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UNITED STATES UNITED IRELAND

“What can we do?”

A Letter From Ireland

a Chara,

Do you know the best question that an activist can ask? “How can we help?”

That was the first question asked by a member of the audience at the Commission on the Future of Ireland People’s Assembly in the Shamrock Club in Columbus, Ohio last week.

I had never been to Columbus before, but walking into the Shamrock Club I knew I was amongst friends. It all felt very familiar. The pictures on the wall, the layout of the hall, the craic in the bar, a Harp Lager lighted sign, and a copy of the Proclamation. Everyone in the place seemed to know each other, and we were immediately drawn into conversations and greetings.

This was the second Commission hearing that Friends of Sinn Féin had hosted. I gave an opening comment setting out the context for the meeting, which was followed by a fireside chat with Judge Mike Mentel. After the presentations, activists discussed answers to prompts in small groups facilitated by local volunteers.

The key message is that we are living in a time when we have the opportunity to deliver a united Ireland by peaceful and democratic means.

The Good Friday Agreement presents the pathway to securing and winning Irish Unity referendums north and south. Political changes now mean that we have the potential

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A few weeks ago while in Washington, I came across a quote from Martin Luther King Jr, "Change does not roll on the wheels of inevitability, but comes through continuous struggle".

That is why the question, "How can we help?" is so important. We live in a time of great cynicism, and the best antidote is to realize the power of activism. Those in power want us to believe that there is nothing we can do to deliver change, but our history tells us differently.

For thirty years, the conflict in Ireland was deemed intractable. Irish America saw the possibility of the peace process being developed by Gerry Adams, John Hume, and Martin McGuinness.

They advocated for a new approach by the United States. President Clinton broke with 80 years of foreign policy and adopted a new approach to Ireland that was independent of Britain. He provided a visa for Gerry Adams to visit the US and appointed a Special Envoy, Senator George Mitchell, moves all opposed by the then British Government.

The rest, they say, is history, and we have enjoyed 27 years of relative peace. The next chapter of Irish history is being written: the building of a new and united Ireland. "What can we do?" was answered by those in the room.

"To secure and win unity referendums will require an Irish Government to plan, prepare, and advocate for unity."

"The US should continue to protect the Good Friday Agreement and Unity Referendums are part of the Agreement."

"To win referendums there is a need to demonstrate that people's lives will be better in a United Ireland."

"We need to build support across the US to vindicate the right to referendums as per the agreement."

The people in the Shamrock Club have a role to play like others across the US and Canada and at home in Ireland.

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Have a great weekend.

Is mise,

Ciarán

Ciarán Quinn is the Sinn Féin Representative to North America

‘People’s Assembly: Diaspora’ meets in Columbus Ohio

More than 140 people gathered at the Shamrock Club in Columbus, Ohio on October 10, 2024 for the latest Irish Unity People’s Assembly: Diaspora. Sinn Féin Representative to North America Ciarán Quinn provided a political update before a discussion among all attendees about the path to unity.

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Win!

By Gerry Adams

The theme of Irish Unity was front and centre in the fringe meeting at this year's Ard Fheis that focused on the life and activism of our friend and comrade Rita O'Hare who died last year. Several hundred people packed into the room where a panel discussed Rita's contribution to the struggle for freedom and self-determination and then listened as people in the audience reminisced about their personal memories of Rita.

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and Danny Morrison. Rita correctly believed that Irish Unity is at the heart of the politics of change. It is at the core of our republican politics, our anti-colonial, anti-sectarian, desire for social justice, and for equality. All the speakers touched on this. On the need for planning and cohesion and the obligation on United Irelanders to harmonise the national and the local.

I read an extract from the speech Rita gave at Bodinstown in 1996 which for me sums up her republicanism and is as much a manifesto for change today as it was almost 30 years ago when she spoke at the graveside of Wolfe Tone. Rita said: "The future we seek is for a transformation of Irish society. We seek constitutional change which places in the hands of the Irish people the sovereign power to determine our own future."

"We seek reconciliation among Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter, people of every religious belief and none, leading to unity in the common name of Irishmen and Irishwomen. We seek equality and respect for the rights of all in place of discrimination, sectarianism, and second class citizenship."

"We seek employment in place of unemployment, prosperity at home in place of emigration. We seek a society which measures economic well being in terms of the proper education of our children, the provision of a free and comprehensive health service for all, jobs and facilities in our communities for our young people, freedom from the scourge of drug abuse and the crime it brings, and a secure old age for senior citizens."

"We seek a place for Ireland in the world which accords with our history of anti-colonial struggle. The development of our natural resources and the fostering of industry with respect for the environment. This is the vision which unites us as republicans".

If Rita's long life in struggle teaches us anything it is about the power of activism – the ability of a single person to make a difference, to make a stand and by their example to encourage others to make a stand and to ask 'what can I do to advance Irish unity.'

Richard McAuley was the last speaker at the Rita gig. He told us, as she was close to dying, how she answered that question for him. As he and I were leaving her he went in for a last word and she looked at him defiantly, lifted her clenched fist and gave him his orders – 'Win'.

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