

# Republican SÍNN FÉIN Poblachtach

## Aitheasc an Uachtaráin



### 95ú Sinn Féin Ard Fheis 1999

#### Presidential Address to Ard-Fheis from Ruairí Ó Brádaigh

A Chathaoirligh, a theachtaí is a cháirde ar fad,

Arís, fearaim fíor-chaoin fáilte romhaibh go léir ag an Ard-Fheis seo, an 95ú ceann de chuid Shinn Féin. Once more you are all most welcome here, to the 95th Ard-Fheis of Sinn Féin.

The past year – since last we met together in national convention – has seen Republican Sinn Féin withstand increasing pressures to accept the sell-out of the Stormont Agreement of 18 months ago.

While leaving last year's Ard-Fheis our national leadership was subjected to a frontal assault by the 26-County Special Branch. Half of the Ard-Chomhairle was arrested under the Offences Against the State Act. Included were Vice-President Des Long of Limerick, National Treasurer Councillor Joe O'Neill (Donegal), and Editor of SAORSE newspaper and National Director of Publicity Ruairí Ó Brádaigh.

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Also held were three Ard-Chomhairle members from Armagh and Fermanagh as well as a former member of the governing body Seosamh Ó Maoileoin (Co Westmeath). It was the greatest attack on the Republican Sinn Féin leadership since 1957 when the entire Ard-Chomhairle was seized while meeting at Head-Office and interned without trial at the Curragh.

This was the high point in an ongoing campaign of arrests, harassment and attempted intimidation of our members ever since Mr. Ahern threatened publicly to "break" our organisation, which he named, three months earlier. In addition Head-Office files, account books and Ard-Fheis records and documentation generally were seized and held for six months.

Notes, rolls of film and other journalistic equipment for the following issue of SAOIRSE newspaper were also taken and held for the same period. The aim was to disrupt and disable our organisation from functioning – an attempt which was singularly unsuccessful.

Because we campaigned unremittingly for a "No" vote in the referendums the previous May and because we continue to press for British disengagement from Ireland and a new four-province federation, it has been found essential to the 26-County Administration to stifle debate and criticism of the Stormont Agreement.

The arrests following the Ard-Fheis were the logical outcome of Mr. Ahern's threats and ultimatums to us. During the interrogations over the subsequent two days it was continually put to our national leaders that we should accept the Stormont Agreement, in other words that we should finally acquiesce in English rule in Ireland.

Our leaders did not bow down under physical restraint and standing here one year later we renew our pledge never to surrender to British imperial rule in Ireland but always to strive, while we are of service, to undo it and all the injustices that go with it.

We note the absence of protest in certain quarters at this attempted suppression of freedom of political expression and its dissemination and political activity. Apparently those who broke the Sinn Féin constitution in 1986 and separated from us to go into the system are now firmly embedded in the status quo and simply do not want it disturbed.

Even while half of our leadership were in detention and all our energies were directed to secure their release, the British Royal Consort visited Dublin and was received officially. It was stated that he was preparing the way for an official visit by the Queen of England who claims jurisdiction over part of Ireland. Republican Sinn Féin will oppose any such visit while she is styled "Queen of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (sic)".

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During the year also a British warship paid a four-day visit to Dublin, while the Royal Air Force was invited to an airshow in Galway. The latter intrusion was cancelled due to a tragic air crash elsewhere, but not before a vehement campaign of protest had been entered into by our local Cumainn and Comhairle Ceantair.

For our part we refuse to subscribe to the fiction that relations between Ireland and England are completely normalised. This cannot be the case while the English ruling class exercise physical control over part of Ireland. In the past our members have found themselves in detention for the duration of such British Royal visits. This happened during the intrusions on both sides of the Border but we shall not be deterred from proclaiming our opposition.

Similarly, we opposed Mr. Blair's visit to the 26-County Assembly and picketed outside the gates of Leinster House while he addressed an institution which is one of the two pillars of the bogus peace settlement of 1921 – a surrender which never brought peace to Ireland.

The following day Mr. Ahern suggested in the London Times that the 26-County State should rejoin the British Commonwealth. Republican Sinn Féin saw this as an attempt to bring the Stormont Agreement a step further in the direction of re-integrating the 26 Counties with Britain.

Departure from the British Commonwealth 50 years earlier had a unifying effect on people and no trade or economic advantage would result from reversing that step. The previous Sunday Mr Ahern had the effrontery to pretend to honour Wolfe Tone and the United Irishmen at Dublin's Croppies' Acre while running counter to their aims and objects.

While Tone's objective – never mentioned in official circles throughout the 1798 bicentenary – was to "break the connection with England" Mr Ahern obviously wants to strengthen it more and more. Our alternative to any British Commonwealth proposal is a Celtic League in which a free and independent Ireland could act in mutual co-operation with Scotland, Wales, the Isle of Mann and even Cornwall and Brittany. But England with its preponderant weight of wealth and population would not be included.

Human rights and neutrality objectives can be furthered through the Non-Aligned Nations' Movement which includes many more former colonial peoples in the Third World than the British Commonwealth. The Rights of Man and Liberty, Equality and Fraternity can best be realised through forward-looking co-operation with peoples who were formerly colonised directly and with our Celtic cousins rather than through the outdated and powerless structures of a once-mighty imperialism.

Having failed in their frontal attack on us, the establishment politicians attempted early in December last to discredit us by linking us in the public mind with groupings

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such as the 32-County Sovereignty Movement and the IRSP and calling such a collection 'dissidents'.

Once more and for the record, there have been no formal discussions with the groups named and no 'joint-strategy' has been considered. There are deep ideological differences in that Republican Sinn Féin rejects not only the Mitchell Principles, so-called, but also the Downing Street Declaration, the Framework Documents and any other pronouncement or instrument which accepts the Unionist Veto on the freedom of Ireland.

In addition Republican Sinn Féin refuses to accept the 26-County partitionist assembly at Leinster House which actively collaborates with British rule in Ireland. We do not 'dissent' from Republican principles and the basic Republican position. In point of fact we have upheld and asserted uncompromisingly the political gospel of 1916 and of the First (All-Ireland) Dáil.

As 'we ourselves', we adhered to that position since 1986 when all of today's 'dissidents' would have us go with the tide in the direction which leads inevitably: first to Leinster House, then to the abandonment of the people's struggle, followed by acceptance of Stormont and of British rule here and finally into full absorption into the English system in Ireland.

Our analysis has been shown to be entirely correct. The succession of events over the past 13 years has proved it is in practical terms. This has been our great strength in that we perceived clearly the way the road of compromise would lead.

Having been vindicated once more we are not going to lead our followers in the direction of those who partially 'dissent' from true Republicanism or indeed towards the greatest 'dissidents' of all on the Irish political scene, the Provisionals, who are fast emulating their predecessors in Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil and the Workers' party. We are Republicans – let whoever likes be dissidents or watered-down republicans! They merely provide a straw opposition for the establishment politicians who can easily demolish them – witness the "No to Stormont" referendums 18 months ago – while denying true Republicans a voice.

The decisions reached at Stormont on December 18 last showed clearly that the proposed cross-Border bodies would be weakened while Stormont itself would be strengthened by the widening of its proposed Executive to ten to include more nationalists.

Vital areas such as agriculture, industry, tourism, strategic transport planning, education and the environment would not be among the 'north-south implementation bodies'. The cross-Border bodies would deal with the Irish language and Ulster Scots, inland waterways, aquaculture, food safety, trade and business development and EU funding programmes.

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Even control of inward investment – a crucial power – would remain at Stormont which would be sure to direct it to unionist areas for political reasons. Republican Sinn Féin asked if anyone in his or her right mind could ever imagine such cross-Border bodies growing into a ‘transitional mode’ to a free and independent Ireland.

Indeed David Trimble, with a great deal of truth, said that ‘no significant function’ would pass to them. The decisions meant that Stormont itself would be reinforced by the inclusion of more nationalists on its Executive while the much-vaunted cross-Border committees would remain as powerless showpieces unable to grow or develop.

Apart from the proposed return of the 26-County State to the British Commonwealth, another amendment to the Stormont Agreement was the denial of political status to those captured and imprisoned as a result of their continued opposition to British occupation in Ireland.

British Minister in the Six Counties, Adam Ingram, confirmed this in a letter to Tony Blair MP on July 1 1999 as follows;

“It is Government policy that, following the (Stormont) Agreement, all those arrested and remanded into custody for, or convicted of, offences after 10 April (the date of the Agreement) will be held in HMP Maghaberry or HMP Magilligan. This applies whether or not a ‘political’ motive is claimed; and whether or not any terrorist (sic) organisation to which a prisoner may claim to be affiliated is on cease-fire”.

This confirms that British policy is to abolish political status for Irish political prisoners. This policy was NOT publicised when the Stormont Agreement was being debated in April/May 1998 and is NOT contained anywhere in the text of the Agreement. It forms part of a hidden agenda which is implicitly supported by the pro-Stormont Agreement parties: SDLP, Provisionals, the Dublin administration, etc.

A number of Republican prisoners in Maghaberry Jail in Co. Antrim have been seeking separation from Loyalist prisoners and from ordinary prisoners since their arrests in November 1988 and January 1999. These Republican prisoners have been isolated from each other and their families’ safety is also threatened on visits to their loved ones.

They have been strip-searched repeatedly and sentenced to 28-day periods of solitary confinement. One of them, aged 20, has been removed to Hyde Bank Juvenile Prison on a technicality. Another, Tommy Crossan of Belfast, was subjected to a serious and unprovoked attack by an anti-Republican prisoner on May 25 last. Stitches to his head were necessary and he also suffered swelling and bruising to his head and chest. The prison governor’s ‘guarantees’ of protection have been proved false. This is a prescription for further – not less – conflict in this country.

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Bobby Sands and nine of his comrades laid down their lives in the historic 1981 hunger-strikes for recognition as political prisoners. This was the culmination of a prison campaign which began with the Blanket Protest in 1976. Is their sacrifice and the sacrifice of many others down the years to be discarded now in exchange for seats in Stormont and British pay-cheques?

The Maghaberry prisoners make four demands: (1) separation from non-Republican prisoners; (2) recognition as a group; (3) the right to have their own spokesperson, and (4) a wing or landing of the prison to themselves. We must campaign to make the British government learn from history in order not to repeat the mistakes of the Thatcher administration which led to so much trauma, suffering and tragedy.

Political status is still being denied to Josephine Hayden in the Dickensian conditions in Limerick Jail. She is the only woman political prisoner in the 26 Counties and has been incarcerated with up to 16 ordinary female prisoners in C-Wing which has only eleven cells. The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, known as CPT, has condemned this wing repeatedly, yet the Dublin administration still uses it as a women's prison.

Because she is the only woman political prisoner and rejects the Stormont sell-out Josephine has been denied political status for the past four years of a six-year sentence. In addition she has suffered heart problems and been denied release on humanitarian grounds. On September 15 last eight thousand signatures calling for her release which were collected in Ireland, England and the USA were handed in to the Dublin Department of Justice.

Republican prisoners in Portlaoise Jail in the 26 Counties who are faithful to the All-Ireland Republic and have not sold out to the latest partition settlement are also under continued pressure in regard to their political status. It is our belief that the Dublin administration will seek to end that status once all the Provisional prisoners have been released.

A further secret addition to the Stormont Agreement not exposed to the Irish people during the debate in April/May 1998 has been the decision of the 26-County administration to join the N A T O-led Partnership for Peace without the promised referendum. This is the pay-off to President Clinton for US intervention in Irish affairs.

The Fine Gael spokesperson on Foreign Affairs, Gay Mitchell, revealed this during the year when he said that from the moment what he called the 'Good Friday Agreement' was signed membership of the PfP became inevitable. The US ambassador to NATO has said that the difference between NATO itself and the PfP is 'razor-thin'.

Speaking in Leinster House while in opposition in March 1996 Mr Ahern said; "While the government may reassure the public that there are no implications for our

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Neutrality, and that may be technically true at this time, it will be seen by other countries as a gratuitous signal that Ireland is moving away from its neutrality and towards gradual incorporation into NATO and the WEU in due course". (29/3/96).

The anti-colonial credentials of the Irish was the great asset to UN peace-keeping duties but this has been undermined in a "fundamentally undemocratic" manner (Mr Ahern's words) by the present Fianna Fáil administration. They have reneged on their 1997 election manifesto on foot of which they secured power.

That manifesto stated: "We oppose Irish participation in NATO itself, in NATO-led organisations such as the Partnership for Peace, or in the Western European Union beyond observer status". The political promise to hold a referendum before joining NATO, given by the major 26-County parties at the time of Maastricht in 1994, is therefore worthless also.

Of course, the upper echelons of the army of the 26-County State have launched themselves into party politics by lobbying for membership of PfP in order to secure lucrative posts for themselves and more advanced equipment for their military machine.

The former neutrals of Europe are influenced by other considerations: in Switzerland's case these are economic because of multi-national companies role in that country; in Sweden the production of arms and finding a market for them is of great importance.

Where is the advantage for the 26-County State? Its role will be to provide manpower – or cannon fodder – in the interests of the big powers. This is a far cry from the idealism of the United Nations Charter and UN operations. The Irish Times/MRBI opinion poll of last May showed 71% of voters in favour of a referendum on PfP but this was disregarded by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael.

The public are in favour of peace-keeping duties and this is possible through a reformed UN which we in Republican Sinn Féin are on record as advocating about the time of its 50th anniversary. We believe that peace-keeping should be performed through the world-body with collective responsibility and not by power-blocs like NATO with their own selfish agendas.

In point of fact the ever-expanding NATO usurped the role of the UN in the world by its war against Serbia during the Kosovo crisis last spring.

The Irish people did not approve or wish to stand by while a war of ethnic cleansing and genocide was being again pursued by the Milosovic regime, but they wanted the UN – not a power bloc like NATO – to act.

In this context the the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has stated that "under the UN Charter the Security Council should be involved in any decision to resort to force".

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In an address to the French National Assembly last December marking 50 years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights he also said that military intervention without Security Council consent "would not be far from a return to the system of spheres of influence founded on the specific interests of states rather than the principle of shared-responsibility".

Mr Annan went on to say in Paris that "some are tempted to act without Security Council consent. This would create an unfortunate precedent and put into question the first article of the UN Charter". We ask is the world slipping down the slope to greater conflagrations and ignoring the United Nations at the behest of the Great Powers? Is the 26-County State not assisting in this process and without reference to the people?

The one Superpower which remains appears to seek to use the UN when it suits its interests and to ignore it when it does not. Meanwhile it owes the world body billions of dollars and refuses to pay up.

Republican Sinn Féin believes it is time to reform the process of decision-making at the UN after more than 54 years, to halt the slide to individual or group action by states in their own selfish interests – a practice which made the League of Nations powerless in pre-WW II times – and to get the whole process of collective responsibility back on track with a reformed UN.

Here at home we must increase public awareness to the erosion of neutrality and indicate to the Irish people the type of free Ireland we wish to see realised. In the case of East Timor we witnessed footdragging by the UN because of the interests of world capitalism and economic imperialism.

Indonesia, the aggressor in occupation of East Timor for 24 years, is a huge market of more than two hundred million people and as a country is very rich in natural resources. As such the multi-national corporations have a huge vested interest there and the small East Timorese population of less than a million counts for little as far as they concerned. Besides there is a lucrative arms trade to Indonesia engaged in by Britain, France and other powers.

Republican Sinn Féin through its Foreign Affairs Bureau was early in the field on this issue. In the late 1970s it was in solidarity with FRETILIN, the East Timorese resistance movement of the time and worked in cooperation with it at international conferences when the case of East Timor had not got international recognition.

Today we stand by the risen people of East Timor. We demand the full implementation of their independence by the UN. We note the use militia death-squads acting in collusion with Indonesian occupation forces and their attempt to create another "Ulster" situation through partition.

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All of this is familiar ground to us in Ireland; so far they have avoided the pitfalls that disrupted our struggle. We congratulate them on their achievements after 24 years of conflict during which they lost one-third of their population.

Nearer home a number of Breton and Basque activists who seek the independence of their countries have been arrested and charged by French police during September and October. Among those held is the editor of *Combat Breton*, the monthly paper of the Breton independence movement EMGANN, Denez Riou. Denez attended and addressed our Ard-Fheis several times in the past ten years.

He and his comrades have been charged with "providing logistic support and shelter" to Basque activists, but the more likely reason is to silence Breton and Basque spokespersons. The editor of *Breizh Info*, a Breton weekly, Charlie Grall was also held for some weeks before being released on medical grounds.

In a dirty war against Corsican separatists, the head of the French military police on the island has admitted he directed his officers to burn down a restaurant frequented by Corsican activists. He claims a former French direct ruler ordered the attack and seven military policemen and gendarmes are in custody awaiting trial. As the small nations of Europe struggle for freedom and their place on the earth, we assure them of our support and call for the release of their prisoners.

Still on the international scene we deplore the intervention of the Vatican during the year on behalf of the former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet. During the reign of terror of his regime, following their seizure of power from the elected Allende socialist government, relatives of the tortured, the murdered and the disappeared appealed publicly to the Pope. They were ignored. The Vatican's action now in support of Pinochet is nothing short of disgraceful and will certainly damage their credibility around the world.

We welcome the release after 19.5 years in United States prisons of eleven Puerto Rican freedom fighters. A further five are still held and our New York-based Patron, George Harrison has been active in their support as well as for the liberation of Puerto Rico, an island colony of Spain which the USA annexed in 1898.

Here in Ireland we welcome the release of political prisoners but regret the manner in which they are used as political hostages each time the current partition process is in difficulty. When a critical decision regarding the recognition of Stormont was to be taken at the Provisional Ard-Fheis a year and a half ago, the "Balcombe Street" group of prisoners were released on parole to attend.

Last April they were finally released after 23.5 years in jail. Their grim ordeal in English prisons exceeds in length that endured by the Fenian prisoners of the 1880s and 1890s. We would be lacking in human feelings if we did not extend céad míle fáilte abhaile

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to them but we deplore their use as pawns by both London and Dublin in the political game to draw the Provos into the British system in Ireland.

North of the Border the current partition process is kept alive on the denial of the facts of nightly attacks on nationalist families and the “ethnic cleansing” of them from unionist-majority housing estates. The grenade, pipe-bomb, and petrol-bomb are in constant use. The killing of grand-mother Elizabeth O’Neill last summer is the inevitable result of such methods.

But the calculated and cold-blooded assassination by car-bomb of human rights lawyer Rosemary Nelson in Lurgan last March was an attempt to intimidate the entire nationalist community into compliance with British rule. Earlier death threats from the British Crown Forces did not intimidate her from acting in the most professional manner on behalf of her clients, which included political prisoners and the people of the Garvaghy Road.

We are convinced that there was British forces collusion with loyalist death-squads in her death, just as in the killing of lawyer Patrick Finucane ten years ago. Her brave testimony to the United Nations and the US Congress exposed British attempts to silence defence lawyers in the Six Occupied Counties.

In the weeks before her provocative slaying there were more than 20 attacks on nationalist homes, making blatantly clear that the Stormont Agreement has not resulted in the lessening of attacks on the lives, rights and property of the nationalist community in the Six Counties. We repeat our call for an independent international investigation into her death. Nothing less will be credible and will command public respect. The final result in the Lee Clegg paratrooper case shows how nationalist families can be mocked by British justice in Ireland.

Meanwhile the then British Secretary Mo Mowlam announced in the face of all the evidence that “the loyalist ceasefires are holding”. At the same time undercover agents such as Brian Nelson and William Stobie are used to manipulate loyalist organisations in implementing British policy. Then even though the Provisionals had been exposed in importing arms and taking nationalist lives, the British Secretary maintained that their ceasefire also was intact.

The killing of nationalists, the hundreds of attacks on homes and the forcible expulsion of nationalist families are all to be disregarded by London and Dublin so that the process can totter on. At what stage does the price become too high? Will it be only when the cost is extended beyond the beleaguered nationalist community? To date the process has been fed with the suffering of nationally-minded people. We must face the facts of “ethnic cleansing”.

While the Garvaghy Road confrontation was not forced to a show-down this year – indicating that the hostile acts on such occasions are controlled and directed – there

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may well be a pay-off in a secret deal. Not so the residents of the Lower Ormeau Road who are to be congratulated on their passive resistance to supremacist parades. They showed great restraint in the face of the brutality of the British forces.

The Patten Report into the British colonial police (RUC) proposed cosmetic changes all intended to entrap nationalists into actively assisting in the maintenance of English rule here. Republican Sinn Féin appeals to the nationally-minded population not to become tools of the British government as did many of the RIC – often with tragic consequences.

Once more British rule is being updated in an attempt to make it more acceptable both to nationalists and internationally. We warn: the leopard does not change its spots; instruments of imperial and colonial rule in Ireland remain just that.

One of the most pernicious aspects of the Report is article 15.2 in which it has the temerity to state: “all community leaders including — sports authorities should take steps to remove all discouragements to members of their community applying to join the police and make it a priority to encourage them to apply”.

This is obviously aimed at the GAA and were the Association to implement Patten it is fair to ask would this mean recruiting posters for the new RUC displayed on its premises? Would it be required to have application forms available to its members? Would senior officers of the colonial police be asked to be available to come and speak to players?

The First (All Ireland) Dáil on April 10, 1919 decreed that “members of the police forces acting in this country as part of the forces of the British occupation and as agents of the British government be socially ostracised by the people of Ireland”. That attitude – and our attitude today – is in stark contrast to the Patten Report machinations.

But Patten goes further. It recommends that the present ad hoc collaboration with the Gardaí be changed to a structured relationship and exchange of personnel which will have the inevitable result of discrediting the 26-County police and making them also direct instruments of British rule.

The Sunday Times (August 22) speaks of a “joint training initiative aimed at breaking down barriers” and says that “a small number of RUC staff from community relations, Special Branch and press office” have already undergone a pilot course at the Garda training centre at Templemore. Above all else “RUC expertise” in “policing serious public disorder” – God help us – would be marketed to the 26-County police.

Later we read in the Irish Times that more than 70 RUC men were in Templemore learning international peace-keeping duties. Patten does not say if this amalgamation in effect of the two forces will result in a return to the pre-1922 name of the Royal Irish Constabulary or the RIC – some of whose members were known as the Black-and-Tans, notorious in Irish history and around the world.

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If the English government does persist in seeking to rule in Ireland, let it be by its own British army, and let the world see naked armed force at work here. Nationally-minded people: do not collaborate with imperialism and colonialism, under whatever guise. Patten says the Northern Ireland statelet is "worth policing" and "worth preserving". We beg to differ.

Of course the British paratroopers who massacred 14 Irishmen in Derry on Bloody Sunday have been granted anonymity by British courts for the forthcoming inquiry. The courts in Dublin, on the other hand, have refused to relatives the evidence surrounding the Dublin and Monaghan bombings in which 31 Irish people, a French woman and an Italian man were slaughtered.

On May 20 last, a delegation of six Ard-Chomhairle and Comhairle Uladh personnel visited London and delivered a letter to 10 Downing Street for Mr Tony Blair. The communication included copies of ÉIRENA – A New Democracy; Towards a Peaceful Ireland and SÁOLNUA – A New Way of Life.

The letter submitted that there was only one way out of the impasse (which is still there six months later). That was that all other options had been tried down the years with the exception of the sole alternative which would really work in the long-term – final British disengagement from Ireland.

The answer came publicly from Mr. Blair in Belfast three weeks later on June 15. "The constitutional issues" had been "resolved", he said. The British government – with the support of the Dublin administration – was staying in Ireland. One factor, no doubt, made him sure, for the time being: the position of the Provisionals.

Their spokesperson, Francie Molloy, as reported in the Sunday Times of March 28 last, described that position very accurately: "We are prepared to work an Executive. We are really prepared to administer British rule in Ireland for the foreseeable future. The very principle of partition is accepted and if the Unionists had that in the 1920's they would have been laughing".

But the present unrest shows that even those who support British rule feel insecure eighteen months after the Stormont Agreement. Other British Prime Ministers have likewise boasted that they had "pacified" Ireland but always another generation has arisen to dispute England's claim to rule in any part of our country. There are elements of the Irish, we hasten to assure Mr. Blair, who cannot be bought off or co-opted into the British system, and the "constitutional issue" is never resolved short of an end to English rule here.

It is noteworthy that even as his Ard-Fheis changed the Provos' constitution to accept Stormont, Mr. Adams stated that he did not "accept partition", that he did not admit the "legitimacy" of the northern state. The Provisionals sit in Leinster House,

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a partitionist parliament into which elected representatives from the Six Counties are not admitted.

Likewise, the Provos sit in Stormont, a partitionist assembly into which representatives from the 26 Counties are refused entry. But then de Valera disputed the legitimacy of Leinster House – even while participating in it – until of course, he achieved power through it. After that he forced the Free State on the people through coercion.

Agus muid ag druidim i dtreo na Mílaoise nua tá riachtanas ar leith ann dúinn-ne, Poblachtaigh, scrúdú a dhéanamh as an nua ar fad b'fhéidir ar scéal na teanga náisiúnta agus an méid atá nó NACH BHFUL déanta againn go léir i dtaobh na ceiste fíorbhunúsáí seo.

Éinne a deir nach bhfuil tábhacht le scéal na Gaeilge mar chuid den iarracht athmhúsailte agus saoirse sa chéad seo nó i ré ar bith, níl le deanamh aige nó aici ach machnamh a dhéanamh ar an mbéim a leag Margaret Thatcher le déanaí ar an “English-speaking world” mar réiteach ar a cuid fadhbanna féin.

We Irish Republicans are fully aware of the refuge and the hope and indeed the moral and physical support which certain people and groups have always given to Ireland's struggle for freedom down through the years. This was done most particularly from Fenian times, when the anniseoirí who fled the Starvation at home in the 1840s were getting on their feet within the WASP culture in the US of that time. These great people, from John Boyle O'Reilly to O'Donovan Rossa, from Joe McGarrity to Mike Flannery placed the winning of Irish freedom and independence at the top of all our agendas, on both sides of the Atlantic.

While the Americans adopted English as their lingua franca or common language after independence from England, the Israelis on the other hand – whatever may be said about the foundation of that state – did revive a long dead language for every aspect of life in a single generation. Tá ceachtanna le foghlaim againn, Gaeil, ón iarracht sin: an dea-shampla agus gur féidir é a dhéanamh.

Modern technology, including mass-media, Internet and all the rest need not necessarily work against the development of languages and cultures other than the great American computer tongue. Wales, Catalonia and even our own limited efforts with radio, television and also the increasing supply of authentic Irish material, song, music and literature that we can now have on CD ROMs, etc all prove the point.

The restoration of the Irish language, the development of native culture and art, the stimulating of independent thinking outside the confines of Hollywood and the West End, depend first and foremost on commitment and will-power, on the simple belief that the Irish nation has a right to its own place in the sun, and that Irish talent can and should be developed de réir dúchas agus gnás na muintire.

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German failed to be adopted as the common language of the new USA in 1784 only by a single vote. Does anyone seriously believe the history of the 20th century would have been the same had German been chosen as the language of central government and constitutional debate and law in the American capital 200 years ago?

Tá muid-ne i Sinn Féin ag tarraingt ar chomóradh céad bliain ar bhunú Shinn Féin i 2005. I measc na bpointí polasaí ba thábhachtaí ó thús, bhí béim ar an daonlathas, ar thógáil Dháil Éireann do mhuintir na h-Éireann uilig le h-obair chrua agus le h-allas.

Central to that doctrine was abstentionism, by which was meant withdrawal from Westminster and all other British-sponsored attempts to distort sovereign Irish democracy, but IN CONSEQUENCE an even more active political regime here at home at local, provincial and Irish national level. This programme also meant self-reliance, standing on our feet and having our own voice in world affairs.

All of these matters brings us to the consideration of the local elections in the 26 Counties last summer. The handful of candidates which went forward under the banner of Republican Sinn Féin deserve our commendation. They were people of integrity and honour. We congratulate Séan Lynch on his re-election to Longford Co. Council for the fourth time.

We regret that Joe O Neill was hospitalised for the period of the election and was unable to campaign actively. As a result he lost the seat he had held for 25 years on Bundoran Urban Council. He is with us again today, fortunately restored to health, and we look forward to a successful contest next time around.

On this subject, it is necessary to stress the need for full and proper preparations for the next local elections scheduled for 2004. Hesitancy and ill-preparedness will not suffice and are unworthy of a great Cause such as ours.

We seek to serve the people, to work for them and to give leadership to them – all of which can be effectively done at local council level. We shall return to this question because we are in deadly earnest in regard to it. Preparation begins now.

Right through this decade of the 1990s we have seen corruption and scandal in high places. First of all the Beef Tribunal, to be followed by the Planning Tribunal, the Payments to Politicians Tribunal – Mc Cracken, Moriarty and Flood have exposed to public view the sickness at the heart of Leinster House political life, to be followed by the Public Accounts Committee and its revelations of massive DIRT tax evasion in the upper echelons of the business and financial sectors.

Ansbacher and such terms have entered our vocabulary and are part of the parlance of the street. It is little wonder that the turnout in the recent Dublin by-election was at an all-time low level at 28% of the electorate. For our part, we have

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honesty and integrity on our side; it is a question of what we have lost personally – not what we have gained – as far as we are concerned.

In contrast to all the talk of the Celtic Tiger economy in the 26 Counties came the United Nations Human Development Report published on July 12. Poverty here, with 15.3% of the population living in “human poverty”, is the worst in 17 Western states, apart from the US. We dropped three places, to 20th, in the Human Development Index of the UN.

Economic markets have dominated the process of globalisation and the benefits and opportunities have not been shared equally. The process has driven “a deeper wedge between richer and poorer countries and between people within countries. In 85 countries, people are worse off than they were a decade ago”. Here in Ireland we must involve ourselves with the victims of such exploitation and motivate them to action to relieve their plight.

Indeed it is noteworthy, as reported in the Sunday Tribune of December 20 last that “the billionaire American currency speculator George Soros has emerged as the largest single contributor (at £30,000 sterling) to the non-party ‘Yes’ campaign during the referendum” on the Stormont Agreement. So said the report and accounts published in the third week of December. Some strange people are supporting the current Pax Americana in Ireland and not for altruistic reasons either. It is hoped, no doubt, to make money out of the “newly-pacified” Ireland. Meanwhile, the Irish News (Belfast) reported on August 17 that long-term unemployment among nationalists stood at 72%.

At this time Republican Sinn Féin is engaged in the current Údarás na Gaeltachta elections to take place on December 4 next. Our candidate, Tomás Ó Curraoin of Bearna, is contesting the new constituency which is confined to the Gaeltacht areas in Galway. He is fighting hard and is favourably positioned in a new and smaller constituency with six seats – double the number since last time. He has a good base in the 600 plus votes he polled last summer because of a great overlap in the Co. Council and Údarás constituencies.

Republican Sinn Féin is campaigning on a programme of self-rule for the Gaeltacht and that the Údarás should have responsibility for and control of housing, planning, roads, agriculture, fishing, the environment, tourism and infrastructure in Gaeltacht areas as well as language and industrial development. We wish Tomás Ó Curraoin well in his efforts.

In Ottawa, Canada on October 8, President Clinton spoke of stopping “a couple of (Irish) drunks ” from scrapping so that he can claim a “Foreign Affairs achievement” in the eyes of his own domestic situation. But far more damaging and hurtful to Irish people was his attempt to perpetuate the great English lie that the so-called Irish

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problem is a case of the Irish “religious tribes” fighting among themselves and that the colonial master has nothing to do with it.

The anti-colonial, anti-imperialist struggle in Ireland goes back more than 800 years – not just Mr. Clinton’s 600. English Christian invaders plundered, raped and stole from the weaker Christian native Irish – the stuff of Cogadh Gael re Gallaibh – for the first 350 years before the Reformation occurred. Someone should give Mr. Clinton an elementary lesson on Irish history. We would, if we could, but our leading members are denied US visas. If he cannot analyse the British problem in Ireland, there is little chance of his solving it.

One of the worst aspects of the Celtic Tiger economy – apart from the poverty level – is the spiralling house prices and the situation facing young couples starting out in life together. The Kenny Report on building land of the early 1970s is totally ignored. It said that local authorities should have the right to acquire all land zoned for housing at current use cost plus 25%.

They should retain ownership of that land, house buyers would only have to buy a house and not the land, either building on it themselves or leasing it to individuals, builders or housing associations. The councils could charge a rent on the land so that house buyers would only have to buy a house and not the land. The ground rent to the council would help to pay for local services. That is one way, as proposed by Kenny, to bring down housing costs. Other means have been proposed by voluntary bodies to stop the ravages in this regard of the Tiger economy.

OECD surveys on Social Partnership Agreements from 1987 to 1994 have found that their by-products include exclusion from the labour market and from the income market. Now we experience the primacy of economic over social progress and we must demand that social welfare should increase at the rate of the average increase in wages and salaries.

In a BBC 2 television series on “Loyalists” last March, John D. Taylor of the UUP stated that the British-backed loyalist death-squads were “a significant factor” in the counter-revolution now taking place. They had “achieved something the security forces could not have done”, he said. Loyalist spokesperson Bobby Philpott stated that the British occupation forces “could not have operated without such assistance”. Between 1989 and 1993 it was claimed 126 uninvolved nationalists and 26 political activists and members of their families had been killed by loyalists.

Surely the discovery 10 days ago in an Orange Hall in Co. Antrim of 300 British Army intelligence files on persons in the nationalist community indicates, for all who want to hear, the continued collusion between British forces and loyalist death-squads. Yet publicity on this find was low-key: there were no banner headlines, no editorials, no in-depth television or radio programmes. The linkage between British forces and the loyalist gangs must be concealed at all costs – while Bill Clinton’s version of events is

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carried throughout the world and the British government is exonerated of all responsibility for the situation in Ireland.

Also transparently clear to all is the counter-revolutionary path at present being followed and where it leads. It began with acceptance of the partitionist and collaborationist parliament at Leinster House; next the people's struggle was turned off, to be followed by entry to Stormont; it is a short step from there to complete absorption into the British system and the voluntary and shameful national surrender of arms – the first ever in Irish history.

There are those who have detached themselves from the Provisionals – and from the Officials before them – who still accept the 26-County State, the first step on the way to constitutionalism and counter-revolution. Some of these who have learned nothing from such experiences – repeated five times over in this century – have indicated publicly that they want to “take-over” our movement.

We reply once again that we are not for sale or take-over by any group with one foot in the constitutional grave. But all are welcome to join if they approach us in good faith. We have a structured organisation in Republican Sinn Féin with ceremonies each Easter in every county in Ireland. This year they were held in London, Liverpool, Glasgow and New York as well. We will not be swallowed up; we shall maintain our own identity as the Republican Movement. That is essential if the Republican ideal is not to perish.

The secret additions to the Stormont Agreement of a year and seven months ago continue to grow in numbers as the partition process develops. First (1) was Mr. Blair's “letter of comfort” to David Trimble in May 1998 regarding the surrender of arms; then (2) came Mr. Ahern's proposal that the 26 Counties return to the British Commonwealth; later (3) was the decision to join the NATO-sponsored Partnership for Peace; and also (4) on the list of treachery was the British government's decision to deny political status to and attempt to criminalise anyone imprisoned for continuing the struggle against British rule in Ireland.

Comrades and friends, the implementation during the year of our decision taken at last Ard-Fheis to open an office in Belfast was the single most significant step on our part in recent years. The securing of a suitable premises at 229 Falls Road in the heart of West Belfast will give a much needed focus and rallying point to our growing membership in Ulster.

Of course, with our national office in Dublin almost paid for, it is necessary to gather support now for this new venture. As we said before, we are not going home; we are digging in ; we are here for the long haul.

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With our Belfast office operating in the near future and our alternative to the current partition process updated and amplified we will be in a much stronger position to give leadership. ÉIRE NUA is an unanswerable proposition.

It makes it much easier, after British disengagement, to take account of regional characteristics and problems. It will bind the country's external unity with internal diversity. Preserving that regional diversity is the traditional task of a federal system. But its main purpose is to safeguard the nation's freedom. And remember above all: we will be judged, not on the labels we attach to ourselves, but on the political positions we adopt.

A cháirde, we face the future with confidence and on firm ideological ground. There is work to be done. Let us go from here and bend ourselves to the realisation of a noble concept in all its aspects.

Victory to the All-Ireland Republic!

An Phoblacht Abú!