diplomacy and human rights.

Our neutrality is a proud principle, and we will not allow it to be sold off or undermined by stealth.

26 Counties

In this state, my friend and our Uachtarán, Mary Lou Mc Donald, leads the political opposition – working constructively with other parties to build a combined opposition to the Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Lowry government.

The current government is out of touch and out of steam – on housing and the cost of living, squandering tax-payers money while failing on a growing list of health scandals – particularly in respect of children with chronic health conditions.

A government more interested in defending privilege than delivering for ordinary people.

The various crises in housing, in healthcare, in the spiralling cost of living – these are the result of political choices.

And ordinary people, including a locked-out generation – are paying the price.

We want to send a message to all those people today, to all those hard-pressed people: Sinn Féin activists are ingrained in our communities, rural and urban, working with people on the ground. Sinn Féin is on your side, and we have your back.

Conclusion

A chairde,

Wolfe Tone's vision is our vision.

It is a path we are walking – with growing strength, growing numbers, and growing momentum.
A united Ireland is within reach.

A new and better future is visible.

Let us move forward with courage and with confidence.

Ar aghaidh linn le chéile – for unity, for equality, for the united, sovereign and free Irish Republic.

Go raibh míle maith agaibh.