

ONE IRELAND ONE VOTE

Redressing the Historic Legacy of Partition



1916 Societies New York
One Ireland One Vote Campaign

If you asked the people of Ireland what plan they would accept, by an emphatic majority, they would say ‘We want independence and an Irish Republic.’ There is absolutely no doubt about that. The elected representatives of Ireland, now by a clear majority, have declared in favor of independence.

Lloyd George, March 1920

If even British Prime Minister Lloyd George realized the fact that the people of Ireland wanted independence from British rule, why, almost one hundred years later, does Britain still claim jurisdiction over a portion of Ireland? The short answer is because Britain did not accept the democratic wishes of the Irish people. The Irish people were overwhelmingly in favor of complete independence for Ireland and overwhelmingly opposed to the partition of their country. Britain suppressed the Irish Republic and partitioned Ireland against the wishes of the Irish people. This British imposed border, moreover, was premised on discredited colonial notions of “native” inferiority. Although the ideas that underlay partition should be anathema to modern Irish men and Irish women, partition remains in place today. The historic roots of partition are now seldom ever raised or discussed. This is all the more remarkable as Ireland of course, is still living with the legacy and with the current reality of partition.

Although partition affects all the people of Ireland, Britain refuses to allow the votes of the majority of Irish people, those living in the 26 Counties, to count in any referendum on Irish unity. Partition disenfranchises these Irish men and women. The **One Ireland One Vote Campaign** is a broad based movement that seeks to restore the franchise to these voters whom partition has disenfranchised. It advocates for a referendum on the question of Irish reunification that the people of the whole of Ireland would vote on together. The Campaign is currently gathering signatures to demand an All-Ireland referendum on Irish Unity. Nothing less will be adequate to address the injustices that are the legacy of partition. In order to fully appreciate why this is the case, it is crucial to first understand how and why partition came to be imposed on the Irish people.

The watershed General Election of December 1918, the first held under the post World War expanded franchise, gave supporters of Irish Independence an overwhelming victory at the polls. On January 21, 1919 the Irish National Assembly, Dáil Éireann, met and declared Ireland's independence to the world. At that first session, Dáil Éireann also adopted the Democratic Programme in which it pledged to adhere to the "principles of Liberty, Equality and Justice for all" of Ireland's people. The British Government responded to this exercise in Irish self determination by "banning" the democratic government of the Irish Republic. This was followed by the unleashing of British state violence against the Irish people. Irish elected officials were jailed or assassinated, ordinary citizens were threatened, homes and businesses were burnt, prisoners were tortured and abused, Martial Law was declared, censorship was imposed, newspapers banned, and basic civil liberties curtailed. All of this and more was done in the name of security by a British Government that lacked the legal or moral authority to rule Ireland. Britain had no compunction about using force and violence as a way of imposing its will on the Irish people.

Even in the face of this British state violence directed at Irish democracy, Dáil Éireann was still able to function on behalf of the Irish people. This was due to the amazing courage and determination of the Irish people, men and women, in resisting colonial military occupation of their land throughout the Irish War for Independence. There was great bravery shown by the ordinary Irish civilians in providing safe houses, organizing fundraisers, buying Dáil bonds, and participating in the Dáil court system at a time when it could mean risking your livelihood, your freedom and quite possibly your life. These risks were taken by Irish women as well as men. Women were invaluable, for example, in keeping the Dáil courts, which challenged the British legal system, running. There was also Cumann na mBan, the women's republican organization, which was in the forefront of all aspects of the independence struggle. Certainly the Irish people at that time demonstrated courage and self sacrifice in trying to defend the All-Ireland Republic that they had democratically elected into being.

The British, however, made it clear that it would not respect democratic principles when it came to Ireland. They demonstrated this first by “banning” the democratically elected Government of Ireland, Dáil Éireann. Britain then took it upon itself to divide up Ireland by passage in the British Parliament in December 1920 of the Government of Ireland Act. The Partition of Ireland, therefore, was accomplished by Britain, without the vote or consent of the Irish people. This is how partition came to Ireland.

Partition itself was undemocratic; the details of its implementation only highlighted that fact. As historian Donnacha Ó Beacháin summarized, “[n]ot only was the concept of partition inherently undemocratic, considering that 80 per cent of the Irish population favored independence from Britain, but its execution compounded the iniquity.” “To satisfy the demands of a small regional majority, and to preserve British hegemony, a new state was established, ostensibly to protect a 20 per cent minority while simultaneously creating a new minority that made up 34 per cent of the population. In not one of the six counties was the unionist majority greater than the nationalist majority in Ireland as a whole.” As historian Professor Joseph Lee has pointed out, unionists saw no incongruity in denying Dáil Éireann the right to govern the whole country in spite of the overwhelming nationalist majority in Ireland as a whole, while simultaneously insisting on a Unionist right to rule Northern Ireland based on a much smaller unionist majority in four out of the nine counties of Ulster. Those counties within Northern Ireland with nationalist majorities, Fermanagh and Tyrone, moreover, were not given the option to opt out of this British created entity. When the Fermanagh County Council attempted to affiliate with Dublin after the Treaty, the British government responded by dissolving the Fermanagh County Council. Clearly the “principle of consent”, a phrase so often invoked by apologists of partition, did not apply to the nationalist counties or population forced into this British created entity called Northern Ireland against their will.

The question is why the “principle of consent” did not apply to these nationalist counties? Why was it acceptable to coerce the people of Fermanagh and Tyrone into becoming a political

minority, against their wishes, within a British state, but unacceptable for unionists in Antrim and Down to become a political minority within an Irish state? As we have seen, Britain certainly couldn't claim the right to rule based on normal democratic criteria. And certainly Britain couldn't claim the right to continue to interfere in Ireland based on its past track record of rule in Ireland. The decades since partition was imposed on the Irish people have certainly shown that the decision by British to impose partition and thereby continue its interference in Ireland was a disastrous one. Internment without trial, torture of political prisoners, censorship, sectarianism and community strife have been the fruits of partition. In terms of the economic consequences of partition, a detailed study has recently been done by economic consultant Michael Burke. As he states in 'The Economic Case for Irish Unity', "no one charged solely with the creation of the optimal economic entity on the island of Ireland would dream of separating the north-east corner from the rest of the country, and imposing two different currencies, legal and tax frameworks and two different legislatures either side of that border." With the British vote in favor of "Brexit", i.e. the removal of Britain from the European Union, restrictions on the right of the Irish people to travel freely from one part of their country to another will very likely increase.

The voters of Britain have decided that the European Union has a democratic deficit and does not serve their interests. This raises the question as to why the people of Ireland can't decide together whether having their country divided in two is what they desire. The people of Ireland have the right to decide if partition serves their interests. Certainly there do not seem to be many positive benefits of partition. Nobody seems to be able to offer up any positive good that the decades of partition have brought to the Irish people. It is notable, in fact, that defenders of partition are seldom even asked to come up with any positive justification. But if there are no real benefits to partition, why was it imposed and should the Irish people be obliged to maintain it?

If partition cannot be justified by normal democratic principles or by any sense of good government or benefits to the Irish people,

what was the rationale behind partition? What did British elite opinion think of the idea that Ireland should be governed by the normal democratic principle of majority rule? Here is a revealing quote from a pro-British newspaper that gives much insight into British thinking about the Irish capacity for self-government:

“Can a people still in the nursery, mentally and morally be allowed to govern itself, either in much or in little? If the thoughtful Irishman replies: ‘This play-acting is only the work of a few youthful irresponsibles’, the world will say: Your give the children a majority of your suffrage: You place them in control of your municipal affairs.”

The Irish Times, March 20, 1920

The Irish, in other words, were only children, not able to govern themselves, and certainly not fit to govern the unionist political minority within Ireland. Here laid bare is the underlying belief in Irish inferiority that underpinned the British contempt for the democratic will of the Irish people. This is what led them to oppose any outcome that would bring the minority Unionist population under Irish jurisdiction. This can be seen as an example of the general colonialist attitude of superiority over ‘native’ populations. This colonial attitude has not been confined to Ireland. In a more extreme example, pro-apartheid whites in South Africa tried to create “Bantustans” as a way of artificially creating a white demographic majority in a country that was overwhelmingly non white. Due in large part to the dedication of anti-apartheid activists within South Africa, with support from an international solidarity campaign, apartheid was dismantled and democratic majority rule was established in South Africa. The historic injustice of apartheid was dealt with in a principled way, at its root.

In the case of Ireland, Britain bears the responsibility for imposing a border whose creation was certainly informed by discredited notions of native inferiority. Partition, moreover, did not prevent unionist/nationalist conflict, it only exacerbated it. It put nationalists in the northeast of the country at the mercy of a British

and Unionist ruling class that had shown only antipathy and disdain toward them. The promise of the Good Friday agreement, that sectarianism would decrease, thereby leading to easier road to a United Ireland, has not been borne out. For example, the so called 'peace walls' in Belfast, ugly physical barriers that separate nationalist and unionist communities, are still in place some 20 years after the Good Friday Agreement.

One Ireland One Vote rejects sectarianism or any attempt to divide the Irish people on ethnic or religious grounds. Many of the leading lights of Irish Republicanism such as Wolfe Tone, Robert Emmett, Thomas Davis, Alice Milligan and Bulmer Hobson were Protestant and non sectarianism has always been a guiding principle of the movement. For its part, **One Ireland One Vote** stands for a democratic, inclusive, non sectarian Ireland based on the principles and spirit of the United Irishmen and women, with guarantees of equal rights and liberties for all its men and women, regardless of background. Structure would have to put in place to ensure that these rights and liberties were protected. The idea is not to simply incorporate the Six Counties into the existing 26 Counties state. A New Ireland, agreed by the people of Ireland themselves, would have to be built. This New Ireland would include a Charter of Rights, separation of Church and State and a truly independent Judiciary. Structure would also need to be put in place to ensure that all sections of the Irish people, including unionists, would have input at the county and provincial, as well as national level, into how they were governed.

For some time the British have been quite effective in pushing a discussion of the undemocratic foundations of Northern Ireland out of mainstream discourse. This history, however, must be brought to the forefront because the legacy of it remains. Contrary to popular understanding, the 1998 Stormont/Good Friday Agreement did not address the fundamental problems related to British involvement in Ireland. British restrictions over full Irish self-determination remain in place.

In the meantime, nationalists throughout the Six Counties are forced to pay taxes to support the very British Military, Police, and Intelligence forces that are violating their rights and working against their interests. Take, for example, the secretive British GCHQ, the rough equivalent to the American NSA. The Guardian has reported in the past that GCHQ has a special unit to spy on those living in Northern Ireland and has the capacity to bug every mobile and landline phone there. In fact, the international human rights group Amnesty International had a long battle in order to uncover the fact that even members of the “devolved assemblies” including members of the Northern Ireland Assembly, are targets of electronic spying by GCHQ. In what should have been a shocking revelation, but which only received scant publicity, it turns out that GCHQ was also spying on Amnesty International itself. The British government never told the truth about its spying on a human rights organization itself, the information had to be forced out. The Guardian has also reported that it appears that GCHQ has been bugging Irish citizens within the 26 Counties. When it comes to invading the privacy of Irish people, the British security apparatus does, it seems, take an “All Ireland” approach. Within the Six Counties, Irish citizens remain subject to harsh and repressive “security” laws and practices: young nationalists, for example, are constantly subjected to stop and searches and other manner of harassment from the British security forces. Also currently in place is what is known as “Internment by Remand” in which individuals are denied bail while awaiting trial, thereby undermining the presumption of innocence. Clearly Britain cannot be trusted to respect the basic civil liberties of Irish people. The question is why Britain should have any power over the rights and liberties of Irish men or women in the first place?

Had the British accepted the democratic wishes of the Irish people, there would have been no partition, no Irish Civil War, and no Northern Ireland. The reality that partition was imposed on Ireland against the democratic wishes of the Irish people and that is based on conceptions of Irish inferiority, does not change with the passage of time. The question is whether or not the Irish people wish to accept a political entity that was founded as a negation of

democratic will of the Irish people and premised on ideas of Irish inferiority. If the mindset behind partition is discredited, why should partition itself remain in place?

The **One Ireland One Vote Campaign** believes that this tarnished status quo does not have to remain in place. **One Ireland One Vote** believes there is a better way forward. It believes that all the people of Ireland, from all 32 counties and all 4 provinces should vote together on any referendum on Ireland's future. The votes from people from Cork and Antrim, Derry and Dublin, should all count equally. Britain should no longer be allowed to control who votes in a referendum on Ireland's future, let alone be able to veto the outcome of any all Ireland vote.

This is where the **One Ireland One Vote Campaign** differs fundamentally from a so called Border Poll. The name "Border Poll" is itself misleading, as it makes it seem as though it is a Poll about whether or not the Border should remain or not. Actually what it means is a Poll that is restricted to people inside the British created border of Northern Ireland, thereby excluding the majority of Irish people who live in the rest of Ireland. In a Border Poll the votes of people from Cavan, or Kerry, or Dublin would not count. Any outcome in the rest of Ireland, no matter how overwhelmingly in favor of reunification it might be, would do nothing to change British rule in the Six Counties under a Border Poll. In a **One Ireland One Vote** referendum on Irish reunification, though, the votes of all the people in Ireland would all count toward the total. It would be a national vote on a national question.

A Border Poll confined to the Six Counties is simply a way to disenfranchise the vast majority of the people of Ireland. It would also give de facto recognition to partition. Allowing the British to fix the Poll by excluding the vast majority of voters of Ireland is also a surefire way to lose. The Six Counties were set up specifically to create an artificial unionist majority in a jurisdiction created by Britain. This is why nationalists and republicans have always steadfastly opposed any such a poll in the past. In fact when the British tried to hold such a Northern Ireland Plebiscite back in 1973, republicans called it a fraud and even the SDLP joined in the boycott that was supported by the overwhelming

number of nationalists in the Six Counties. They saw it for the fixed game that it was. Asking the British to consent to a Border Poll is the equivalent, in gambling terms, of playing poker against a house that uses a stacked deck. The house, ie, the British, will always win, and the Irish people will always lose with a Border Poll restricted to the Six Counties.

Britain, in fact, has stacked the deck for any Border Poll even further to ensure its ineffectiveness. Under the current arrangements, Britain is in charge of deciding when and whether any such Poll is held. Britain would determine the wording of any Poll. Then the result of any such Poll vote would have to be ratified by British MPs at Westminster, thereby exposing the fiction that the Irish would be determining their own future. Under this arrangement, therefore, the British would have a “Triple – Lock” in place to prevent Irish national self determination through a Border Poll. The act of participating in a Six County “Border Poll” confers legitimacy on Partition. And a failed Border Poll would simply strengthen partition. It is why, current British posturing notwithstanding, the British do not really fear a Partitonist Border Poll.

The same, however, cannot be said of an All Ireland vote as advocated by the **One Ireland One Vote Campaign**. That would trouble the British. Of course, some have argued that the British will never agree to **One Ireland One Vote** precisely because it does have a real chance of ending British interference in Ireland. There is no question that opposition will be strong. Of course, an All Ireland referendum would give Britain a chance to demonstrate whether its oft claimed desire for “peace” and “democracy” in Ireland is sincere or not. It would put the core issues front and center in a way that a Six County only Border Poll would not. In any event, if Irish people are going to expend time, energy and resources on challenging the British on a referendum on Irish unity, it should at least be based on a proposal, such as **One Ireland One Vote**, which could at least succeed if implemented.

The other point to keep in mind is that many things that were, until recently, thought impossible, have now happened. Just a few short

years ago, Scottish independence was a pipedream, not it is a real possibility. The idea of Britain leaving the European Union was farfetched, now it appears to be happening. In the case of Ireland, the more people begin to think about the anomaly of partition, its absurdity, the way it insults basic concepts of equality and democracy, the more vulnerable it is to challenge. This may be the opportune time to press ahead. The time could just be now.

This of course, is a time of commemorations in Irish history. 2016 marked the 100th anniversary of the Easter Rising of 1916. Much has been rightly made of the stirring invocation in the 1916 Proclamation of the rights of Irish women as well as Irish men, of the Proclamation's guarantees of religious and civil liberty, equal rights for all its citizens, of "cherishing all the children of the nation equally" and its calling out of the historic use by the British government of ethnic or religious bigotry and sectarianism to advance its own ends. The **One Ireland One Vote Campaign** fully stands by the Proclamation's call for equality and inclusiveness for all the people of Ireland. Those who have immigrated to Ireland in recent years are also now children of the nation and entitled to equal rights as citizens and should not be targets of religious or ethnic bigots. Witness, for example, the appalling recent statement of then First Minister of Northern Ireland Peter Robinson, who said, channeling the anti-Catholic bigotry Ian Paisley circa 1965, that he would only trust Muslims to "go to the shops for him." Are the people of Ireland, people in Dublin and Cork and Galway, really unconcerned that someone such as this would be in charge of protecting the rights and liberties of people living in the north-east of the country? Pro-British Loyalist groups have also been involved in racist attacks against minority communities inside the Six Counties. If people in the 26 Counties are truly committed to equality and non-discrimination, to the Proclamation's call to cherish all the children of the nation equally, than that commitment must extend to those ethnic and religious minorities living within Northern Ireland. The people of the 26 Counties can no longer turn a blind eye to what is happening in the north-east of their own country.

The 1916 Proclamation guaranteed that the Republic would pursue “the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts.” It also called for a “permanent National Government representative of the **whole** people of Ireland and elected by the suffrages of all her men and women.” The commitment of the signatories to an All Ireland Republic, therefore, is unmistakable. Not coincidentally, it is these sections of the Proclamation that are usually left unaddressed by many of those who pay only lip service tribute to the ideals of the Proclamation. By doing so they hope to sidestep the fact that British imposed Partition was anathema to the vision of the men and women of 1916 as evidenced by these words from the Proclamation itself.

Other important anniversaries are also coming up. 2018 marks the 100th anniversary of the Anti-Conscription Campaign in Ireland, a successful campaign to oppose any attempt by Britain to conscript (draft) Irish men into the British Army to serve as cannon fodder during the First World War. The Anti-Conscription Campaign was a mass broad based movement that included militant republicans such as Cathal Brugha and Austin Stack, as well as moderate nationalists. It was an important campaign in its own right, it helped to prevent unknown thousands of Irish young men from dying in England’s imperial war, but it also helped greatly to advance the national cause. It could serve as an important example for Irish people going forward from today.

2018 will also mark the 100th anniversary of the watershed General Election of November 1918 when the whole of the Irish people went to the polls and voted for their independence. And, of course January 21, 2019 will mark the 100th anniversary of the First All Ireland Dáil Éireann, and the Declaration of Irish Independence. There is much work to be done to restore the All Ireland Republic that Irish men and women of a past generation sacrificed so much to establish. Now, therefore, is not the time for indifference or cynicism. It would be a fitting tribute to the memory of those Irish men and women who came before us to at least make the effort to reclaim what they sacrificed so much to establish, Irish national democracy.

The first necessary step for the Irish people is to make it clear that it is they themselves, and not the British Government, who get the last word on the future of the Irish nation. **One Ireland, One Vote** is a principled and practical way to make sure this is the case. It's a way to finally put Ireland's future back into the hands of all the Irish people. The first step in doing that is by signing the **One Ireland One Vote** petition demanding an All-Ireland referendum on Irish Unity. The petition can be found on the 1916 Societies website, 1916Societies.com. By signing the petition, individuals who care about Ireland are able to go "on record" in demanding that the rights of all Irish people are upheld. It lets those in power know that Irish people have not bought into decades of historical revisionism and are finally demanding the restoration of national democracy. The next step is to get others to sign the petition and to become involved in the Campaign. The more people who sign the petition and the more people who get involved in the Campaign, the more pressure can be brought to bear to change the status quo and the closer we will get to the day when all the people of Ireland will finally get the chance to determine their future together. With hard work and dedication, the 100th anniversary of the Declaration of Irish Independence could be a true day of celebration.

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