



Léargas

by Sinn Féin's Gerry Adams

Thursday, January 4, 2018

Athbhliain faoi mhaise daoibh

Next Tuesday January 9th will mark one year from the day Martin McGuinness resigned from the office of First and Deputy First Minister. It was not a decision Martin took lightly. He understood the political ramifications of his resignation. But the Renewable Heat Incentive scandal, the increasing arrogance of our DUP partners in the Executive, and the refusal by them, and by the Irish and British governments, to honour agreements previously made meant that a stand had to be taken.

In the months since there have been two elections which validated Martin's decision and there have been at least four attempts to restore the political institutions. Some progress has been achieved but not enough to guarantee equality, fairness and respect, and to end the impasse around an Irish Language Act, marriage equality, legacy matters and other longstanding issues like a Bill of Rights. Regrettably, as we begin 2018 there is still no real evidence of a willingness by the leadership of the DUP to embrace the Executive and the political institutions in the way required if they are to serve every citizen.

In a few short months April will see another important anniversary. The Good Friday Agreement will reach its twentieth birthday on April 10th. In the two decades since then this, and subsequent agreements, have made a significant and positive improvement to the lives of citizens. Although the process to implement it is incomplete the Good Friday Agreement is the defining document and agreement which sets out the relationship between the people who live on this island and the people of these two islands.

Sinn Féin's objective in any new negotiations that will take place will be to defend the integrity of the Agreement and to ensure that those aspects of it, and of the subsequent agreements, that have not been implemented, are positively resolved to everyone's satisfaction, and progressed. We are also very mindful of the major differences that exist among potential partners to any new Executive around the Brexit issue. We are also very aware of the danger from Brexit to the fundamentals of the Good Friday Agreement.

A successful conclusion to any fresh negotiations must ensure agreement on a new dispensation which delivers for every citizen on the basis of equality. If the DUP wishes to be part of this and wishes to return to the Executive and the Assembly, it knows precisely what it must do. It means implementing past agreements. It means building respect, tolerance and equality. It also means the two Governments stepping up to the mark as co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement.

For example, there is a commitment to a bill of rights in the Good Friday Agreement, but 20 years later there is no bill of rights. There is a commitment to establishing a civic forum, but there is no civic forum. In the St. Andrews Agreement, there is a commitment to an Irish language Act, but there is no such Act. In the Stormont House and Fresh Start Agreements between all the parties and the two governments, measures were agreed to deal with legacy issues. The British Government is blocking these.

Just before Christmas it was revealed that the British government is intending to insert a statute of limitations covering all Troubles-related incidents for British crown forces in a new section of legislation covering the Stormont House Agreement. Sinn Féin was not told about this. To the best of my knowledge the Irish Government only knew about it when Sinn Féin brought it to its attention. This was an act of gross bad faith and is unacceptable. Michelle O'Neill, Mary Lou McDonald and I told the British Prime Minister this directly. The British want everybody else to deal with the past, but they excuse themselves from this responsibility.

So, the big question in any new negotiation is, can the political parties in the North and the two governments resolve outstanding differences?

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That is more of a question for the DUP than for a Sinn Féin. Michelle O'Neill and our negotiating team stand ready to engage positively in any talks. Sinn Féin wants the 20th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement to be a positive point in the history of our island.

The call by the DUP Leader for a return to British Direct Rule flies in the face of her party's devolutionist position. But it also reflects a refusal to face realities. The fact is the DUP is betraying the people of the North and the clear vote against Brexit. In particular it is acting against the interest of a section of its own support base, particularly in the Agri-food sector which will take a huge hit if Brexit goes through on English Tory and Westminster DUP terms. The DUP is also actively denying people in the North rights available everywhere else on these islands.

The rationale behind the DUP stance is that it is focused on maintaining the Union. But there is no longer any absolute protection for the Union from British Governments the way there used to be. British Government involvement in our affairs will end when a majority vote for that. That is why the Irish government's recent assertions about Irish Unity are welcome. But of course the Taoiseach needs to move beyond the rhetoric. So far he and the Fianna Fáil Leader are refusing to establish an Oireachtas Committee to discuss and consult on how an agreed new Ireland can be achieved.

So, 2018 will present many challenges. If progress with the DUP proves impossible then the onus falls on to the Irish and British governments to spell out how they intend to jointly ensure that all past agreements are honoured. A first step toward this will be the establishment of the intergovernmental conference.

In the absence of local agreement the Taoiseach has committed to that. If Arlene Foster wants to make 2018 a better year for everyone, including herself, she needs to focus on the needs of our health service, our schools, our homeless and everyone else. Their interests will be better served and protected by local accountable representatives. Their well-being certainly needs to take precedence over narrow out-dated negative interests. A rights based dispensation is the best way to advance this imperative.

So Arlene let me wish you and your family a happy, peaceful, prosperous and hopeful New Year. 2018 will be interesting. Athbhliain faoi mhaise daoibh.



Posted by [Gerry Adams](#) at 1:09 PM No comments:

Friday, December 29, 2017

Refugees need our help



In December 2012 Banksy - the renowned graffiti artist - produced a Christmas Card of Mary and Joseph unable to enter Bethlehem because of Israel's apartheid wall which now surrounds that Palestinian town. It was a powerful and evocative image. It caught the sense of occupation and oppression faced daily by the Palestinian people and was a reminder of the plight of the five