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open economy. This process is continuing. The North also underwent a modernisation process, though a much more violent one – starting with the collapse of Stormont and the long struggle to find a political solution.

This leads us to a new space.

- 12 A starting point is to mark the two seismic events of one hundred years ago – and remember the men and women who acted with hope and selflessness during a violent period of our mutual history. In marking these events, we also declare that never again will war be tolerated, nor will we tolerate discrimination on the basis of culture, faith or race. We remember so that we can build a new order, new relationships and a new shared future.
- 13 Whereas, in the first century after 1916, we tended to define ourselves through the differences between traditions within the island, and the differences between the traditions on this island and our neighbour, the next one hundred years will offer us the chance to redefine ourselves positively by affirming our interrelationship with each other and our place in an ever more interconnected world. We have a duty to mark and respect the memory of all those who acted with hope and selflessness, while at the same time acknowledging the legacy of these events. Marking the two great defining events of 1916 offers a chance to reconsider where we stand in relation to our history and its legacy. In marking the workers' year of 1916, let us imagine a new workers' future.

## STANDING BY THE FUTURE

- 14 Unite and the trade union movement are very clear about that future. It is quite simply that the men and women on this island who create the wealth are entitled to dictate how that wealth will be shared. We will oppose those forces that seek to divide, to dissemble or to put up false flags and invoke partisan histories that fragment the economic, social and political strength of working people.
- 15 Where will this process lead? That is for working people to decide. But the decisions we take must result in a more prosperous future where working people are the directing agents, where prosperity is created and shared, where people live without oppression or alienation, free to maximise their life chances in cooperation with their neighbours, their workmates and the environment. Otherwise, we will return to the past.

*Unite stands by the future.*

*Tis the final conflict;*

*Let each stand in his place.*

*The international working class*

*Shall be the human race.*

The Internationale, written by Eugène Pottier in 1871 and published in International Workers of the World Songbook, London 1916

  
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1916:  
A WORKERS' year



Unite the Union (Ireland Region), Spring 2016



**1** 2016 is the centenary of two seminal events that had a lasting impact on the national traditions on this island: the Easter Rising and the Battle of the Somme. Both events emerged from a violent period of European history. Both were part of a series of transformative events stretching back to the rise in industrial militancy on the streets of Belfast and Dublin. Both were catalysts in the establishment of two states on this island – states that reflected the diverging traditions and nationalisms on this island.

**2** These events became symbols which helped legitimise and underpin the domination of two national traditions for nearly a hundred years afterwards. The interests of working people were subordinated not only to 'North' and 'South', but also to the political coalitions which reinforced the privilege of domestic elites.

**3** The two national traditions viewed each other with suspicion and apprehension and mobilised support based on these views. These national traditions defined themselves by their relationship with Britain; either to separate or to remain united.

The two major Irish events of 1916 – the 1916 Rising and the Battle of the Somme – fuelled those definitions.

## 'A WORKERS' YEAR' IN CONTEXT

**4** The two identities and national traditions on this island existed long before 1916, although they were crystallised by the events of that year and partition. Many Protestants died in the famine, many Catholics served in the British army, and many of both traditions played a leading role in the struggle for advancement of the working class.

The two great Lockouts – Belfast in 1907 and Dublin in 1913 – involved trade unionists of both traditions, and their effects were still being felt in 1916 and long afterwards.

**5** Before the outbreak of the First World War, socialists and trade unionists had been forging international links not only to advance the industrial struggle for workers' rights, but also to resist the rush to war – a war which would inevitably impact first and hardest on working class communities. However, when the war came those progressive sentiments were washed away in a tide of nationalism. That retreat from progressive internationalism to conservative nationalism was to shatter confidence in the growth and power of international socialism and solidarity between working people.

**6** Many impoverished workers living in the tenements of Dublin or the slums of Belfast enlisted out of economic necessity, only to find themselves embroiled in what was to be one of the most murderous wars in history. Others supported the 1916 Rising, while still others – like the tenement dwellers of

North King Street – found themselves caught between opposing factions.

At the same time, those who stood firm against both WW1 and the Rising – such as the pacifist and suffragist Francis Sheehy Skeffington – were side-lined.

In an irony which exemplifies the contradictions of that 'Workers' Year', Sheehy Skeffington – who had opposed the militarisation of the nationalist movement – came to the aid of a British officer wounded during the Rising, but was subsequently arrested and executed as an enemy sympathiser.

**7** The events in Dublin and Flanders in 1916 heralded five years of mounting conflict, resulting in a hardening of the divisions between the two traditions on the island. Those who had fought together in Europe returned to a changed island. It took nearly a century for change to come again.

## BEYOND NATIONALISMS TOWARDS INCLUSIVENESS

**8** In the year of this centenary, much is changing radically. The Good Friday / Belfast Agreement represented a significant stride forward. Supported by a majority within both traditions, it represented a break within Irish nationalism by abandoning the constitutional claim on Northern Ireland and accepting the unionist right to democratic self-determination. Similarly, the Agreement represented a break with unionism, bringing about democratic institutions of inclusion and equal

participation within Northern Ireland and ending the dominance of communal majoritarianism.

**9** The new constitutional settlement offers us the opportunity to rediscover the longstanding progressive traditions represented by those who rejected division and sectarianism and domination, and instead sought to advance solidarity, inclusion and social progress. The new power-sharing dispensation in Northern Ireland, as well as the cross-border bodies, provides space to deliver on those progressive visions of a society which celebrates the diversity and complexities of our traditions, identities and histories.

**10** Alongside this democratic breakthrough, the island of Ireland is changing. More people are living and working here who were not born here and are not part of the historical traditions. These new Irish are bringing their own national and cultural traditions and giving us an opportunity to rethink Irishness in more inclusive and creative ways.

## REDEFINING OUR TRADITIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS

**11** Unite and the trade union movement comes into the new century with great hope and ambitions rooted in the lives of working people. Towards the end of the first century both parts of Ireland underwent profound transformation. The Republic experienced a modernisation process which saw the decline of church influence, membership of the European Union, immigration and an