**Freedom For All Ireland – Dolores Desch – January 2021**

**Christmas Appeal:** The 2020-2021 Christmas Appealis underway, and I am happy to report that donations are coming in from our Divisions so thank you for the work you are doing to make sure we have a successful Christmas Appeal! I recently emailed a copy of the current list of donations from each entity to all State Presidents, State FFAI chairs and FFAI subscribers. If you have any questions on the report, please send me an email. I will be collecting money all throughout the year so please keep the fundraising going! No word yet on when we will be sending the funds over but I will keep you posted. A reminder, please send your donations directly to me at: 20 Arlene Ave. Albany, NY 12203. Please include the check payable to**:** LAOH, Inc., the full name of your State, County, Division making the donation and a contact name with email address. Also, you may designate the donation to any of the following groups: Relatives for Justice, Holy Cross Trust, St. Patrick's Center-Downpatrick, Cairde, Belfast National Graves, Down Patriot Graves, EALU, Tyrone, New Lodge Commemoration Committee, Conway Mill Trust, Tyrone AOH, Bridges Beyond Boxing, Belfast, Green Cross, Omagh Basketball, Omagh Choir, Duchas-Oiriall, Ballymurphy Families Committee, Bloody Sunday Trust - Museum of Free Derry, Tyrone National Graves, The Witness Project-Sean Murray, The Pat Finucane Center.

**Brexit News:** We have witnessed history this month with the implementation of Brexit. We are seeing the effects already in the ports where trucks and shipping containers are piling up. Issues with Customs and paperwork are clogging the border crossings. Thankfully there was an agreement struck between the UK and the EU regarding the border in the Irish Sea and that the Withdrawal Agreement and Good Friday Agreement were honored. The efforts to foster a united Ireland have benefitted from the backlash of Brexit. The fact that most voters in the North of Ireland voted to remain says a lot about how they feel about their identity - European or British? While there are still a substantial number of those who would prefer to be British and remain with the union, Brexit has forced many to look at the benefits of being European. Many unionists in the north of Ireland have applied for Irish passports which they automatically qualify for. Irelands Future is a group that are trying to address the issues behind a united Ireland in a factual, non-partisan and nonpolitical way <https://irelandsfuture.com/> . Sinn Fein has been very vocal on this issue over the past year and we expect to see the Irish government set up a group to further the One Island concept.

**FFAI Events and Webinars**: In early December we held a webinar with our AOH brothers and speakers from the north of Ireland to mark the 40th anniversary of the start of the Hunger Strikes. The first set of Hunger Strikes started in October of 1980 and lasted 53 days. We heard from Hunger Striker Tommy McKearney who talked about the background and reason for the Hunger Strikes, which were to force the British government to treat Republican prisoners as political prisoners and not criminals. Prior to 1976, republican prisoners could wear their own clothes, receive parcels and had political prisoner status. In 1976 changes were made to classify these prisoners as criminals resulting in their losing privileges, especially the right to not put on a prison uniform. This was the start of the Blanket Protests where republican prisoners refused to wear a prison uniforms and wore only a blanket. The Hunger Strike was carried out to try to get their demands met. Tommy explained that he was very close to death and was in disbelief when he was told that the Republican prisoner leadership had called off the strike due to Margaret Thatcher agreeing to the terms. We heard from Andree Murphy, Deputy Director at Relatives for Justice, who described the effect that the Hunger Strike had on the community and republican movement. Several women in the Armagh Prison joined in the Hunger Strike as well. This served to expand support and cause protests and marches across the north, bringing the issue to the world stage. It was a month after the first Hunger strike ended that it became evident that there was no agreement for political status. Months later the next Hunger Strike began resulting in the death of 10 prisoners, Bobby Sands being the first.

On January 23 Hibernians hosted a webinar to support Relatives for Justice and the victims of state collusion and their families. These families have waited over 30 years for their loved ones’ deaths to be investigated and for fair and detailed investigations to be conducted. Family members, 3,499 in total, signed an open letter to An Taoiseach and the British PM asking for immediate implementation of the Stormont House Agreement of 2014 which was created to deal with the legacy issues of the past.

**Pat Finucane Case:** On November 30, 2020 Northern Ireland Secretary Brandon Lewis was ordered by the UK Supreme Court to issue his ‘decision’ on opening up a new, public inquiry into the killing of Pat Finucane. The week before that decision was due, and under the direction of President Keane, I issued a Call to Action to ask all of you to contact your Congressional representative immediately and request that they sign on to the bipartisan letter drafted by Chris Smith-R and Richie Neal-D directed to Prime Minister Boris Johnson urging him to establish a full, public inquiry into the murder of human rights attorney Patrick Finucane.

Multiple investigations commissioned by the UK government have pointed to security force collusion in the Finucane case. Despite the David Cameron apology in 2012 to the Finucane family in the House of Commons where he acknowledged there had been "shocking levels of collusion" in what was one of the most controversial killings of the Troubles, despite the multiple investigations that uncovered collusion and published accounts of collusion connected to this murder, despite one of the guns used to kill Pat being traced to the British Army and despite the Stormont House Agreement which stated the need for legacy issues to be resolved, there has never been a public inquiry. Geraldine Finucane, wife of Pat Finucane, injured in the attack, left a widow with three traumatized children who huddled under the table and watched as their father was shot over a dozen times as he lay on their kitchen floor, has spent the last 31 years actively working to uncover the truth behind the murder of her husband. Despite the efforts of many, on November 30, UK Secretary of State Brandon Lewis issued his decision – he denied the family the request for a full public inquiry. The family was devastated, they had put some much energy into the past 18 months that this recent battle had started – yet they met this setback with dignity, issuing their statements of shock, disbelief and yet familiar denial for justice by the UK government. The world was watching, and we all saw a family that was again shattered by an overt denial of justice, but not being beaten. They were standing up to their attacker, displaying their courage, strength and determination to continue to fight for Pat and other families. In fact, the family was subsequently awarded a 7,500 Euro settlement for damages from NI Secretary of State Brandon Lewis for breaching human rights over the Pat Finucane probe decision delay. They need our support now more than ever as they continue the fight for the justice they deserve. Please remember the Finucane family in your prayers as we approach the anniversary of Pat’s death on February 12, 1989.

**Please make sure your Division has an FFAI appointee** who willreceive and relay the latest information on the news, issues and programs affecting those living in the north of Ireland. FFAI information is readily available on our national website page and Facebook Page. I am also happy to assist if you need any help. Please like, follow and share our FFAI Page <https://ladiesaoh.com/freedom-for-all-ireland/> which contains updated information as well as FFAI news. If you are not receiving my emails, please send me your email address. As always, if you have any questions or would like more information please contact me at laohnationalffai@gmail.com. Thank you for all of your support for Freedom For All Ireland.

Go raibh maith agat.