



93ú Sinn Féin Ard Fheis 1997

Dublin. 8–9 November

Presidential Address by Ruairí Ó Brádaigh

Ruairí Ó Bradaigh, President, Republican Sinn Fein A Chathaoirligh, a theachtaí, is a chairde ar fad,

Fearaim céad míle fáilte romhaibh ag an Ard-Fheis seo, an 93ú ceann de chuid Shinn Féin. You are all most cordially welcome to this, the 93rd Ard-Fheis of Sinn Féin.

At the very outset I wish to congratulate you on your devotion to the work of the organisation and your persistence down the years, especially since 1986. You have braved intimidation and misrepresentation and the fruits of your efforts are manifest today.

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The young members we are now attracting have been inspired by your steadfastness, and your political stand was never clearer than at present. You have clung to the revolutionary road forward rejecting the easy path of constitutionalism. Because of this our Ard-Fheis this weekend is the most important of the past decade.

A cháirde, British government policy towards Ireland has not changed over the centuries. It is one of coercion, that is government by force. But when opportune it changes to one of compromise with the objective of reducing the constituency or level of support for the Irish people's struggle against British imperialism and colonialism.

This policy of compromise on the part of the British was seen clearly in the Treaty of Surrender of 1921 by which counter-revolution was set in motion here under threat of "immediate and terrible war" (their words). Faced once again in the years since 1969 by a popular struggle against English rule they embarked once more in recent years on a policy of compromise.

They had willing collaborators, of course, in the Dublin politicians and the SDLP but this time they were joined by a section of our former comrades who have gone over to constitutionalism and reformism.

Gradually and inevitably this has resulted in some but not all of them being absorbed into the British system in Ireland. But this is nothing new; it has all happened before as we know to our cost. Every time it occurs the system is strengthened and the Republican Movement is weakened.

Those who were clear-headed enough to realise where the latest compromise was bringing them have had the moral courage to disentangle themselves from the downward slide into collaboration with the enemy of Irish freedom. A number of them have had the strength of character to admit that they had been misled and have returned to their allegiance to the All-Ireland Republic. Many of these latter are among the best workers in Republican Sinn Féin today.

English rule in Ireland is modernising itself these days, trying to make itself more acceptable internationally by involving as large a section as possible of the nationalist population of the Six Occupied Counties in its workings. "What is available", (John Bruton's words) is Sunningdale No 2: a reformed power-sharing Stormont with cross-border committees and possibly a new British-controlled police force.

The American economist John Kenneth Galbraith once described revolution as the kicking down of a rotten door; and the fall of the old Stormont in 1972 under pressure from the nationalist population led by the Republican Movement was surely a case in point. But what the British government is now proposing is a new and modern steel-reinforced door which will be so much harder to dislodge.

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That is why they want nationalist cooperation and the assistance of former Republicans in rebuilding an up-to-date Stormont and enforcing its rule on all those who oppose it and continue the struggle for Irish national independence. As many "poachers" as possible must become "gamekeepers" in the British scheme of things – for the "reformed" militants will know how to repress their former comrades much more efficiently – as history has shown us. Those of us who live in the 26 Counties know just how well the Free State Army of 1922–23 and the Broy Harriers of the '30s and '40s did their deadly work.

Signs have not been wanting of such an evolution of policy. Three years ago, in the aftermath of the first Provisional unilateral and unconditional ceasefire, a faithful Republican was abducted and interrogated by former comrades. Last May others were similarly treated while in September in the Ardoyne area of Belfast a Republican operating against British occupation forces was disarmed and his weapon was seized by Provisionals. Apparently enemy forces now have additional, local protection.

In modern terms the experience of the Palestinians and the Basques surely give examples of what happens when some of those engaged in struggle accept imperialist compromise and are drawn into collaboration with the enemy. Every time a section of a revolutionary movement settles for something short of its objective, there is a price tag attached to such an "interim solution" or stepping-stone. And the colonial power can be relied on to exact that price in full measure.

The head of the 26-County Administration Mr Ahern has said on RTE radio (September 28) that the Framework Document is "our preferred option" but "we must be flexible" – meaning, it would appear, that the Dublin government would settle for less. The Irish News of Belfast in a front page report by its political correspondent on September 26 stated: "The bottom line for (Provisional) Sinn Féin in the Stormont negotiations will be the Framework Document, senior republican sources disclosed last night". This latter statement was never denied so the lines on which a so-called settlement will be based are already visible.

The UUP as the main Unionist participant in the Stormont talks agrees with the Loyalist assessment three years ago that "the Union is safe". But it is divided about how much should be conceded to nationalists in the final analysis. Even if the UUP withdrew from the talks and they collapsed the London–Dublin axis will impose a bargain reached on the lines of the already agreed Framework Document. British Secretary Mowlam has said at a fringe meeting of the recent British Labour Party conference that "it will be a majority in the North that decides the way forward – the bottom line is: majority in the North" ..

We must oppose such a referendum in the Six Occupied Counties and its accompanying side-show in the 26 Counties. We must exert every effort in this

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regard. We must counter it tooth and nail. But let it be clear that regardless of the results we shall not accept any settlement which seeks to legitimise English rule in Ireland under whatever guise. The present process will strengthen and update British rule here – not weaken it.

In taking this position we acknowledge the existence of the historic Irish nation which is entitled to its freedom and we stand by the 1916 Proclamation which states that this “right cannot be extinguished except by the destruction of the Irish people”. We believe that in time we will be vindicated for upholding Ireland’s just rights when it was neither fashionable nor profitable. But then, what is new about all that?

It is impossible to understand the present condition of Ireland without reference to its roots which lie deep – not in 28 years – but in 828 years of invasion, annexation and colonisation – injustices which were continually countered by Irish resistance.

The present constitutional position results from a counter-revolution which suppressed the All-Ireland Republic of 1916 and the First (32 County) Dáil and from the subsequent forced imposition of partition rule 75 years ago on the plea of “giving peace a chance”.

The arrangement was totally undemocratic in that it divided Ireland and divided Ulster and created a new entity – the Six Counties which has been sustained by corruption, by injustices and by the might of British forces. It is a completely artificial entity which is inherently undemocratic and incapable of reform, based as it is on a sectarian headcount.

We all know that the legitimate demands of the Civil Rights movement in 1968 & '69 were met with the violence of sectarian police, of Orange mobs and ultimately of the British Army itself.

With all of this, and the previous experiences of the early '20s and mid-'30s in this century alone, we caution those who play with the idea of the surrender, or “decommissioning”, of arms to think long and carefully. Never before in our long struggle of resistance to foreign rule was there a surrender of arms, neither of United Irish pikes by Catholic, Protestant or Presbyterian, nor indeed of Fenian guns. The leadership which, to its shame, left the people of the Falls and Ardoyne and other areas defenceless in 1969 were ignominiously dubbed a most unpleasant name.

We all yearn for a true and lasting peace but this will elude us until such time as the injustices inflicted on the Irish people and the root cause of these injustices – foreign rule – are removed for all time. The prophetic words of Patrick Pearse still ring true: “Ireland unfree shall never be at peace” – Ní Síocháin go Saoirse!”

The New Ireland which emerges from the ending of English rule must be one which provides for a direct participatory democracy, involving all our people. In this context those who now support the English connection would not find Republican Sinn Féin

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wanting. We commend our ÉIRE NUA proposals to them and we are always ready and available for discussion.

The time is opportune for an appeal to Unionists. If they feel they are being pushed down the road of Dublin rule or absorption into the 26-County state as has been hinted, we fully understand and even sympathise with their fears. When it suits the masters in Westminster they will be dumped or handed over to the Leinster House regime. There will be no New Ireland in that event – just an extension of the present set-up South of the Border.

If they are as wise, as prudent and as far-seeing as they claim to be, then they should be exploring with us now the possibility of a new radical Ireland with self-government for every community. Are any amongst them capable of initiating dialogue with us? An exchange of views would do no harm. It would do a lot of good and we could learn from each other.

Real power, constitutionally guaranteed, in a New Ireland would surely be preferable to a long and debilitating rearguard action against a gradual change from Westminster rule to Leinster House rule. How many more Drumcrees, how many more Harryvilles must we have on the way? There is a real long-term alternative and it should be explored now.

The twelve months since last we met in convention have been eventful. In January John Hume called on the Provisionals to take the next logical step in their programme towards mere reform of English rule in Ireland and enter the British parliament itself.

By April they had stated they would “frequent” Westminster if elected. The Irish News of April 2 described this as “an important shift in strategy” and its leading article of the same day called it “another small step along the road to full participation” in the British parliament.

Meanwhile the British Labour Party in its election manifesto withdrew its gesture to “work for a united Ireland by consent” as the current process relieved pressure on it. John Major in his manifesto expected “Northern Ireland (sic) always to be part of the United Kingdom”, thus ignoring the tide of human progress. The Leinster House parties reinforced their 30-year old acceptance of the Unionist Veto, in that way protecting their cosy 26-County constituency.

Republican Sinn Féin responded by launching in Belfast a leaflet to be distributed in thousands over the occupied area. It called on Irish elected representatives to reject Westminster and on voters to confront candidates on this issue. “Drumcree, Garvaghy Road, the Lower Ormeau Road and Derry in 1996 showed the contempt that the British and their Unionist allies have for ‘constitutional nationalists’ and those who dilute their opposition to British rule”.

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When two Provo MPs – note well not TDs to an All-Ireland parliament – were elected, their party announced the intention of opening offices for them at Westminster. The Irish Times of May 5 commented: “The party’s policy of abstentionism seems set to become virtually meaningless as a result”.

Republican Sinn Féin warned that the election results should not be regarded as a mandate to take seats in Westminster and thus acknowledge the usurping British claim to rule in Ireland. Nevertheless, the Provo MPs went on to seek the privileges accorded to British Members of Parliament and were in the outcome allowed to use the House of Commons notepaper.

By August they were initiating proceedings in a British court to have the oath of allegiance to the Crown on entry to Westminster removed. Now if the English people want an oath of allegiance to their Queen in their parliament, Republican Sinn Féin stated, that is strictly their business. The legislature of another country was no place for Irish elected representatives.

Such an oath is of no interest to Irish Deputies – unless they intend to take part in the British parliament which is surely the intention of the Provisionals. Otherwise why concern themselves with an English oath in an English House of Commons?

But as they gradually turn a section of what was a revolutionary national liberation movement into a constitutional and reformist political party they should relinquish the historic title of Sinn Féin as did the Workers’ Party/Democratic Left.

Sinn Féin was founded in 1905 to withdraw the Irish representation from the British parliament and set up an All-Ireland government here at home. Participation in Westminster is the real issue – not the oath.

As we said at the Belfast press conference on April 15: if the Provos’ flirtation with the English parliament progresses into actual participation there, they do so at their peril; in that event they may well find themselves opposed by principled abstentionists in the future.

It is well to remember that people here present today took part in the election of Republican Sinn Féin prisoner-candidates in both Fermanagh-South Tyrone and Mid-Ulster several decades ago. With a total of over 152 000 votes in the Six Occupied Counties, the successful candidates styled themselves TDs to an All-Ireland Parliament and not British MPs. There is a world of difference between the two standpoints.

On April 9 last a columnist in the Irish Times asked: “How could it be that the disruption of a horse race is considered such an outrage and the murder of a Belfast Catholic apparently treated as of no consequence?”

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But it was not just one uninvolved and innocent civilian who was done to death. In the past 18 months Bernadette Martin (18) of Lurgan, John Slane, father of ten, Belfast, Séan Browne, GAA official, Bellaghy and Michael McGoldrick, Lurgan were shot dead.

Niall Donovan, (28) bank official, Dungannon and John Joseph Molloy (18) of North Belfast had their throats cut. Robert Hamill (29) of Portadown was kicked to death in the clear view of a jeep-load of British colonial police, the RUC, who did not intervene to save him. James Morgan (16) of South Down was beaten to death and his dead body treated in a hideous manner.

Garrett Parker (23) tennis player was beaten in North Belfast and left to be killed by passing traffic. A child of eleven, Darren Murray, was taunted by sectarian bullies and in rushing towards them was hit by passing traffic and met his death. Of course Dermot McShane of Derry was crushed to death by an armoured vehicle carrying British troops in his native city.

The Irish Times columnist remarked further in the same article: "The arson attacks on the churches have evoked not a whimper of condemnation or even comment from those so upset over the Aintree bomb hoaxes last Saturday afternoon".

The destruction of places of worship certainly cannot be countenanced and we know that it is one particular denomination which in the main suffered this way. But the aggressive picketing, molesting and even assaulting of people going to Mass at Harryville, Ballymena stands out above all in this regard.

For 41 weeks from September 1996 to June '97 this violence was applied systematically. Then as reported in the Irish Times of June 23 the British colonial police (RUC) claimed that they "could not guarantee the safety of Mass-goers during the marching season" and the church authorities cancelled Saturday evening Masses until September. At that stage the sectarian bullying at Harryville was resumed. The blackmailers had returned; and it continues.

Just as the Harryville bullies attempt to equate going to Mass there with provocative and triumphalist Orange marches through the nationalist village of Dunloy so an attempt was made to offset such marches with such events as a Fleadh Cheoil, an Irish language Feis or a GAA hurling, football or camogie match. This occurred when the British government was drawing up proposals for their new Parades Commission in the Six Counties.

In the event British Secretary Mowlam appeared to exclude GAA games but could include Irish language or music events, Irish National flags or Irish language signs. Also the RUC Chief Constable could challenge any decision of the Commission and Direct Ruler Mowlam could then make a ruling. This means that events like Drumcree could happen repeatedly with the British capitulating to Orange threats as they did

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for the past three years. "Statutory recognition of traditional parades" will be restored regardless of population shifts, much to the gratification of the bullies.

Following the British abdication once more at Drumcree, the Orange Order's decision not to march through certain nationalist areas on July 12 marked a mere pause which appears to have been rewarded by the Provisionals' second unilateral and unconditional ceasefire ten days later. Why was not such a decision taken a week earlier in regard to the Garvaghy Road and spared the people there the brutal attack on them by British forces together with consequent action in other areas for days afterwards?

All the while low-intensity ethnic cleansing of nationalists is taking place in North Belfast and in Co. Antrim. Families have been forced to flee from their homes amid scenes reminiscent of the notorious Kristalnacht in Germany. Elizabeth Hill, mother of Guildford Four member Paul Hill, has had her family home of 25 years in New Barnsley targeted since her son was released from wrongful imprisonment in 1989. During October they were forced to flee after enduring years of intimidation and violence.

Are the participants in the bogus "peace" process prepared to turn a blind eye to all of this and acquiesce in "an acceptable level of violence"? The British inspired loyalist death-squads operate a policy of "no claim – no blame", of course, in regard to the assassinations, some of which as in the case of GAA man Séan Browne have been preceded by torture.

South of the Border recent events have revealed in more dramatic form than heretofore the works and prompts and methods of Eoghan Harris and others who exercised enormous and mainly disastrous influence on what became the Official pro-Marxists or Stickies of the late '60s and early '70s. It is past time the media in general and RTÉ in particular stopped concealing the infiltration that took place by these people over 25 years and researched a few real stories for their public.

But the anti-national bias that remains, even after the removal of Section 31 censorship as amended by Dr. Cruise O'Brien, should not prevent them from telling us how the Harris fellow-traveller, who for so many years helped to set the agenda for Gay Byrne on radio, could turn up as spiritual director to the former AGSI General Secretary within a day or two of resigning the crucial post of Controller of Programmes on Radio Ireland?

Why has there been no follow up on the almost casual but very crucial revelation in Ireland on Sunday by Tim Pat Coogan that a certain media adviser to Mr. John Bruton was also apparently advising Mr. Trimble and his UUP friends – not forgetting Mr. Ken Magennis who was urged, in plain language, to refuse to answer direct questions on RTÉ, but instead "to get a hold on the interview" and remind listeners about the number of graveyards he had passed on his way here today.

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At least Derek Nally admitted publicly that he had been duped by the media wise-guys who had their own agenda. It took him only 48 hours to see through this. It would seem RTÉ has not seen through it after a quarter of a century!

There is, however, another law for another scenario as was recently seen clearly in the first long television interview your President was given by RTÉ in 25 years. Let it be stressed immediately that we have no objections to the most rigorous questioning – even from an unbalanced list of questions provided apparently by RTÉ researchers.

But one would never think from this profile and interview – confined almost entirely to 10 years out of five decades of involvement with the Republican Movement – that Republican Sinn Féin did elect two prisoner-candidates in 1955. They might have linked this clear support for the All-Ireland Republic with the four seats we gained in the 1957 General Election – one in each province south of the Border.

Then that would have led to the internment without trial four months later of the entire Ard-Chomhairle, two elected representatives and key members locally to a total of 200 internees at the Curragh.

All of this would contrast with the current media hype for two Provo MPs who are now attending at Stormont and one Provo TD in Leinster House. We say that this alleged progress is an illusion, a mirage because it involves talking in the wrong forum about the wrong issues to a joint London-Dublin agenda that does not confront the main issue that has to be faced if there is to be a just and lasting solution.

It is particularly at variance with truth and historical accuracy that a so-called “Sinn Féin” TD should enter and participate in Leinster House, 75 years after the initiation of that infamous partitionist system this year. We shall of course have our own commemoration ceremonies for Rory, Liam, Dick and Joe on December 8 next.

But Fianna Fáil in power in the 26 Counties, who used to remember this date and gained considerable political capital from it for two generations, have now agreed to hold a full State Reception, no less, on the sixth of December to mark “the foundation of the State”. This is the same hated and defective Irish Free State which was forced on the Irish people by the Treaty of Surrender a year previously and did not come into being until it was sanctioned by a British Act of Parliament.

This is too much from those who ignored the 75th anniversary of the First (All-Ireland) Dáil in 1994 until Albert Reynolds was upbraided in the United States on St. Patrick's Day for his neglect. He returned to Ireland to organise a minor commemoration in April – three months after the event.

The “Dáil” which met on September 9, 1922 was confined to 26 Counties and excluded Sinn Féin representatives from the Six Counties. My own predecessor from Longford-Westmeath, Larry Ginnell, was unceremoniously thrown out when he asked was that Assembly the real Dáil Éireann. They began the official minutes of their first

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Leinster House meeting under the heading “Volume 1/Imleabhar 1”. It was the first 26-County parliament, not the third (All-Ireland) Dáil.

There followed secret drumhead courtsmartial and unannounced executions with Catholic Church support. The importance of the legacy of these events now being honoured over the ghosts of their own former martyr-figures needs to be spelled out. Within 48 hours of the coming into operation of the Irish Free State, on December 8, 1922, those who preached law, order, morality, constitutional rights and due process, had coldly and calculatingly taken out four uninvolved prisoners of war who had been in Mountjoy since July, and shot them without trial in an act of revenge by the new Executive Council that shocked the civilised world.

It shocked even some of the British politicians who had encouraged them to deal with the Republicans after they had failed to do so. We need to remember this bloody baptism of the 26-County State 75 years after the events because the lessons are too horrendous. Erskine Childers was executed even while a Habeas Corpus appeal in his case before the Free State courts was pending.

Liam Mellows argued, in notes written in the hours before the firing squad, that there would be further evils arising from that basic evil. Within 20 years de Valera and Fianna Fáil were engaged in the same sort of railroading to the firing-squad, and even to the British hangman, of loyal Republicans some of whom had fought with him and under him from 1916 to 1923.

We recall these events not because we wish to abandon the Christian duty on us all to try and forgive but because those who have succeeded them into the second and third generation of such Free State “democracy”, actually continue to defend and boast of what was done – and may well try and resort to the same type of behaviour, or a more doctored version of it, if we allow ourselves to forget the historical record.

Is fíor go ndearna cuid de na daoine seo obair fhónta ar son na Gaeilge ach go háirithe. Is fíor gur chreid cuid de lucht an tSaorstáit gur cheart glacadh leis an Treaty, mar go raibh scéal na Gaeilge agus na Gaeltachta chomh prínneach sin fiú amháin siar in 1922. Agus ní mór a admháil gur leagadh síos polasaithe a raibh ciall ag baint leo ag an am, go háirithe maidir le múineadh na Gaeilge sna scoileanna agus úsáid na teanga i gcuid den státhóras. Ach cad mar gheall ar an nGaeilge a foghlaimíodh a úsáid sa saol poiblí? Cad faoi leathnú agus cur leis na cláir fhobhartha Ghaeilge de réir pleannanna cinnte? Cad mar gheall ar chearta phobal na Gaeltachta agus stádas na teanga i ngach gné den saol?

Ar chúl atá obair na Gaeilge ag an stát le glúin anuas ag dul. Tá a fhios ag aon duine macánta nach bhfuil eolas úsáideach ar Ghaeilge le fáil d'fhormhór óige na féire mar a bhíodh tráth den saol, nuair nach raibh an oiread sin béime ar chúrsaí

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oideachais. Tá a fhios ag na múinteoirí féin nach bhfuil Gaeilge líofa ag go leor de lucht na gairme faoi láthair.

Ach tá an INTO agus dá ndéarfainn é, an chuid acu atá gan Ghaeilge sa tuaisceart, ag brú ar an SDLP chun deireadh a chur le riachtanas na Gaeilge don mhúinteoireacht ó dheas – in áit a bheith ag iarraidh cumas Gaeilge a chur ar fáil do gach múinteoir agus gach scoil ó thuaidh. Is gearr go mbeidh scéal na Gaeilge chomh maith ó thuaidh i dtéarmaí praiticiúla agus atá sí faoi scáth an stáit a deir go bhfuil clár aithbheochana aige ó dheas.

Níl de chosaint ag an nGaeilge sna meánscoileanna faoi láthair ach riachtanas don Mháithreánach san Ollscoil Náisiúnta. Ní gá Gaeilge ar bith a bheith agat le freastal ar Choláiste na Trionóide – fiú an Scoil Dlí as a dtagann na hábhair Uachtaráin Stáit, gan trácht ar go leor den ard-aicme dlí atá in ainm is a bheith ag feidhmiú faoi Bhunreacht a deir gurb í an Ghaeilge an phríomhtheanga oifigiúil.

Ní gá Gaeilge ach an oiread le freastal ar an dá ollscoil nua DCU agus UL a bhunaigh an stát le gairid. Rinneadh riachtanas na Gaeilge a chur i bhfeidhm san Ollscoil Náisiúnta (NUI) in 1908 – nuair a bhí na Sasanaigh i gceannas na tíre ar fad. Tiocfaidh an riachtanas faoi ionsáí arís go luath, más féidir braith ar an bport a bhíodh ag an Seansailéir nua, Garret Fitzgerald, ar feadh a shaoil i réimse na polaitíochta. Eisean is mó a chaith fiche bliain ag scríobh san Irish Times agus in áiteanna eile in aghaidh “compulsory Irish”.

Bhí sé ina bhall den rialtas idir Fine Gael agus an Lucht Oibre a chuir deireadh léi mar riachtanas don Ardteist agus don státseirbhís in 1973, fiú i réimse ina mbéadh sí riachtanach de réir éileamh fiú. Mar shampla, le linn dó a bheith ina Aire Gnóthaí Eachtracha sna blianta sin, ceapadh daoine go leor gan Ghaeilge le feidhmiú thar lear in Ambasáidí na hEireann. Ní mór dúinn bheith ar an áirdeall roimh fheachtas nua, ós í seal, dírithe ar chéim síos breise don Ghaeilge.

We have been overwhelmed in recent months with reports of the Celtic Tiger – the unprecedented economic growth in the 26 Counties, which is based mostly on massive transfers of money from the EU. These structural fund transfers will soon come to an end, but control of our own affairs has been surrendered more and more, our agricultural policy is now almost totally dictated from Brussels and our rich sea fisheries are plundered by the boats of other European countries. The benefits are short-term and the drawbacks are longer-term – and it is the long-term which counts, for our children.

Yet, even in the short-term, the Celtic Tiger has many limitations – in the midst of all the hyperbole, we still have unacceptably high levels of unemployment and poverty. More than 34% of our people live at or below the officially defined poverty line. Truly, the rich get richer and, as the gap widens, the poor get poorer.

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We have a rising level of crime, accidents and violence, particularly violence against women and children, who are often subjected to many abuses.

This economic growth has been of such a character as to cause environmental degradation, in the form of pollution of air, water and even of food and drink, as the BSE problem has highlighted.

The main instrument of economic development here is now the multinational companies, who have no roots or sense of belonging here, who have taken over large sections of the wholesale and retail trade, who often do not allow Trade Union membership and who export their profits. Where now is the Culliton Report and its call for more indigenous industry?

The basic philosophy of the European Union and of those who rule Ireland today, North and South, is based on the supremacy of international capitalism and an unbridled materialism. The Celtic Tiger and its strong growth in Gross National Product (GNP) has overwhelmed our country in a selfish individualism. One of its results is the rat race and the awful number of suicides among young people, who feel that they can no longer cope in the Ireland of today. This is indeed a grim reflection on the society in which we live.

Those who have lectured us all on the value of human life see little to worry about in the toll of traffic accidents, drugs and suicides in Irish society today. A caring society is not merely one which tries, often ineffectively alas, to alleviate the dreadful consequences of late 20th century capitalist economics. A truly caring society is one which bases its model of development on staunchly human values and whose main objective is human development.

GNP merely measures flows of production, income and expenditure. It was never designed to be a measure of human well-being. If we measure our success and progress, as the politicians do, in terms of GNP, then we are indeed "navigating with a faulty instrument".

In our newly drafted Social and Economic Programme, SAOL NUA, a New Way of Life we have clearly stated that growth should be judged, not by the abundance of commodities it produces, but by how it enriches people's lives. In other words, human development is the real and important objective.

In this context, and in order to demonstrate that in what we advocate we are not being unduly or impossibly idealistic, I should like to refer to the United Nations Human Development Report for 1996. In this Report it is openly stated that "there is no automatic link between economic growth and human development – to be valuable and legitimate, development progress – both nationally and internationally – must be people-centred, equitably distributed and environmentally and socially sustainable".

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This UN Report lists five dimensions of human development which can be used to evaluate the quality of economic growth. "Good" economic growth promotes human development in all its dimensions – growth that

Generates full employment and security of livelihoods.

Fosters people's freedom and empowerment.

Distributes benefits equitably.

Promotes social cohesion and cooperation.

Safeguards future human development.

In contrast to this, the individualism of the free market has made some people materially better off but we in Ireland know well the limits of Trickle-down economics. Poverty, material, social and cultural, continues to ruin the lives of thousands of our citizens and the quality of life has been damaged for everybody, even the rich.

The UN Report also mentions perceptively that an over emphasis on production and consumption can become a form of enslavement, turning people into nations of passive consumers rather than active participants in their society.

In this year, when we celebrate India's 50 years of freedom from English colonialism we remember the wisdom of Mahatma Gandhi – "the earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need but not every man's greed".

SAOL NUA – A New Way of Life, was launched by Republican Sinn Féin in January 1993 at a time when the number of unemployed in the 26 Counties crossed the 300,000 mark for the first time.

Based on Republican, democratic Socialist, self-reliance and environmental principles, it provides a ready-made guide to local and national action in countering the evils listed here and giving progressive leadership to our people.

Next year 1998 we commemorate the bicentenary of the 1798 rising. The outstanding significance of that particular glorious but unsuccessful episode in the attempts of Wolfe Tone and his comrades to forge a new contract of United Irishmen and free our country from English control is so momentous that not even the revisionists or indeed the tourist industry can afford to ignore it.

Republican Sinn Féin's attitude to Wolfe Tone, the legacy of Tone, Irish Republicanism and its significance in the ongoing inheritance of separatism and self-reliance has been spelled out at Bodenstown last June. It will be spelled out again, at whatever price, next June when, hopefully, the sort of inspiration which the celebrations in 1898 produced will again be under way and all who claim to honour the Father of Irish Republicanism will have to state where they stand.

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We have no fear in that regard. Any additions to our political or other programmes are mere developments of the basic philosophy of power to the people, the Rights of Man and the right to self-government, the breaking of the connection with England and the establishment of a free and democratic society where the common name of Irishman is substituted for all the various religious labels.

But even this summary clearly shows the need for updating. All reference to United Irishmen, for example, must also include Irish Women – as did the Easter Proclamation of 1916.

Already in August last at the All-Ireland Fleadh Cheoil was launched Songs of 1798 – the Year of the French, a very worthy production indeed. We also commend to you the cassette and CD of 19 patriotic songs now on the market named Who Fears to Speak.

Further, our calendar for next year is devoted in a fitting manner to the people's uprising of 1798. We must reclaim the spirit of those "dark and evil days" and the self-sacrifice of the Irish people for Liberty, Equality and Fraternity during the coming year and gain inspiration from their memory.

Also brought out by Cló Saoirse/Irish Freedom Press, during the past year was Dílseacht; the story of our late Patron, General Tom Maguire and the All-Ireland Dáil. This publication is important, not only because it is alternative history and the account of a great and uncompromising Republican leader, but because it traces the progress of the All-Ireland Dáil which remained in existence as a shadow government up to 1938.

Then it delegated its powers to the Army Council of Óglaigh na h-Éireann. Tom Maguire as sole and faithful survivor of that Dáil nominated the Provisional Army Council in 1969 and the Continuity Army Council in 1987 as the legitimate successors of the 1938 body. No account of the Republican struggle in the 20th century is complete without this book.

Next year, '98 will also be the centenary of the founding of the County Council system of local government which was so important in the transferring of allegiance at local level from the British Crown to the First and Second (All-Ireland) Dáileanna in 1920-21. Though founded by the English Tories to "kill Home Rule with kindness" they were a training ground for the new generation of Irish democrats which emerged after 1916.

Republican Sinn Féin has always operated honourably in Irish local politics. We need to launch a radical campaign in preparation for the next local elections which are several years overdue and for the Udarás na Gaeltachta elections due in 1999. One of the reasons why there is so much "government by (expensive) Tribunal", why so many planning disputes end up in the High Courts, etc. is simply because local

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democracy, already greatly weakened, has been allowed to wither with successive postponements of local elections.

Local planning and rezoning scandals and ongoing Section 4 controversies were challenged by us. We put a stop to it whenever we were strong enough or held the balance of power. This time Section 31 is no more and the growth of local radio gives all of us a chance to take up the causes, the legitimate causes of our local communities in a rational and up-front manner. But we will have to work at it.

Members of Republican Sinn Féin will have to get up and be active and push out the frontiers of our access to OUR AIRWAVES that have not been as generous to our legitimate views as they should be.

The effective cancellation of even the limited local democracy in the 26 Counties has been a disgrace over recent decades. It must never be allowed to happen again. We need to start gearing local communities to raise this crucial scandal of zoning and re-zoning, of Tribunals and alleged corruption.

Meanwhile our environment is being destroyed, unplanned suburbs and developments are taking place without proper consultation, road and transport growth is unorganised. Consultation, such as takes place, seems to belong to pressure groups and vested interests, with less and less attention paid to local residents' associations or grass-roots democracy. Our candidates must have, as a first essential, honesty and integrity. After that we seek as much dedication and ability as possible. Let us get to work.

Chuir muid fáilte an bhliain seo caite roimh Theilifís na Gaeilge. Tá dul chun cinn nach beag déanta ag an tseirbhís ó shin i leith – mura mbéadh ann ach go bhfuil "súil eile" mar a deir siad féin tugtha acu de shaol na tíre, go háirithe lasmuigh de Bhaile Atha Cliath.

Ach tá sé riachtanach go gcuirfí T na G ar fáil láithreach do phobal na Sé Chontae freisin. Cheana féin tá moill ar na geallúintí a tugadh agus más fíor an scéal is déanaí, tá moill bhreise ar an tarchuradóir nua a bhí le cur i dtreo i gCo. Lú chun an chuid is mó d'oirtheach an chúige ó thuaidh a chlúdach.

Tá sé riachtanach freisin go gcuirfí ar chumas T na G féin, go luath, a cuid clár féin a dhéanamh go háirithe maidir le cúrsáí reatha, cúrsáí phobal Ghaeltachta agus cúrsáí conspóideacha chultúir, teanga agus oidhreachta.

Ach conas is féidir a bheith ag súil leis sin nuair atá Aire Gaeltachta ann anois nach labhraíonn an teanga riagh go poiblí agus nár ghlac páirt i gclár ar bith de chuid T na G nó R na G ó ceapadh í. Gheall Fianna Fáil do lucht na Gaeilge roimh an Olltoghchán go mbeadh Roinn iomlán ann a bhéadh freagrach as cúrsáí Ghaeilge agus Ghaeltachta.

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Ní h-amháin sin ach gheall siad go mbéadh aire rialtais ann a mbéadh cúram díreach na Gaeltachta air nó uirthi, duine a bhéadh líofa sa Ghaeilge agus a thabharfadh tús áite do riachtanais na teanga maidir le craolachán, oideachas, Gaeilge sa chóras poiblí agus riachtanais nua cosúil le córas ceart idirlíne don teanga.

Ina áit sin, fuair muid duine atá ag déanamh gaisce faoin £15 milliún atá Telecom ag cur isteach ina bunáit, Inis, ag an am céanna go bhfuil a Roinn féin ag iaraidh a áiteamh ar Bhord na Gaeilge pinginí suaracha a bhaint de na hirisí Ghaeilge seanbhunaithe.

Scannal eile é seo, ní h-amháin i ngeall ar an airgead suarach a íocadh le scríbhneoirí agus eagarthóirí na n-irisí Gaeilge ón chéad lá, ach gur léir anois go bhfuil gnó na ndeontas caite chuiti Bord na Gaeilge ar bhealach a fhágann gur lú saoirse cainte a bhéas le fáil ag na hirisí céanna, má tharlaíonn rud ar bith a bhfuil baint ag Bord na Gaeilge leis?

Maidir le comóradh 1798 is beag ar fad atá á rá, go fóill, faoi Mhaigh Eo bocht ná na daoine a thug an cath chomh fada le Béal Atha na Muc i gCo. Longfoirt. Cén fáth? mar gur Caitlicigh, cainteoirí dúchais Ghaeilge, ba mhó a bhí in lorras an uair úd? Tá lucht comórtha faiseanta áirithe ann ar mhaith leo a thabhairt le tuiscint gur Protastúnaigh amháin a ghlac le teagasc Tone agus Réabhlóid na Fraince in 1798. Ní fíor. Thug Gaeil bhochta lorrais go maith freisin cérbh iad a bhíor-namhaide, cén leagan amach a dhéanfadh a leas! Tugaimís ómós dóibh freisin, i Maigh Eo go háirithe!

Another task facing us in the coming year is to organise opposition to the recently-signed Amsterdam Treaty. This pact tightens the grip of the EU on our country, even further than the Maastricht contract. Under the Amsterdam Treaty, Ministers could commit all member-states to a “common defence should the European Council so decide”.

This common defence would be nuclear-based and there will probably be no further referendum on neutrality if Amsterdam is adopted next spring. How many of those who proclaim so loudly their “abhorrence of violence” will work with us to defend neutrality, or is this just another case of little bombs “No”, big bombs “OK”? In any case our course is clear.

The success of the referenda in Scotland and Wales during September were occasions for celebration. Messages were sent by Republican Sinn Féin in both cases extending congratulations and looking forward to a Celtic League in the future where a free Ireland could co-operate with the independent nations of Scotland, Wales and Brittany.

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Every move towards the weakening and eventual break-up of the so-called United Kingdom is to be welcomed but it must be borne in mind that the struggles in Scotland and Wales for hundreds of years have been constitutional and not revolutionary as in Ireland.

Evidence of the continuing repression in Ireland was contained in a report sent recently to the United Nations Human Rights Committee – now headed by Mary Robinson – from the Irish Council for Civil Liberties and the British Irish Rights Watch. The report contains allegations that some of those arrested by 26-County police investigating the death of a Special Branch man in Limerick were beaten and abused in terms designed to humiliate and degrade.

About fifteen people were involved in what the report said was “a pattern of ill-treatment and oppressive conduct in breach of the law and of Ireland's human rights obligations”. Those arrested said they were told by their interrogators that the Dublin Administration then led by John Bruton had authorised a Heavy Gang approach. The ICCL had found Justice Minister Nora Owen's response unsatisfactory so it decided to mount its own investigation.

North of the Border lawyers doing their work have been abused by British forces. An announcement was made in October of a United Nations investigation into police intimidation of lawyers. The UN team will also investigate British colonial police (RUC) collusion in the killing of Belfast solicitor Pat Finucane by the UDA/UFF pro-British death squad in 1989.

Restrictions on freedom of speech were further tightened when your President was refused entry to Canada in August. He was going to attend a 150th anniversary commemoration of the Great Starvation at the time. In April, our Vice-President Des Long was denied entry to the United States.

However, leading Provisionals and Loyalists engaged in the Stormont talks, as well as prominent DUP spokespersons are freely admitted to both countries. It all depends on one's point of view, it would appear.

At the end of May, Josephine Hayden serving six years in Limerick Prison suffered a heart attack. She was sent back from the hospital within a week but had to be returned there a month later because of crippling chest pains. A world-wide campaign for release on humanitarian grounds was immediately initiated by Republican Sinn Féin. Publicity was generated and signatures collected as far away as New Zealand. The Dublin government has refused to release her to her family but the campaign continues.

From this Ard-Fheis we send greetings to this intrepid Republican and assure her of our continued support. Salutations and pledges of support are also conveyed from here to Róisín McAliskey in prison in London, to the uncompromising Republicans in

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Portlaoise and to all Irish political prisoners, wherever they may be, who seek British withdrawal from our country and a New Ireland.

Even as the Stormont talks proceed two of the Long Kesh escapees of 1983 were arrested in recent months in the 26 Counties and held for extradition. So much for Dublin's good faith and that of London in seeking to have them handed over.

In the United States extradition proceedings are continuing against three more of the 1983 escapees while a fourth, Jimmy Smyth, was actually handed over to the British last year. Seven ex-prisoners from Ireland who have settled in the US and are raising families have had their deportation orders put on hold as long as the Provisional ceasefire lasts. On such a basis Washington's good faith is clearly in question also.

Meanwhile the Stormont talks continue within the constrictions of the Anglo-Irish Agreement (1985), The Downing Street Declaration (1993), the Framework Document (1995) and the Mitchell Principles (1997). All of these reinforce the Unionist Veto whereby 18% of the population of Ireland will dictate to the other 82%.

Tony Blair has reiterated John Major's 'triple lock' on the talks. This requires a majority at the conference, a majority in a referendum in the artificial Six-County area and lastly, a majority in the British parliament.

As nationalist numbers and self-confidence continue to grow the British Establishment seeks a compromise in order to reduce support for the national liberation struggle. They hint about an interim solution, a stepping-stone which could lead on to a free Ireland. Those of us who live in the 26 Counties know that partition was accepted as part of a stepping-stone deal 75 years ago.

Arthur Griffith pushed it on the Irish people with these words: "I have signed a Treaty of Peace between Great Britain and Ireland – what I have signed I will stand by in the belief that the end of a conflict of centuries is at hand".

Whatever about his sincerity, his political judgement was at variance with the facts as they emerged. The Treaty of Surrender brought not peace but a greater intensity and frequency in the rounds of resistance to British rule and the resultant repression. Instead of taking place in every generation, we have had them in every decade since 1921.

Where was the dynamic to keep the 26-County Free State evolving into the All-Ireland Republic? There was none in the Treaty sell-out and there will be none in a new so-called "agreed Ireland" within British rule in 1998 or whenever. The only dynamic has been and will be outside such bogus settlements and in the people's own freedom struggle.

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The stepping-stone becomes comfortable, becomes an end in itself and not a means to an end; it fossilises into a cosy constituency where political careers are safe. As has happened in the 26 Counties, those working any new interim settlement north of the Border will defend and protect British rule rather than work to bring it to an end.

Of course Provisional leaders will go to the United States and other places and tell their uneasy followers that nothing has changed, that they still seek a British withdrawal from this country – even as they sell out the All-Ireland Republic, step by step, month after month.

As Nelson Mandela says in his autobiography *The Long Road to Freedom*: “Brother, there is nothing so dangerous as a leader making a demand that he knows cannot be achieved. It creates false hopes among the people”. An end to British rule and consequent peace cannot be attained through the Stormont talks, yet this claim is repeatedly made. Republican Sinn Féin says of the compromisers: “Watch what they do, not what they say”. We have seen – and felt – the results of such stepping-stones before. This process in 1997 is no different.

On the other hand British disengagement from Ireland is not the impossible goal we are told it is. It was discussed before with British government representatives – 20 years ago. The British Secretary for the Six Counties at the time, Merlyn Rees later wrote in a letter to the *Guardian* newspaper of July 19, 1983: “The option of withdrawal was seriously considered in Cabinet sub-Committee between 1974–76”.

Rees goes on to list the opposition to such a move. You will not be surprised to hear that it was headed by the Dublin government and the SDLP. British disengagement from Ireland, accompanied by the creation of a new community of self-governing communities here, can be achieved. It requires the political will to do so together with people's resistance backed by mass-mobilisation on the ground. For all of this, hard work is essential. You have your part to play in this great enterprise.

An Phoblacht Abú!

Long live the All-Ireland Republic!