

**DO YOU WANT A
UNITED IRELAND?**



**THE REPUBLICAN SOCIALIST
CASE FOR A BORDER POLL
ON IRISH UNITY**

INTRODUCTION

‘Yes For Unity’ is the Republican Socialist campaign for an Irish unity referendum or a ‘Border Poll’, we seek to raise awareness amongst the Republican Left of the need to participate pro-actively in the midst of ongoing political and demographic shifts, in order to grasp an opportunity to end partition and ensure that whatever type of Ireland emerges from the other side of a poll, has working class interests at its heart.

In the course of touring Ireland and beyond with public talks and meetings, our activists are always met with a series of well-meaning ideological, political and tactical questions, by activists often still sceptical of the need to participate in the referendum process.

The purpose of this pamphlet is to answer those questions, in a fashion which we believe is both principled, progressive and from an authentic republican socialist perspective.



Yes For Unity public meeting, Belfast, December 2018, addressed by former Breton political prisoner Gael Roblin ... "The campaign for a referendum must be seen as yet another step in the long Civil Rights struggle which began in 1968. Its time to fill up the ballot boxes, and empty the prisons"

Guerrilla politics and the campaign for a Unity referendum

In January 1970, at the United Sinn Féin Ard Fheis, Seamus Costello, IRA Guerrilla leader and future founder leader of the IRSP declared:

“I favour guerrilla tactics in parliament, the same as I do in many other respects... And I see no reason why with a few TDs or a few MPs of the right calibre, pursuing the right policies, why they cannot destroy the confidence of the people in these institutions and bring them tumbling down in ruin.”

Whatever the context of that year's gathering, Seamus' principled rejection of abstentionism that night, could not have simply referred to participation in the elected chambers, North, South or other?



Seamus Costello's doctrine of Guerrilla politics

Costello was of course making a logistical (and ideological) declaration of faith in the ability of principled republicans to appropriate and utilise mechanisms of the state to ultimately bring down the state itself; a formidable doctrine of Guerrilla politics.

He was not the first to espouse such a proposal; in 1918, Sinn Féin and the IRA participated fully in the post WW1 Armistice British Westminster elections, utilising the enemy's

procedures, protocols and resources to ultimately take power and put into action the Democratic Programme of the 1st Dail; the most revolutionary political program practiced in Irish history. No doubt, many initially opposed that tactic also, on a point of understandable principle.

In May 2017, Seamus Costello's party, embracing the very same doctrine and considering undeniably radical demographic shifts occurring in the occupied six counties, made a judgment call, that there was more to be gained than lost in openly campaigning for a 'Border Poll' or referendum on Irish Unity; on a 32 County basis if possible but via the mechanisms of the Good Friday Agreement if need be; the latter being the more realistic of options in the immediate term.



'Yes For Unity', was born from this initiative but soon asked for, received and relied upon the support of a range of other Republican-Left organisations and individuals, campaigning equally and along Costello's favoured 'broad front' approach to the national

struggle. Recognising the growing trajectory of the 'Catholic Nationalist Republican' population of the North; Yes For Unity - having learned from delegation visits to Scotland, Catalunya and Brittany - reasoned that the formation of a 'broad front' style, street based movement (as existed in

those nations) may with a push, help shove a vote for Irish unity over the line in the Six Counties, if not in this decade, then certainly within the coming decades.

Statistics add credence to the prospect. Within the Occupied Six Counties, the broadly 'Protestant Unionist Loyalist' population are no longer the perpetual majority which that statelet's founders relied on them always being.



'YFU' activists conducting a 'door to door' canvass on the issue of an Irish 'Border Poll' West Belfast 2018.

We don't need drawn out statistical lists to tell us how in 'the North' Catholic children are no longer the minority community that we and our parents, once were. And while YFU are not naïve enough to suggest that a future 'Catholic majority' will automatically translate into a vote for Irish Unity, experiences in Scotland and Catalunya, strongly suggest that innovative modes of political

organising can, (indeed have) transformed once stagnant nationalist voter bases into proactive mass movements for national independence via a referendum.

If such a process - that is the creation of a broad front type, nationally aware, street-based movement - could inject enthusiasm into the currently passive yet nationally minded voter base of 'the North', and in turn help to mobilise a significant 'Yes' vote amongst a growing nationalist

demographic in the future, then surely (YFU reasoned) the option is at least worth exploring?

YFU spent it's first year travelling around Ireland and parts of Europe making this very point, sometimes in venues which were pleasantly receptive, sometimes in rooms where the reception was bordering on contempt, every event was well worth it, nonetheless.

We encountered various strands of opposition to our proposals during this time, all of which we disagreed with, but none of which we resented being made.

The fact is that many members of YFU were not always sold



YFU public meeting, Strabane November 2018

on the concept of a border poll themselves, all acutely conscious of the deeply held principles that cause many well-meaning Republicans to baulk at the thought of allowing a British secretary of State to umpire an election on unity within an unfairly partitioned section of Ireland. As is often the case

however, emerging political reality can trump the importance of previously vital principle.

In 1973, it was totally inconceivable that a Border Poll could have proved successful for Nationalists; today that is not necessarily the case, in future decades it simply need not be the case.

In March 2017, for the first time since the creation of the Occupied Six County state, party political Unionism lost its majority position in Stormont; a turn of events which prompted us – like many others – to visit reliable statistical research avenues to gain a wider picture of what may be going on behind the scenes.

We found that all reliable bodies tasked with gathering statistics in the North, i.e. the statistics & research agency, labour force surveys, school enrolment bulletins and equality commission monitoring reports, were making findings which strongly suggested that our generation of what is the broadly ‘Catholic, Nationalist, Republican’ population, will be the last that lives as a



YFU public meeting, Castlebar. Mayo Sept 2018

minority within this artificial state. Our children will not be in a minority position.

This could mean a lot of things to a lot of people, not all of them conducive to Republican support for a Border Poll of course. But it could also, with the right perspective and the right type of campaigning from Republicans and Socialists, give future voters keen to dismantle partition, a chance (to paraphrase Costello) to “bring the institution crumbling down in ruins”. Bearing in mind examples in Scotland and Catalunya, where a shift in modes of nationalist organising,

away from both clandestine militant activity & traditional party political electoralism, towards an all embracing 'broad front' style street based approach to campaigning on an independence referendum, has seen pro-active support for independence in those nations rocket to the extent where aspirations to freedom have become much more than just aspirations.

In Scotland, a MORI poll in 1999 recorded that only 27% of the Scottish voting population were pro-actively in favour of Scottish independence, by 2016 that figure had mushroomed to 46%. In Catalunya, in 2005, Spanish government statistics recorded that a mere 12% of the Catalan population were pro-actively supportive of independence, by 2015 that figure had risen to 45%. By the time the Spanish military were smashing up polling stations in Barcelona, 43% of the Catalan population had tried to vote, of those 90% had declared for freedom.



YFU activists travel to and participate in Militant street protests on behalf of Catalan and Breton independence.

What triggered the rise in pro-active sentiment in both of these nations? Undeniably, factors included the shift towards popular, broad front and street-based initiatives.

Season after season of mass rallies, mock referendums, public debates and (vitaly) the intervention of the Left, had taken the issue of independence out of the hands of the stuffy few usual suspects and brought it down to a street level.

This in turn injected an enthusiasm into the independence project not previously present, making what was previously impossible, now seriously achievable.

It is not a pipe dream to think that the same process of popular progressive mobilisation could occur here. Acting in favour of a Border Poll and taking advantage of shifting demographics, a newly found radical nationalist confidence and our people's proven ability to mobilise when needed could push a 'Yes' vote over the line.

There are of course several principled counter arguments to such a proposal, but with further consideration they largely lose their merit, not least because the growing prospect of a border poll occurring sometime in the future appears certain to overtake all aspirations of those steadfast political movements and individuals who simply want Irish Unity to happen some other way.

Demographics and popular opinion may prove bigger than all of our previous revolutionary plans.



At all YFU meetings, our activists can expect to face a range of well-meaning and important questions from the principled Republican Left base.

Principled objections to the 'Yes for Unity' position usually take the form of the following questions.

Questions asked by our critics

Question 1. What would we do in the event of a No result?

This question was initially & easily answered by the IRSP's 'Britain out of Ireland/Ireland out of the EU' position paper which first proposed the Republican Socialist Border Poll position. And it is an answer shared by the 'Yes for Unity' campaign. The opening caveat of the position paper simply states:

"In the event of any failure to end partition via so called 'constitutional' means, Republican Socialists would be under no more compulsion to recognise the Unionist Veto than we are today."

Costello's declaration that he favoured "Guerrilla tactics in parliament" just as he did "in many other respects", opened up for us all, the prospect of taking or leaving the mechanisms of the state as and when it suits us, confident that we need not compromise our overall goals while doing so.

In layman's terms then, if the Border Poll project breaks down, we get another bus. We owe this state no courtesy.

Question 2. Isn't a border poll just a sectarian headcount?

This is also easily answered, as such opportunistic critiques were also forwarded throughout decades of brutal political and people's struggle against the Orange state, most often by the lifestylist left and other anti-republican tendencies, who,

(from a position of political cowardice) were more offended by positive aspirations to end partition than Loyalist aspirations to maintain it. We owe nothing to such people today.

**Question 3. The Republic has already been declared (in 1916)
“No referendum required” why vote?**

In regard to those who hold to the ‘already declared republic’ position; we have a great deal more sympathy for this line of questioning than the others and understand the passionate beliefs of those who find notions of voting today on independence and sovereignty unpalatable, we find it unpalatable ourselves.

However, repeated research suggests that demographics and public feeling are shifting with a momentum that may soon overshadow any such concerns in terms of real time political relevance.



When a border poll scenario arises (which it most likely will) it will be bigger than the programme of any one political party or any revolutionary tendency. And, if a significant section of the Irish working class within the occupied six counties decides to march in that chosen direction, then it would be nothing short of arrogance for Republican Socialists to stand aloof and tell them that they are wrong.

To abstain from what would be a genuine, people's led opportunity to end partition in Ireland, while citing (albeit legitimate) historical and political principles alone, would risk us appearing like the Jacobite faithful of old; passionately waiting for warships that existed only in our minds, while ignoring the emerging trends of actual struggle that existed all around us.



YFU Saturday morning workshop in central Belfast. Activists from a range of republican-left organisations gather to discuss strategy for the coming campaign.

Surely the Democratically elected 1st Dáil would not have wished for their adherents to stand, many decades after their passing, and evoke their monarchical title rights? And all because the electoral process was being presided over by the enemy (as was their own) all the while passing up on tangible opportunities to seriously weaken British rule in Ireland, if not end it?

Of course not! And, it is at this point where supporters of a Border Poll may start asking equally difficult questions of their critics.

Questions we ask of our critics

Question 1. What should republicans be doing while a Border Poll is occurring?

In all likelihood, a border poll is going to occur within the next few generations if not earlier; Brexit, demographics and public opinion make it a virtual certainty. Do republican opponents of the process suggest that we simply stand aloof and wag our fingers at hundreds of thousands of progressive people in 'the North' determined to break out of the sectarian state in an opportunistic fashion? What would be revolutionary about that?

Question 2. What if 'Yes' wins but we abstain?

Serious question. If a border poll was successful and the Republican Left had been seen to stand aloof from the process which had secured Irish Unity, why would we then think that we could credibly argue for a stake in new Irish society?

Had Catalunya succeeded (and it may yet) then the left there would have been recognised as an integral part of what emerged, and precisely because they were part of the people's momentum that had delivered independence.

The Neo-Liberal right and middle-class nationalism are already planning for their image of a post referendum United Ireland and for the left to abstain at this point would (frankly) be absurd and detrimental to working class interests.

Question 3. Why should participation in a 'Border Poll' be viewed differently to any other Civil Rights campaign?

Our parents and grandparents took to the streets to demand Civil Rights within the occupied six counties; to demand housing, jobs, the right to vote, and an end to Internment.



Republicanism in its entirety backed them then and rightly so.

Today, Republicans in the six counties regularly utilise the courts system to secure further civil rights in terms of Judicial Review, appeal rights etc.

Were those Civil Rights marchers “*running with a begging bowl to the Brits*” as border poll advocates have been colourfully referred to in some quarters in recent times?

Why, is the ultimate Civil Rights demand (an end to partition) any less honourable than the demands of past generations in 'the North'?

Question 4. Why presume that advocating for a Border Poll rules out other forms of struggle?

During the 1973 British backed border poll, it made perfect sense for republicans, socialists and other progressives to abstain from what would have proved a certain defeat, and one which would have led simply to a wartime propaganda victory for British imperialism and advocates of partition.

But the factors that made '73 unfavourable have without doubt shifted radically and may shift further if given the right



Activists from a wide range of republican-left organisations address a YFU Rally, Fermanagh, January 2019

push at the right time.

In the meantime, the same people campaigning within 'Yes for Unity' remain active in, and open to, every other form of political, socio-economic and agrarian struggle available; as avenues to be explored on the

long road to the Worker's Republic.

And if the 'border poll' road fails, those other political avenues will still be there; Guerrilla politics! simple really.

More than just another republican group

'Yes For Unity' are unique in Irish politics, not only because we seek to unite the republican left behind a campaign that is as progressive as it is principled, but in our means of



YFU doorstep canvassers get a chance to hear real people's concerns about a United Ireland, giving us a chance to allay the worries of both Unionist & Nationalist homes alike.

organising; locally, nationally and internationally.

Thanks to the innovative tactic of 'doorstep canvassing' our activists get to hear about the real

concerns that many working class people have around a

united Ireland; concerns that activists may otherwise overlook, yet which must be recognised (and addressed) if a

post referendum Ireland is to have any chance of looking anything like the Socialist Republic we seek to achieve. Through this tactic we have learned in particular, concerns that may exist within the traditionally Unionist working class community of the north; placing our activists in a unique position to garner, consider and act upon ideas that may guide future political policies capable of clinching final and deciding votes come referendum day.

In the same way we recognise and learn of the role that our youth seek to play, not only in a future United Ireland but in today's campaign to



claim it; and with this principle in mind we seek to build upon progressive democratic shifts by demanding and campaigning for the rights of 16 year olds and over to vote in any future independence referendum.

Working towards a street-based campaign for Unity

YFU regularly travel to and assist with similar national independence referendum campaigns in Scotland, Brittany, Catalunya and elsewhere. We have learned from the real potential that exists within powerful street-based mobilisations in those nations, where once small and marginalised independence organisations mushroomed into popular mass campaigns in a relatively short period and through the tactic of street mobilisation. We openly seek to replicate such successes here.

Celtic & European Networking

From the outset 'Yes For Unity' have worked alongside sister organisations in Brittany, Scotland, Catalunya and elsewhere, helping us bring lessons from their struggles back to Ireland and building lasting political networks for future political cooperation.

Having participated in and learned from highly successful street based 'manifestation' tactics in the other Celtic nations, YFU seek to utilise such potential in order to build momentum for a border poll here.



YFU on the streets of Nantes with the Breton independence movement. Such networking today makes the future cooperation between free Celtic and European Socialist nations a genuine and desirable prospect.

In this process of cooperation, YFU have struck up lasting bonds of comradeship with fellow activist groups in other oppressed nations; a development that has evolved into a wider debate on future (post independence) cooperation.

YFU propose that such co-operation between historically oppressed Celtic nations and other left-European independence initiatives, can lay the groundwork for a future Union of sovereign European socialist nations; independent of, and separate from the capitalist bloc known as the 'European Union' today.

There for the taking, if we want it

Much more can be said on the topic and no doubt will.

Capitalism and the right are already attempting to monopolise momentums towards Irish reunification, some are now openly pushing retrograde and unacceptable proposals such as an Irish return to the commonwealth, post



referendum; ideas that must be fought and put to bed by Socialist Republicans now, at the outset of the campaign.

‘Yes For Unity’ are the only Republican Socialist campaigning group in the field. For our part we intend to lobby those open to the concept of a border poll, but to urge them to do so for the openly Republican Socialist reasons and to Revolutionary ends.

We have no interest in a so called ‘agreed Ireland’, a merging of two capitalist states and a continuation of the old order;

we have declared for a Worker's Republic and that is our red line. The Left cannot afford to abstain from this fight, as to do so not only hands the field back to the British state (literally) but to the right wing, economically.

But let us never forget, that even following a successful border poll, national independence without Socialism will not be independence at all, this requires a further push to get a United Ireland out of the European Union as a necessary step towards creating a Socialist Republic, YFU are the only referendum campaigning group in Ireland saying this and we are fully confident in that analysis.

Time will tell, either way, considering all of the above, we have nothing to lose. Join us!



www.yesforunity.ie