



99ú Sinn Féin Ard Fheis 2003

Presidential Address to Ard-Fheis from Ruairí Ó Brádaigh

A Chathaoirligh, a theachtaí is a cháirde ar fad,

Céad míle fáilte romhaibh ag an Ard-Fheis seo, an 99ú ceann de chuid Shinn Féin.

When last we met in national convention the restored Stormont had just been suspended – for the fourth time in as many years and the seventh occasion since 1972. All of this demonstrates the chronic instability of English rule in Ireland. More than a year later it has still not been re-assembled – the artificial means cobbled together to administer an artificial statelet remains in crisis.

The past year has been marked by the stepping up of repression on both sides of the British-made Border in Ireland. During February last the Donagh area of Co. Fermanagh was subjected to a three-day siege by large numbers of heavily-armed Crown Forces. Homes were ordered to be evacuated and one Republican family in particular was singled out for special attention. Mickey and Mary Lavelle were

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arrested by the RUC on the first day, Mickey's brother Jimmy the following day and on the third the couple's son Emmet was taken into custody.

Another son, Michael junior was viciously set upon by members of the RUC and badly beaten – also on the third day – as part of the terror tactics. Two other children still in their teens were ordered from their home at twelve midnight without anywhere for them to go. This was to allow the attackers to smash in the rear door of the house the following morning and to conduct a search without the knowledge, consent or most importantly the presence of any family member or independent observer. Was this tactic used to allow alleged incriminating evidence to be planted?

Nine months later Mary Lavelle is still on bail, while Emmet was given bail eight months subsequent to his arrest. Mickey Lavelle remains on remand in Maghaberry Prison, Co Antrim. All of them face what we believe are politically-motivated trumped up charges.

Although the nationalist community was outraged the local SDLP representatives and spokespersons were conspicuous by their silence possibly because of their membership of an RUC liaison board and a district police partnership committee? One clergyman did speak out publicly to the press on the question of bail for Mary Lavelle, the mother of eight children.

Throughout the year, nationalist families were terrorised in their homes by loyalist gangs and in many cases forced out of them, especially in the Larne, Antrim town, Coleraine and North Belfast areas. All the while British forces harassed nationalists but loyalists were given a free hand.

Meanwhile, south of the border the trial took place in the Special Non-jury Court in Dublin's Green St. of the Limerick Eight who had spent a year and a half on remand since before Christmas 2001. The proceedings took three months and cost the 26-County State several million Euro. Seven of the eight were acquitted while Pat O Shea was sentenced to four years. He was a victim of the ongoing campaign of State harassment directed against Republican Sinn Féin, a campaign aimed at criminalising anyone who rejects the Stormont Agreement of 1998 and opposes English rule in Ireland.

This campaign of harassment, smearing and felon-setting, with occasional show-trials, has as its purpose the retarding of the growth and development of Republican Sinn Féin. Both the British government and the Dublin administration have stated publicly their intention to crush all opposition to the re-jigged Stormont set-up, which is sectarian in nature and has failed to date.

Our members and supporters will not be intimidated by this campaign of coercion, but will continue to organise and recruit throughout Ireland, putting forward unashamedly the Irish Republican agenda of ending British rule and creating a New

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Ireland negotiated by the Irish people themselves. We wish to compliment all of the Limerick Eight on their uncompromising and unflinching stand over the eighteen months.

During July and August another well-publicised show-trial resulted in Michael Mc Kevitt being sentenced to 20 years on the word of a paid agent provocateur employed by the FBI and the British Security Services.

The occasion was availed of to slander members of the national leadership of Republican Sinn Féin. The truth is that Mr Rupert made political demands on us promising an unlimited supply of dollars on condition that we amalgamated with the 32-County Sovereignty Committee. Republican Sinn Féin feels vindicated in its decision, on ideological grounds, to reject Mr. Rupert's demands and his money, and to have nothing to do with him.

Meanwhile, meetings during the year between the British Supremo for the Six Counties and the 26-County Minister for Justice indicate the drafting of yet further draconian legislation aimed at coercing Republicans.

The presence at these meetings of the RUC/PSNI Chief Hugh Orde and the 26-County police Commissioner only reinforces the view that the real agenda behind the sectarian Stormont Agreement is the bedding down of English rule here by means of increased collaboration between the British forces of occupation and those of the 26-County State. It is becoming clearer that if the ailing Agreement is again patched up the hammer will once more fall on true Irish Republicans who refuse to accept British rule in Ireland.

While Republican prisoners in Maghaberry struggle for political status, the proprietors and managers of premises across the Six Counties who agree to host functions in aid of the prisoners' dependants are intimidated by former comrades and forced to refuse bookings.

What will the situation be when the Provos don the uniform of the British police in Ireland.? The example of de Valera's Broy Harriers, who consisted in the main of former IRA Volunteers, gives us a clear indication of what to expect. They will enforce British rule with gusto as they hound former comrades who continue the struggle.

When young people see these roles acted out in public, they will come to realise who is on England's side in all of this and who stands for the freedom of Ireland. Many older people have come to realise the position already, but coming events will clarify it for all. Republican Sinn Féin must be there to give the lead.

During this summer the Republican prisoners in Maghaberry escalated their protests in support of their demand for segregation from loyalist and ordinary prisoners. This limited demand was won and the prisoners were moved to separate

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accommodation. We here at this Ard-Fheis congratulate them on their partial victory on the well-worn road to restore political status.

The attitude of many of the prison staff in implementing this gain has been grudging, to say the least. The questions still needing to be resolved include the continuation of closed or screened visits, the use of sniffer dogs, the lack of education facilities in the Republican prisoners' own area, the minuscule size of the exercise yard and the despicable attitude of prison warders towards families.

The most immediate and pressing problem is the matter of securing separated visits. Families have to travel from the gate to the visiting area and back again with loyalists. This has exposed them to harassment even to the extent of being pursued by loyalists on the journey home from the prison. It is a subject that needs priority and speedy resolution. The prisoners and their families require constant support and with the coming of Christmas fund-raising must be stepped up.

During the year our members took part in protests against the imperialist war launched by the Bush administration in Washington and the Blair government in London against the people of Iraq. This was done contrary to the United Nations Charter and we marked it out as the first of the "resource wars of the 21st Century" forecast by Jacques Delors a decade ago. Control of the supply of oil was the real issue here.

We participated under our own banners and with our own literature with the 100 000 people who demonstrated in the centre of Dublin. We opposed at Shannon and other centres the action of the 26-County Administration in allowing US warplanes to refuel at that Airport and to overfly Irish airspace.

Such action was a slavish and flagrant breach of Irish neutrality and had to be opposed. Now the White House and Downing Street want the world, including Ireland to supply bodies to police their occupation of Iraq and funds to reconstruct that country. The responsibility for these tasks rests with those who waged a horrific war of conquest on the people of Iraq.

George Bush came to Belfast in the middle of that war to be greeted by – among others – the SDLP and the Provisionals who had publicly opposed the war. This exercise in hypocrisy was engaged in to lend weight to the US support of the imposition of a civil rights type solution under British rule in the Six Counties.

The powerful Washington establishment has consistently supported the stronger side in various conflicts as evidenced by their involvement in Palestine where they have sponsored an Israeli dictated so-called peace process which has led only to a daily death toll of Palestinian men, women and children.

Nelson Mandela condemned the unilateral action against Iraq by what he called "people without a vision, without a depth of thinking". Speaking at NUI Galway, where

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he received an honorary degree last June, he put the issue clearly without naming the US specifically: "Any country which went to war outside the remit of the United Nations represented a danger to the world". No weapons of mass destruction were found in Iraq, neither were any links to Al-Qaeda.

The recent World Trade Organisation conference at Cancún, Mexico where the US and the EU joined forces to face down the Third World was a failure because the one remaining superpower and its ally could not impose their will on the billions on this planet who survive in abject poverty.

The words of Johann Hari writing in the Sunday Tribune of September 14 deserve to be quoted: "A concerted global effort to deal with poverty could yield amazing results.

"There is no mystery. The checklist is well known: End agricultural subsidies in the rich world. Open our markets to products from poor nations. Allow developing economies to protect themselves, as we did when we were emerging from poverty. Allow the poor to manufacture life-saving drugs. Cancel all poor world debt.

"Just as the global anti-apartheid campaign delegitimised that system, we may need another vast movement to transform the systems that are betraying the poor". The Fortress Europe that Republican Sinn Féin warned thirty years ago would be built by the EEC against the Third World has indeed come to pass.

About this time last year the second referendum on the Nice Treaty was pushed through, having failed the first time. One reality needs to be borne in mind in this regard. That is that more than half a million people have consistently opposed the militarisation, centralisation and domination by the larger states in the EU. The big lie proclaimed by the Establishment about Nice was that it was about enlargement, when in fact it was about making internal arrangements in the EU prior to enlargement, to the disadvantage of smaller states.

Right on the heels of Nice comes the EU draft constitution from the Intergovernmental Conference. This will not be a permanent settlement for the European Union or any permanent or lasting balance between the powers of Brussels and those of its member states. The practice of an EU Treaty escalator, carrying the people of Europe's nations further and further into an ever closer union, with new powers for Brussels constantly emerging, is to continue. It is set to roll on relentlessly.

This draft EU constitution in Article 40 obliges the 26-County State to spend more money on defence, and commits the State to mutual defence thus destroying Irish Neutrality. In practice this neutrality no longer exists since the current administration participated in the illegal conquest of Iraq by turning Shannon Airport into a US airbase. We must oppose the emerging EU nuclear armed superstate.

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The proposed constitution in Article 1. 10.1. says: "The Constitution adopted by the Union's Institutions in exercising competences conferred on it, shall have primacy over the law of the Member States". Clearly States that put themselves under a Constitution with such an article can no longer regard themselves as independent or sovereign in the way the world's other 170 or so States are. EU Members will come closer to being subordinate states or provinces within a superior European Federal State. We must oppose this move as never before and build on the half a million voters who have steadily and constantly rejected the tightening of the EU grip.

Having been more than 30 years in the making, an Irish Language Act has at last been enacted in the 26-County State. It is a first step in moving towards guaranteeing the rights of Irish speakers. Is féidir cúis a chur in aghaidh chomhlacht poiblí má déanann sé faillí ina dhualgas an scéim a chur i bhfeidhim. Tig le duine é sin a dhéanamh go pearsanta nó ligint don Chomisinéir Teanga an cás a chur.

You may have your case heard in Irish in court, but still the judge can waive the right in criminal cases. This is not good; in fact it is the worst aspect of the legislation.

Ní thiocfaidh an t-Acht í bhfeidhm go cionn trí bhliain eile. Deirtear gur mhithid an mhoill seo chun am a thírt do na comhlachtaí poiblí a chuid scéimeanna a dhréachtadh agus dul in oiriúint don scéim. Ba leór bhlian amháin leis an ngnó sin a dhéanamh.

Braitheann éifeacht an Achta ar an Aire Ghaeltachta agus an Aire Airgeadais chun é a chur i bhfeidhm. Muna mbíonn dóthain airgid ar fáil ní éireoidh leis an dlí nua seo. De réir Alt 1 (5) den chéad sceideal den Bhille is féidir scóp an Achta a leathnú do rannóga eile den eacnamaíocht, mar shampla, comhlachtaí teileachumarsaide, bancanna agus comhlachtaí árachais. Dá luaithe a déantar é sin sea is fearr.

Most Irish language bodies are satisfied with this Irish Language Act. It is a start but it needs to be amended to ensure effectiveness. Feicfear le h-imeacht aimsire cé'n toradh a bhéas air.

This year being the bicentenary of Robert Emmet's Rising, the event was suitably honoured on both sides of the English-imposed Border. Cló Saoirse – Irish Freedom Press had a highly successful launch during April of a book entitled Bold Robert Emmet by Seán O Brádaigh which has been described in one review as "short and easy to read" and having the "very real benefit of being tempting to the reader while retaining historical integrity".

In September at the very date and hour of Emmet's execution a worthy commemoration was held at St Catherine's Church, Thomas Street, Dublin, the scene of his sacrifice. Emmet's Rising was a repudiation before the world of the Act of Union as a British-imposed settlement in the aftermath of the great National Uprising of 1798.

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During October, Downpatrick, Co Down was the scene of another fitting commemoration, this time at the grave of Thomas Russell in the Church of Ireland cemetery. Russell, a native of Cork, was a United Irish leader and close friend of Wolfe Tone who stood with him and others on Cave Hill, outside Belfast, where they made their famous vow "never to desist in our efforts until we have achieved the independence of our country".

Russell was the first Librarian of the Linenhall Library in Belfast and honoured with him were all 22 Republicans who were hanged in 1803, especially the other two executed in Downpatrick and the two who died for Ireland on England's gallows tree in Carrickfergus, Co Antrim. Later in Dublin, the annual Bobby Sands Memorial lecture was devoted to Robert Emmet and the Rising of 1803. Throughout the bicentennial year, no voice was raised to declare that the time had come to write Emmet's epitaph ——No, not yet.

At our Ard-Fheis of 1992, SAOL NUA – A New Way of Life, our Social and Economic Programme was finalised. It was published at the end of January 1993, a time when unemployment in the 26 Counties reached the all-time high mark of 300 000. At last year's Ard-Fheis a resolution from Belfast was adopted instructing An Ard-Chomhairle to "review, update and publish SAOL NUA". A lot had happened in the intervening ten years since the "New Way of Life" policy document was first published.

Over the past year the work has been completed, as directed by the Ard-Fheis. It remains to be published. To give you just a flavour of the new updated text the following passages are quoted:

"For nine decades of the twentieth century, one out of every two persons born in Ireland was forced to emigrate. Those who remained experienced unemployment rates of up to 20% in the 26 Counties and 15% in the Six Counties at various times.

Even during the period of the Celtic Tiger, one in every four households and one in every five people in the 26 Counties were living in poverty. These figures are from Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) data and are based on the EST+RI 50% poverty line. This poverty line, which is used in many European studies, is a line which is half average income, adjusted for family size and composition. On this basis, the ESRI figures show a substantial increase in poverty between 1987 and 2000.

"The United Nations Human Development Report, launched in Dublin in July 2003, contains some shocking statistics for the 26 Counties:

9.3% of those born today are not expected to survive the age of 60;

22.6% of adults lack functional literacy skills;

12.3% live below the poverty line, as defined by the UN.

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“This means that the 26-County State is second only to the United States as being the most unequal society in what is known as the Developed World, that is second worst out of 17 countries. The ‘United Kingdom’ , which includes the Six Counties, is ranked fifteenth. Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands have the lowest level of poverty.

“The substantial increase in employment opportunities which came with the Celtic Tiger was brought about by the arrival of EU structural funds and the encouragement of foreign, mainly US, capital investment by reducing tax on corporate profits. A lot of the new employment is in low-paid service jobs. A significant price has been and will be paid for this strategy.

“Irish sea fisheries have already been decimated by the fleets of other EU states and tens of thousands of farmers have been driven off the land. Indigenous industry has been neglected. Housing accommodation is outrageously expensive. The tax base has been narrowed in such a way that our spending on Social Protection Expenditure has become the lowest in the EU. This expenditure includes spending on healthcare, unemployment, disability, old age, family/children and initiatives to deal with social exclusion.

“The advent of the Euro currency has deprived us of one of the pillars of national sovereignty, a national currency and the right to set our own interest and exchange rates. All of these developments place us in a precarious position whenever the foreign capitalists begin to pull out and locate elsewhere in the world wherever they can find cheaper labour.

“All of this free movement of capital has produced a real danger that the Irish banking system will fall completely into foreign ownership.

“Meanwhile, family farms are being eliminated and the rural economy is collapsing. There is a lot of real poverty, inadequate health and education services and increasing unemployment as foreign capitalists pull out of Ireland. This in turn produces grave social problems and personal misery for thousands of individuals and families. Emigration, the safety valve which let politicians off the hook for generations, could well return.

“But quick-fix solutions, based on a sell-out of national sovereignty, natural resources and national identity is a poor substitute for developing our own resources according to the needs of our own people.

“The economic growth of recent years has been based on production and consumption, the consumer society, and has been achieved at the expense of many positive values. In financial terms, it has enriched the elite and left the majority relatively worse off. Selfishness and individualism are replacing the old Irish traditions of neighbourliness and social responsibility.

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“In this regard, two quotations from commentators are significant:

“ ‘Ours is a time of patented locks, burglar alarms, barbed-wire fences, neighbourhood watch and vigilantes!’ – Zygmunt Banman in Globalisation: The Human Consequences (1998).

“ ‘A regime which provides human beings no deep reasons to care about one another cannot long preserve its legitimacy’ – Richard Sennett in The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism (1998).

The Programme of Immediate Action lists sixteen issues. Some will be deleted and some amended but at least one will be added as follows: “Campaigning against the exorbitant price being demanded for building land by a small number of speculators who have managed to acquire large tracts and the campaigning for the implementation of the Kenny Report”

That ends the extracts from the updated SAOL NUA . It remains to have it printed and published and to put it before the people. The sixteen points for Immediate Action can be implemented on the ground straight away.

As part of the filching of our natural resources another step was taken by the EU in October when the so-called Irish Box to protect fisheries off our coast for 50 miles was replaced by a “conservation area” of one third its size. The new area stretches a little further south than the Irish Box but it excludes the western, north-western, eastern and south-eastern waters entirely. The Irish Box was introduced when Spain and Portugal joined the EEC in 1985.

The cod-fish is gone from many areas of the world due to over-fishing and if the spawning grounds off the Irish coastline are not preserved, other species, for example hake, are in danger of being fished out entirely. Under the new arrangements even big foreign factory ships will be permitted to fish right up to most of the Irish coastline.

Another step backwards for the fishing industry is the taking over of the marketing functions of Bord Iascaigh Mhara (the Irish Seafisheries Board) by An Bord Bia and An Bord Glas of the Dublin Department of Agriculture. These matters of importance to coastal communities can be raised at next year’s local elections in the 26 Counties and the following year’s Udarás na Gaeltachta elections.

A further stage in the concerted campaign by the British government and the 26-County State to normalise English rule in Ireland was seen during the year when Gaelic football matches were held between the 26-County police and the RUC/PNSI, The British Army of occupation and 26-County forces at the Curragh and finally between Leinster House representatives and the RUC/PSNI.

The motivation behind the Dublin Administration’s pressure on the GAA to drop its Rule 21 is now crystal clear – it is part of the agenda which underpins the Stormont

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Agreement. Republican Sinn Féin points out yet again that a British military or policing presence in Ireland is neither acceptable nor normal, but rather represents the root cause of conflict in our country. These matches have nothing to do with sport but everything to do with collaborationist politics.

The vice-chair of the RUC/PSNI policing board Denis Bradley put a question to those opposed to the Stormont Agreement: "Do they or do they not accept the sovereignty of the Irish people?" The response is that the two concurrent referenda held under duress in geographical fragments of Ireland purported to cede or surrender sovereignty over the Six Occupied Counties to England. The answer is No; we do not accept such a surrender.

Similarly when the Provo ex-prisoners committee, Coiste na nlarchimí, called for the lifting of the bans preventing its members from serving in the British police in Ireland or joining "district policing partnerships", they – like Mr Bradley and his kind – accept and surrender to British sovereignty in the Six Counties.

Republican Sinn Féin repeats its call of last May for full disclosure about the events surrounding the Dublin and Monaghan bombings of May 1974 which resulted in the biggest loss of life in the present conflict. It commends the work of the Justice for the Forgotten group of relatives and deplores the delaying tactics of the British government whose lack of co-operation has frustrated the work of the inquiry during the past four years.

In this regard we would seriously question why the hearings of the Barron Commission established by the Dublin government were held in private. The revelations of the British-sponsored Stevens Report were partially released only but served to highlight the fact that the English government have used Loyalist Death Squads as another arm of its military machine in Ireland. Republicans have been pointing this out since the early 1970's. The Dublin and Monaghan bombings were very much part of the "dirty war" which Britain waged against the Irish people.

The findings of a delegation from the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture, published in September, serve only to confirm what many Irish Republicans, mainly young people, have experienced at the hands of the 26-County police, whether on the street, at work or in custody. Following visits to a number of police barracks the delegation found that there was credibility to allegations of abuse made by people who have been in police custody.

Republicans have for long borne the brunt of a concerted campaign of intimidation. In many cases young people have been arrested and released without charge as often as five times in a twelve month period, as well as being subjected to raids on their homes and random body searches. We welcome these findings but we feel that while the 26-County police remain unaccountable and have recourse to some of the most draconian legislation in western Europe, for example the Offences

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Against the State Acts, human and civil rights will never be secure within the 26-County State.

Also in the 26 Counties the official policy in recent years of keeping general taxation down has resulted in "stealth" taxes, i.e. charges on many services, both centrally and locally administered. The recent imposition of refuse charges in Dublin is but another example of this policy in action and it has proved to be a flashpoint. In general these imposts do not take into account the ability of the taxpayer to pay. We commend our members and supporters, and all involved in the anti-bin charges campaign.

However we would enter a caveat in this connection: the last thing that the most vulnerable in society want is the privatisation of the refuse service with its spiralling charges and absence of waivers for the unemployed and the destitute. We would point out that as our policy documents EIRE NUA and SAOL NUA state, effective change can only be brought about by local communities taking control of their own affairs, true democracy in action.

The Justice Commission of the Conference of Religious in Ireland (CORI) in its interesting pre-budget submission issued during October called for an increase in the lowest social welfare payment by at least 12 Euro for a single person and 20 Euro for a couple. CORI recommends among other things that income tax should not be increased, but that corporation tax should be to 17%, that capital gains tax be raised and that the levy on financial institutions be added to. CORI has always championed the least well off in our society whom unjust taxation has always hit the hardest.

Ireland has perhaps the largest wind resource in Europe, and could be a net exporter of electricity if even a small portion of this resource was harnessed. Ireland is also over 90% dependent on imported energy sources, a figure which is increasing rapidly as our native peat resources deplete. The 26-County State is already 30% ahead of its permitted CO2 emissions agreed in the Kyoto protocol, under which emissions taxes over €1 BN per annum could be charged in 2008. The building of wind farms will help reduce these fines in the future.

Governments on both sides of the Border have completely failed to develop this wind resource to supply the country with a clean and secure energy supply. The recent AER 6 renewables contracts resulted in over 80% of the renewable energy contracts going to the ESB and Bórd na Móna, leaving many small-scale operators out in the cold. Republican Sinn Féin recognises that community and small-scale ownership of wind farms has been the hallmark of the highly-successful wind energy regimes in Denmark and Germany. We call on the 26-County government to pay a higher price for energy from wind to operators large and small, which will ensure that wind farms to be economically-viable, need not be placed only on high mountains,

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where they are in conflict with delicate eco-systems, as was seen in the last week in Co. Galway.

The year that has passed has seen planning permission granted by An Bord Pleanála for the country's first large-scale waste incinerator near Duleek in Co. Meath. Despite increasing waste separation, reaching over 50% in at least one city, the Dublin government is pushing ahead with its policy of building the large "cancer-factories", despite opposition by tens of thousands of local people. Republicans must oppose Environment Minister Cullen's plans to include waste incinerators among the fast-track planning route for critical infrastructure.

The slick-horror waste advertisements on television urging people to re-use, reduce and recycle are undermined by the fact that, apart from one paper mill in Dublin and one glass factory in Fermanagh, the country has no significant recycling facilities. The ordinary people are not the problem – they will recycle when given the opportunity to do so – but Governments must encourage the recycling industry here, and thus provide jobs in Ireland from our waste resources. Over 90% of the materials separated by citizens is being exported to the Third World rather than being recycled here in Ireland.

The only glass factory in the 26 Counties, the Irish Glass Bottle Company in Dublin which engaged in large-scale recycling of glass, was allowed to be sold off while the Dublin Administration stood idly by. Many of the issues mentioned here can be raised in the local election of next summer and it is encouraging to note that candidates have already been selected in Limerick and Galway. For them the campaign has got under way.

We look to other areas to follow suit. All areas must contribute in one way or another and the sooner the better. Issues include energy from our natural resources, (wind, gas and possibly oil), fishing, waste disposal, transport, housing policy, and most importantly, planning including County Development Plans and Spatial planning.

In the Six Occupied Counties a survey carried out last March by the University of Ulster confirmed Republican Sinn Féin's analysis of the Stormont Agreement five years earlier. We warned that it would only further entrench the artificial divisions created among our people by Britain, as it was based on a sectarian head-count.

That it has fostered sectarianism is borne out by the figures. In the period 1996 to 2001 the proportion of people who believed that relations between the two communities had improved fell by 22%, backing for mixed areas fell by more than 20% among Unionists from 81% to 59%, whilst among Nationalists it fell from 85% to 72%; support for mixed workplaces has also fallen substantially among both communities.

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According to Dr Gillian Robinson of the University of Ulster School of Policy Studies: "The indicators suggest a marked deterioration in community relations and a distinct retreat towards single-identity communities since 1996". Similarly, a poll conducted in February by Queen's University and the Belfast Telegraph highlighted the growing frustration of powerlessness felt by the Unionist population.

In that same month of February Republican Sinn Féin launched in Belfast An Address to the People of Ireland with a special appeal to the people of the Unionist persuasion. It pointed out: "We believe that neither London nor Dublin can guarantee the future welfare of the people of Ulster. Only the people of Ulster themselves can do that – and they can best achieve it by taking their rightful place, as equals, in the historic Irish nation, where their rights would be guaranteed by a new constitution and they would have access to real power".

As attempts continue to patch together what is a fatally flawed and sectarian Agreement it is time to look again at what is the only credible alternative to ongoing conflict and division. With trust foundering on all sides, we ask everybody to consider again our ÉIRE NUA programme for a four-province federal Ireland, with optimum devolution of powers down to community level.

The Address continues: "The nightmare of the Nationalist community still endures: watchtowers, patrols and checkpoints still operate, prisoners are denied political status and sectarian attacks and killings continue. Now, the Unionist community also experiences a sense of apprehension and insecurity, as the certainties of the past give way to uncertainty, confusion and bewilderment".

Our Address was stated in an attached statement to be a clear statement of Irish Republicanism as we had inherited it from our predecessors over two centuries. We had taken a positive attitude in it and hoped for reciprocation to it. Other parties were engaged in a never-ending wrangle towards a short-term solution which was bound to fail in the medium to long-term. We believed – and we still believe – that the framework of an enduring, inclusive and just solution lies in the tenets of Irish Republicanism.

We added that we considered the Address worthy of notice and careful study and appealed to the media to treat it accordingly. Apart from the Irish News (Belfast), Carn, (the quarterly journal of the Celtic League), the BBC Radio Ulster Talkback Show which did a live radio interview with the Republican Sinn Féin President in recent weeks, the media appeared to ignore our initiative to Unionists.

It seems as though an editorial line to promote the Stormont Agreement at all costs and to reject all appearance of an alternative is being strictly enforced. However there have been some responses from individuals and these are being followed up on and contact is being maintained.

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Also in recent weeks – on October 21 – Mr Adams stated that the Agreement “provides the context” in which the Provos and the Unionists “will, as equals, pursue their objectives peacefully, thus providing full and final closure of the conflict”. He added: “We are opposed to any use or threat of force for any political purpose”.

Now, Republican Sinn Féin bases its stand on the fact that Ireland is a sovereign nation, and sovereign nations the world over have the right to defend themselves and to resist foreign aggression. We state that Ireland is no exception to this principle. We state further that there will be no “full and final closure to the conflict” between Irish Republicanism and English imperialism and colonialism until the British government signals to the world its intention of leaving Ireland forever. We reject Mr Adams's statement.

At present an election campaign is taking place to restore the Stormont assembly. It is not a free and fair election. Under an edict of Margaret Thatcher in 1989 all candidates in Stormont or local council elections in the Six Counties must, to secure nomination, subscribe to a political test oath to (a) disown publicly the organisations of the Republican Movement and (b) to deny the right of the Irish people to resist English rule in Ireland.

This is not democracy. It is not even what is known as “civil rights”. There are no political test oaths in England, Scotland or Wales. There are none in the 26-County State. It is a basic civil right of all citizens in a true democracy to stand for election irrespective of their political views and beliefs. If one accepts English rule in Ireland one can contest this election. If not, one cannot. Therefore Republican Sinn Féin cannot take part in it. We are people of our word.

We are engaged in distributing many thousands of leaflets and hundreds of posters conveying this message. Because it is not a free and fair election we are asking people to reject it by either Boycotting the poll or Spoiling their votes. In that way they will be supporting civil rights to the Irish nation and an end to English rule. It is not the right of an occupying government, or of any government, to reject an individual's candidature by virtue of a political test oath.

As has been stated already, this is the bicentenary year of Robert Emmet's Rising in 1803. He, with the men and women of 1798, set a course for the Irish nation with their appeal to Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter under the common name of Irishman which will, we believe, eventually bear abundant fruit. In conclusion, then, let us repeat the “solemn obligation” which Thomas Russell, hanged in Downpatrick in 1803 , Wolfe Tone, Henry Joy Mc Cracken and others took on Cave Hill, overlooking Belfast:

“Never to desist in our efforts until we had subverted the authority of England over our country and asserted our independence”.

An Phoblacht Abú! Victory to the All-Ireland Republic!

Republican SÍNN FÉIN Poblachtach