

UNITING IRELAND

UNITING WORKERS

A Trade Union Vision for a New and United Ireland



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TRABAJADORES - UNIENDO IRLANDA - UNIR L'IRLANDE - UNIR
LES TRAVAILLEURS - IRLAND VEREINEN - ARBEITER VEREINEN
アイルランドの統一 労働者の団結

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“The betrayal of the national democracy of industrial Ulster would mean a carnival of reaction both North and South, would set back the wheels of progress, would destroy the ongoing unity of the Irish Labour movement and paralyse all advanced movements whilst it endured”.

James Connolly



“I therefore hope...for the Irish nation to strike out (for) something new and show an example of candour, generosity and justice, superior to any that have gone before “

***Mary Ann Mc Cracken, anti-slavery
campaigner, writing to her brother
Henry Joy Mc Cracken, leader of the
United Irishmen***

“As to the union between the two islands, believe us when we assert our union rests upon mutual independence. We shall love each other if we be left to ourselves. It is the union of mind which ought to bind these nations together.”

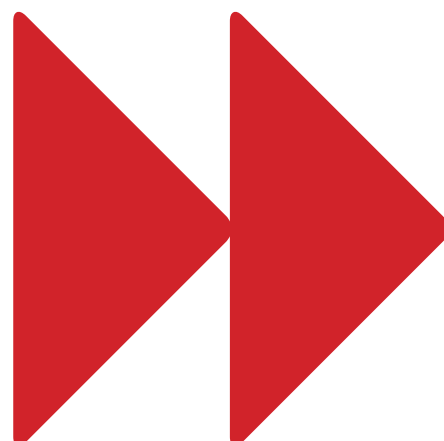
***Address from the Society of United Irishmen
to the English Society of Friends of the
People, 1791***





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Foreword

by Gerry Murphy, ICTU President

WRITING IN A PERSONAL CAPACITY



The debate on Irish Unity has started and is taking place in communities and workplaces across the country. Events in recent years such as Brexit and the disjointed response to Covid across the two political jurisdictions on this island have ensured that Irish Unity is no longer just an aspiration for many people. Rather, it is a real and practical solution to many of the problems our society faces today.

Trade Unionists for a New and United Ireland (TUNUI) is a group of activists and officials from all shades of cultural and political opinion across our movement who are campaigning for a referendum on Irish Unity.

We believe passionately that the interests of working people, their families and society are best served by the ending of partition and the creation of new all-Ireland economic and social models. In this, the centenary year marking the division of our island, TUNUI are joining their voices with those in every area of society, across the island, who are promoting and agitating for these goals. Many of the proposals we make in this pamphlet, such as an All-Ireland National Health Service, a Just Transition to tackle climate change and collective bargaining rights are in line with the proposals made by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions in its 'No Going Back' document released in May 2020.

The Ireland of today is a very different place than that which was partitioned one hundred years ago. Yet we are still burdened by an imperial hangover, partition along with economic and social structures that continue to support the interests of the few at the expense of the many. Change is underway and it is imperative that trade union activists across the island involve themselves in accelerating and shaping this change. TUNUI provides the vehicle for your involvement.

I invite you as a trade unionist to embrace this opportunity to contribute to the shaping of a new Ireland; one characterised by equality and fairness that is outward looking and free to shape its own destiny. Such an Ireland is within our grasp if we work together positively and proactively, we will be central to building this new Ireland.

I am delighted to introduce this pamphlet which we hope will add to the debate on Irish Unity that is already happening across the trade union movement.



Introduction

Trade Unionists for a New and United Ireland (TUNUI) was established in February 2019 with the aim of putting the interests of workers front and centre in the debate on constitutional change.

Our initiative was launched with a statement which called on trade unionists across the country to "put economic and social equality into the heart of the discussion on a New Ireland". That statement was signed by over 150 trade union leaders, officials and activists from across the country.

The inclusion of the word 'New' in TUNUI's name was a very deliberate one. We are intensely aware that both states on the island of Ireland have failed workers. So, constitutional change cannot mean simply bolting those two states together. As our declaration states, "If there is to be a United Ireland, it must be a New Ireland that puts workers rights, economic rights, gender rights, as well as universal human rights front and centre in a new all Ireland constitution."

In the South, the rights of workers have been undermined since the foundation of the state. From its inception until the Good Friday Agreement, the Northern state was a "cold house", not just for nationalists, but also for workers, trade unionists and even those on the moderate left. Both states were run ultimately in the interests of business and of conservative and reactionary forces. Thus, a new departure in the form of a United Ireland on this island cannot simply be about more of the same. The same has meant austerity, housing crises, emigration, inadequate health care, low wages and the restriction of worker's rights such as the right to collectively bargain or to strike.

We are proud to say that supporters of our initiative include the sitting President of ICTU, Gerry Murphy, a number of General Secretaries, leading officials and activists, as well as the former Dunne's Stores Anti-Apartheid strikers. As active trade unionists, the people involved in TUNUI are engaged on a daily basis in fighting for the rights of workers. We aim to advance the cause of workers and organised labour in the long-term and recognise the enormous damage inflicted on those who live and work on the island by partition and divided communities.

While a United Ireland, achieved by peaceful and democratic means, is a legitimate object in itself, workers are nevertheless entitled to ask what it would mean for them. We therefore believe in a New and United Ireland of equality. This means that economic and social justice, human rights, workers' rights, womens' rights, children's rights and diversity should be at the heart of a new constitution. We have to ensure that never again will workers, their families and communities be left behind or be divided by sectarianism and racism.



Overshadowing everything else currently are three enormous existential challenges: Covid -19, Brexit and Climate Change. All three pose massive risks for working people who inevitably pay the biggest price for failure on any front. Covid -19 and Climate Change respect no borders while Brexit disregards the will and interests of the majority of citizens on both sides of the border. All point to the absolute necessity of an all-Ireland strategy and solution.

There are those who say that now is not the right time to debate the future for all those who live and work on this island. However, there was never a more compelling time when workers on both sides of the border are in the front line facing an emerging and immediate "perfect storm" posed by the Covid pandemic, the breakdown of our climate and the disruption of Brexit. Indeed, to not do so would be reckless and irresponsible. As the largest civic society movement in the country, trade unions have a particular responsibility to involve themselves in this ongoing debate.

Even leading Unionists agree we should talk about the future, albeit from a different political perspective. Former Northern First Minister and DUP leader Peter Robinson has more than once called for unionists to prepare for a Border Poll and put forward their case for the retention of the Union with the United Kingdom.

There is no escaping the fact that the debate about the future of our country is underway in the media, in civil society, in workplaces and in communities.

That is all the more reason why trade unionists have to come together to promote discussion within our movement and among workers generally on how their interests could be advanced in a New Ireland. That discussion must be constructive and involve trade unionists and workers on both sides of the border. It should include both unionist and nationalist/republican identities as well as those who declare as neither. It especially must involve the many workers who have come from other countries to live and work in Ireland, marginalised communities and young people.

What we cannot do is simply wait around to allow corporate interests to monopolise and dictate the terms of this debate, leaving workers scrambling to "play catch up." Workers and communities on this island deserve better than that.

Why workers and trade unionists should support Irish Unity

In 1914, James Connolly warned that partition would be a disaster for the working people of Ireland. In the Irish Worker, he wrote: "The betrayal of the national democracy of industrial Ulster would mean a carnival of reaction both North and South, would set back the wheels of progress, would destroy the ongoing unity of the Irish Labour movement and paralyse all advanced movements whilst it endured".

The Irish labour movement opposed the partition of the country from the moment it was first proposed. In 1914, the Irish Trade Union Congress declared "that partition will intensify the divisions at present existing and destroy all our hopes of uniting the workers of Ulster with those of Munster, Leinster and Connaught on the basis of their economic interest".

When partition became a reality in 1921, the warnings put forward by Connolly and the Irish trade union movement unfortunately came true. The workers' movement was not only divided in two because of the creation of two political jurisdictions, but workers in the North were further divided along sectarian lines. Despite these divisions, the trade union movement tried against very difficult odds to maintain some degree of unity across the working class in the north.

Over the past century, partition has undermined the natural development of not only the trade union movement, but every movement for progressive social change in this country. Most recently, vibrant campaigns achieved marriage equality and reproductive rights in the south but were denied to people in the North. In the North since the 1940s, people have had access to universal free healthcare, something that right-wing governments in the South denied to its citizens.

Partition distorted the natural economic development of Ireland on both sides of the border. Most of Ireland was cut off from what was then the country's industrial heartland based around Belfast and Lagan Valley. Over time, the north's once powerful shipbuilding and linen industries went into decline, while the southern state became dependant on foreign investment attracted by low corporate taxes at the expense of its own indigenous industries and public services.

Partition is not simply a matter of national identity. It is a pressing social and economic issue that has had real negative material and economic consequences for the people of this island. Trade unionists knew this at the time when partition was happening, and it remains true today. Below are a number of reasons why we believe trade unionists should advocate for a New and United Ireland.

■ **Irish Unity is a chance for a new start for everyone on this island.**

Most trade unionists would agree that both states on the island of Ireland have failed working people and few would argue that either state is a model to emulate. TUNUI believes that Irish Unity cannot mean merely stitching the two states together. We want a totally new state where the rights of workers are advanced, taxation is progressive, housing is a right and health care is free at the point of delivery.

The debate on Irish Unity will necessarily involve a broader discussion about what the country will look like after reunification. This is an exciting opportunity for everyone living on this island to have a say in what their country should look like, and what rights and services they expect from a new state. In this civic discussion, trade unionists should be demanding the right to collective bargaining, a living wage, a Bill of Rights, universal health care and affordable housing in a New and United Ireland.



■ Irish Unity will enhance democracy on our island.

The aspiration for Irish Unity is a democratic one based on the principle that decisions affecting people on the island of Ireland should be made by the people living here. A fundamental principle of trade unionism is democracy. By no stretch of the imagination could the northern state even today be described as democratic. Key political decisions such as taxation, major state investment strategies and foreign affairs are all dictated by London, with minimum input from people living in the North.

Democracy requires that decisions affecting communities on this island should be taken as close to them as possible, not in London.

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■ The debate on Irish Unity has already started and trade unionists need to play a leading role in the discussion.

The debate on Irish Unity is already underway in the media, in politics and right across society. As the largest civic society movement in Ireland, trade unions have a responsibility to take an active part in this debate and ensure the rights of workers are front and centre in this discussion.

Irish Unity will be an occasion of enormous constitutional change and as such will determine the course of politics and economics for decades to come. If trade unionists stay out of this debate, our voice will not be listened to when those new constitutional arrangements are being constructed. Furthermore, without the voice of workers and their unions, corporate interests will determine the course of this discussion and mould it in their interests in order to further promote privatisation, anti-union legislation and low corporate taxes.

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■ Irish Unity can help heal the divisions that exist on our island.

Partition not only divided our island, but exacerbated sectarian division within the north. Anti-racism and anti-sectarianism is a central principle of our movement. We need to face up to the fact that sectarianism cannot be overcome while partition exists. The northern state was a colonial sectarian creation. It was founded on sectarianism and continues to exist because of it. As long as partition continues, sectarianism is something that can only be managed, but never eliminated.

Irish Unity is an opportunity for us to overcome the divisions inflicted on our island by colonialism. A New and United Ireland would respect and protect the rights of all traditions on this island to ensure the injustices of the past are never repeated.

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■ A referendum on Irish Unity is a key provision in the Good Friday Agreement

Holding a referendum on Irish Unity is promised in the Good Friday Agreement. The agreement states that the British Secretary of State can call a referendum "if at any time it appears likely to him that a majority of those voting would express a wish that Northern Ireland should cease to be part of the United Kingdom and form part of a united Ireland".

TUNUI believes the conditions have been met for an Irish Unity referendum to be held. Political parties that are explicitly in favour of partition are now a minority in both the Stormont Assembly and among the north's Westminster MPs. Only 8 MPs out of 18 are unionist, while only 39 MLAs out of 90 are unionist. Unionism is now a minority position in the north and there is a clear desire for constitutional change.

Regardless of one's position on whether or not the north should remain in the union with Britain, if you support the Good Friday Agreement, you should support all the key provisions of that agreement – including the provision that allows for a referendum on Irish Unity.

■ Irish Unity will allow us to tackle climate change as an island.

The response to the Coronavirus pandemic across the two political jurisdictions has been disjointed, with conflicting public health advice and different restrictions on a number of occasions. This gives us a small glimpse into how difficult it is going to be for us to tackle climate change on a divided island. In order for any Green New Deal or Just Transition initiative to be successful, it needs to be implemented on a 32-county basis.

TUNUI advocates for strong climate action, which would include divestment from fossil fuels, massive state investment in green energy, expansion of public transport and a Just Transition for workers in affected industries. Climate change does not recognise borders, and our response to it cannot be hindered by a line drawn in a map by imperialists a century ago.

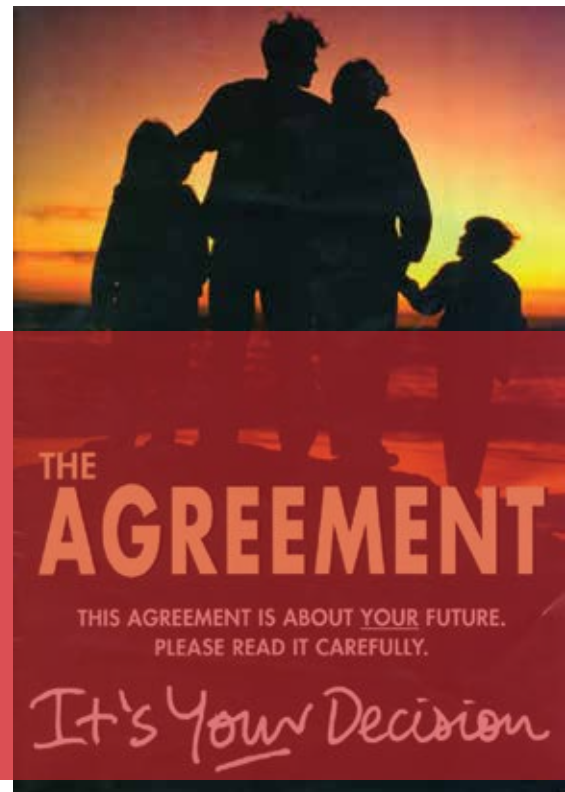
■ Irish Unity can allow for all-island economic planning.

An All-Ireland industrial strategy could help address the imbalances of the island's economy caused by colonialism and partition. The north is overly dependent on a subvention from London, while the southern economy is overly dependent on foreign investment. A New and United Ireland could be an ambitious country that breaks this dependency and sets out an all-island strategy to develop sustainable industries across the island. Most importantly it should be one based on sustainable employment and fair pay and conditions for workers.

Reunification could further rebalance regional inequalities, particularly in the border counties which were particularly damaged by partition. This would see an expansion of public transport, particularly rail, which those counties have historically been deprived of.

The Good Friday Agreement:

A democratic pathway to a New and United Ireland



Our generation is fortunate that we now have a peaceful and democratic pathway to achieve Irish Unity as a result of the Good Friday Agreement. This was endorsed by a massive majority on both sides of the border in 1998, giving it an all-island mandate. The Agreement is also an internationally binding treaty, of which both the United States and the European Union are guarantors.

A key provision of the Good Friday Agreement, and one which needs to be honoured, is the facilitation of a referendum on Irish Unity. The agreement states:

"it is for the people of Ireland alone ...and without external impediment, to exercise their right to self-determination on the basis of consent , freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a united Ireland if that is their wish ...".

The mechanism to bring that about is also laid out in the agreement which provides for a poll (referendum) to be initiated by the British Secretary of State (for Northern Ireland):

"...if at any time it appears likely to him (sic) that a majority of those voting would express a wish that Northern Ireland should cease to be part of the United Kingdom and form part of a united Ireland"

Such a majority decision would be binding on both British and Irish governments. Consistent with the other provisions of the agreement, a concurrent poll would have to be held south of the border

Therefore, it is clear that there is mechanism – enshrined in international law – to achieve Irish Unity by peaceful and democratic means. What is not clear, however, is what kind of united Ireland that would be. That is why we are advocating that the trade union movement needs to involve itself in this debate. We need to ensure that any new constitutional arrangement is grounded in the principles of economic equality and social justice and advances the rights of working people.

It is absolutely imperative that we plan for a New and United Ireland in advance of any referendum. As a first step, the Irish government should convene an All-Ireland Citizens' Assembly-type forum which would explore the complexities of reunification and plan for that eventuality. This forum would listen to a wide range views from across the island and across civic society, including trade unions. The findings of this forum could help determine what a New and United Ireland would look like.

In addition, a referendum on Irish Unity should extend the franchise to everyone aged 16 and over, as was done in Scotland in 2014. The vote is, after all, about their future.



A trade union vision for a New and United Ireland

As trade union activists, we believe that Irish reunification is an opportunity to shift power and wealth from corporations to working people. However, this will only be the case if trade unionists set out a strong vision of what we want a New and United Ireland to look like.

Below are a number of ambitious objectives that trade unions – and, indeed, the people of this island – should set out to achieve as part of the constitutional change that will come about in the near future.



An All-Ireland National Health Service

In our view, the biggest obstacle to Irish Unity is no longer the fear of 'Rome Rule'; It is the refusal of consecutive right-wing governments in the South to introduce universal free health care. The two-tier system which boosts the profits of private insurance companies and allows those with more money to skip the queue ahead of those with greater medical need, is something that needs to end.

Although people in the north have access to free health care, the NHS in the six counties fares badly as a result of partition. Disgracefully, waiting lists for outpatient procedures in the north are 100 times longer than those in England. In 2019, just over 1,000 people were on waiting lists in England, which has a population of 55 million. In the north, with a population of less than 2 million, 100,000 people were on waiting lists. Health care is free at the point of need in the north, but a decade of Tory austerity has decimated the service.

Right across our movement, in unions such as the INMO, UNISON, SIPTU and Fórsa, we have thousands of people with years of experience in health care delivery. They can play a key role in constructing a new NHS for everyone on this island. Much of the framework for this is in Sláintecare, the blueprint for universal healthcare which is supported by all parties in the Dáil. People in the north are rightly concerned that a joining the southern state would mean losing access to free health care. This need not be the case. Indeed, the creation of a universal health care system, free at the point of need, is a prerequisite for a United Ireland.

Decent pay and strong workers' rights legislation

Ireland, both north and south, has the unenviable position of being the country with the highest prevalence of low pay in Europe. A quarter of workers in the north are defined as low paid, while 23% of workers in the south are in the same category.

The best way to tackle low pay and rising inequality is by building strong trade unions and legislating for effective collective bargaining. Workers in the south of Ireland do not have a legal right to collective bargaining. The International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Committee on Freedom of Association has noted that Ireland has violated ILO conventions 87 and 98. A Trade Union Rights Act, as advocated for by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, should be brought into law. This would give workers the right to collective bargaining and provide union officials with the right of access to workplaces. Legislation should also be brought forward to tackle bogus self-employment, which is a growing problem on both sides of the border.

In addition to this, in a New and United Ireland the Living Wage should become the legal minimum wage. No one should have to work for less than is necessary to live a decent life.

A Bill Of Rights

A Bill of Rights is a key aspect of the Good Friday Agreement which has, unfortunately, still not been implemented. TUNUI sees a Bill of Rights as an essential safeguard to protect not only minorities, but every citizen on this island, including the rights of women and children and of workers generally. In particular, it would offer protections for those on this island who identify as British to ensure they face no discrimination and their identity is protected.

The full contents of a Bill of Rights should be decided by an All-Ireland Citizens' Assembly.

All-Ireland Climate Action

Tackling climate breakdown requires an all-Ireland approach. Climate change does not stop at borders, and dealing with this enormous crisis will only be made more difficult if the island remains partitioned. A New and United Ireland would make a priority of ensuring a Just Transition to a green economy. It would ensure that we meet our international climate commitments to reduce our carbon emissions to net zero by 2050. A massive state stimulus package aimed at investing in solar and wind energy, expanding public transport and retrofitting homes to reduce energy consumption has the potential to create thousands of well-paid unionised jobs.

Tackling climate change is the challenge of our generation, but it can also be an opportunity to build not only a more sustainable society, but a happier and healthier one. We need to move away from a system that prioritises GDP growth above everything else and towards one that measures human wellbeing, such as the UN's Human Development Index (HDI).

A four-day working week, which some Irish trade unions have been campaigning for, points towards another solution that could help reduce carbon emissions, as well as being something that would vastly improve the lives of working people and their families.

These ambitious goals are all achievable in a New and United Ireland.

A constitutional right to housing

The housing system in Ireland has completely failed, with ever increasing numbers of people in homelessness, ridiculously high rents and huge mortgage debts. Delivery of housing in Ireland is almost totally dominated by the private companies driven by private profit, with the state all but squeezed out.

In a New and United Ireland, the right to housing should be enshrined in the constitution, and housing should be delivered by the state. This would require a huge public housing building programme which, along with the green transition outlined above, could provide well-paid, unionised employment. In addition to public housing, rent controls would need to be introduced in order to tackle the extortionate rents that landlords charge currently.

In a New and United Ireland, housing should be a basic right for all citizens rather than a commodity for a few to profit from.

Fair and progressive taxation

A New and United Ireland should have a fair and progressive taxation system that tackles the corporate tax avoidance that the southern state is synonymous with. In order to achieve the public services that we should aspire to, those with most wealth will have to pay more in tax.

In addition to introducing a wealth tax on millionaires, increasing taxes on rental income and increasing corporation tax, employer contributions to social insurance would also need to be increased, as it is currently one of the lowest in Europe. Average employer PRSI in Ireland stands at less than €1,700, compared to a western European average of €3,500.

As a result of low social insurance contributions and corporate tax avoidance, public spending in Ireland is the second lowest in western Europe, with just over €16,000 being spent per citizen. By comparison, Denmark, which has a similar population to Ireland, spends more than €26,000 per person.

A New and United Ireland should have world class public services, paid for through progressive taxation.



What you can do

TUNUI encourages all trade unionists who aspire to Irish Unity to get involved in our initiative. If you would like to get involved, please contact us on our Facebook page or email tradeunionists4ui@gmail.com.

Below are a number of ways you can help TUNUI campaign for Irish Unity:

- Put forward motions in favour of Irish Unity or an Irish Unity referendum to your union conference
- If you are a member of your local Trades Council, ask them to support the work of TUNUI
- Share this document with others in your union
- Hold debates and discussions on Irish Unity in your union branches and national executive
- Get involved in Trade Unionists for a New and United Ireland
- Invite TUNUI to give a talk to your union branch or local trades council
- Add your name to the list of sponsors supporting TUNUI



Trade Unionists for a New and United Ireland declaration, February 2019

We, the undersigned, are calling on trade unionists across Ireland to begin engaging in the debate for Irish unity. Profound social and constitutional changes have taken place across this island in recent years and the debate about future arrangements has already begun.

As trade unionists working on both sides of the border, we believe it is critically important that the interests of workers and working families are put at the heart of this debate. If there is to be a United Ireland, it must be a New Ireland that puts workers rights, economic rights, gender rights, as well as universal human rights front and centre in a new all Ireland constitution.

In the past both states on either side of the border allowed conservative interests to shape public policy and practice. Workers were divided along sectarian lines, and the interests of workers were subordinated to the interests of big business and ruling classes.

Conservatism, sectarianism, homophobia and misogyny became embedded in government policy North and South. Trade unionists have a duty to counter this positively and proactively and we intend to utilize the debate for Irish Unity to do so.

We the undersigned firmly believe that the mistakes of the past must not be allowed to happen again. If there is to be a United Ireland, it must be a New Ireland, a better Ireland, a fairer Ireland.

It is up to us to put economic and social equality into the heart of the discussion on a New Ireland. As such, we call on trade unionists to begin a campaign for Irish unity and a New Republic of equality.

SIGNED

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Damien Austin
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Pat Bolger
Aine Brennan
Derek Byrne
James Callaghan
John Callan
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John Carty
Colm Casserly
John Clarke
Paddy Cole
Paschal Condra
Pascal Connolly
Frank Connolly
Naomi Connor
Matthew Conroy
Jimmy Coughlan
Rachel Coyle
Debbie Coyle
Ruairí Creaney
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Samantha Farrell
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David Gibney
Kate Goodman
Denis Gormalley
Marie Gray
Noirin Greene
Eoin Griffin
Alan Grimes
Tommy Guilfoyle
Eddie Gunnery
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Anto McCabe
John McCarrick
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Billy Wall
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