



Sinn

Féin

Policy

Document



INTRODUCTION



The prerequisite for a lasting peace in Ireland is the existence of democracy. Without democracy there can be no settlement, no economic stability, no end to injustice or partition. The denial of national democracy creates the conditions for conflict, perpetuates injustice and division and deprives the Irish people, North and South, of a free and open society in which economic prosperity and social equality can be achieved.

Ireland is the most underdeveloped country in Western Europe. It has the highest unemployment and emigration rates, the greatest levels of poverty and the least ability to create indigenous economic growth. This is the legacy of the British evasion of our country.

The primary task facing the Irish people today is the resolution of the national question and the establishment of an Irish democracy in which the Irish people as a whole can decide their future. Therefore, Sinn Féin's primary objective has been to keep the demand for national self-determination firmly on the political agenda. For us this is a core part of any peace process and an essential step in building a more just and egalitarian society for all the people of this island.

The development of such a peace process is an ongoing one, and has at its political core the need for:

- A new agreement between London and Dublin to end partition;
- Inclusive talks as a means of resolving the conflict;
- A programme for national reconciliation.

The adoption of such procedures would allow a real peace process to develop.

All elements in the conflict and all institutions of Irish and British society have a responsibility to

encourage such a process. Irish people can live together in peace. How peace is established is the challenge and the responsibility facing us all.

Sinn Féin's pursuit of peace through dialogue, discussion and debate, in private and in public, with a range of groups and individuals across the political and religious spectrum have borne fruit in the current national and international concentration on the issue of peace in Ireland. Most significant of all has been the dialogue between our president Gerry Adams and the SDLP leader John Hume.

In April 1993, as a result of their discussions, they issued a joint statement which accepted that the most pressing issue facing the people of Ireland and Britain today is the question of lasting peace and how it can best be achieved. The statement accepted that "an internal settlement is not a solution" and that "the Irish people as a whole have a right to national self-determination".

In September the two leaders said that they had made "considerable progress" in their discussions aimed at the creation of a peace process which would involve all parties. From September 1993 onwards the political agenda in Ireland and Britain has been dominated by this peace initiative. It has won widespread support among the Irish people, support manifested on the streets and in the media. As a result of it, national and international opinion is focused on the need for peace in Ireland and on the issue of self-determination, which lies at the core of the conflict. In the 26 Counties the national question is at the centre of the public debate. The central role of Britain in reinforcing unionist intransigence has also become increasingly evident.

Peace, real and lasting, remains the central part of the republican programme.

■ Please note, some aspects of this document may need to be updated. A full update will be done after the Ard Fheis. The Sinn Féin Foreign Affairs policy document is also currently being updated. Sinn Féin has more detailed policy on a number of issues contained in publications including the *Local Government Policy Document* (1992), *Democracy or Dependency — The Case Against Maastricht*, an updated document on EU policy, *The Economics of a United Ireland* (February 1994), and the party's discussion document on the peace process *Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland*.



Every British effort to rule Ireland has failed. The Irish people are the main victims of this failure. The Government of Ireland Act was not a solution. Seventy years after its enactment, unemployment and emigration have reached unprecedented levels in both parts of Ireland. The gap between rich and poor is widening. Sinn Féin calls for an all-Ireland democratic economic plan to develop an integrated economic strategy through consultation with industry, trade unions, political representatives and local communities. Its primary objective would be to tackle unemployment, poverty and discrimination. This would require a massive investment of capital, particularly in local companies, a properly structured and financed training programme which prepares workers for real jobs, and greater accountability of the DED, IDB and LEDU.

The Six Counties

There must be an end to structured political discrimination with government funds being fairly distributed to areas of greatest need. There must be an end to political vetting and an end to the destruction of public-sector jobs through privatisation and cutbacks.

The Six Counties has seen no real improvement of the dire state of its economy. Although the British government claims that unemployment has fallen below 100,000, this still represents, even in their distorted terms, a jobless rate of 14%. Unofficial estimates by trade unions and other bodies place the real figure much higher. For example, the West Belfast Economic Forum, in a report published in May 1991, revealed that the real unemployment figure was probably closer to 151,000 or 20.7%. Several reports, most recently by the Northern Ireland Economic Research Centre (NIERC), have further predicted a serious rise in unemployment.

The economy of the North is characterised by a heavy dependence on public spending (63% of the Six Counties GNP is made up by public-sector spending and 40% of the workforce is employed by the public sector) a severe weakness in manufacturing industry, high unemployment, welfare dependency and an uncontrolled rise in the price of the most basic commodities such as food, fuel and clothing. The general standard of

living, measured per head of the population is 25% lower than that in Britain and the gap is widening.

Sinn Féin believes that partition has artificially divided the Irish economy, creating two separate underdeveloped and dependent economies. The Six Counties is dependent on the British economy without any powers of economic development or initiative of its own. It has no power to control capital movements, to set up state industries of its own, or to vary the exchange rate so as to promote economic and employment growth. The population of the Six Counties amounts to only 2% of the population of the 'United Kingdom'. It is a tiny minority in an area on the fringe of British economic development and its only future lies in an all-Ireland democratic economy.

The British government economic strategy published as *Competing in the 1990s* supposedly heralds a fundamental change. In summary, it proposes that improved competitiveness will be the criterion for government aid, that a greater subsidisation of training rather than physical capital will occur and that decreased amounts of aid will be available for locally-owned companies. However, this strategy is not only confused, but it implies a decreasing emphasis on job creation with resulting higher levels of unemployment.

Sinn Féin also believes that the publicity given to the job creation activities of the IDB and LEDU have to be viewed with a degree of scepticism. The NIEC in 1990 stated that less than half the jobs which the IDB announced since 1982 were never created, and the record of LEDU does not appear to be any different.

British government proposals to privatise health and education and hospital services as well as local council services must continue to be vigorously opposed. Privatisation, with its emphasis on maximising profits, inevitably results in poorer services for the consumer, increased prices, lower wages and reduced protection from exploitation for employees.

Sinn Féin demands the introduction of a statutory minimum wage. In the Six Counties a significant proportion of the workforce is estimated to be on low pay. The average weekly income in the Six Counties is £134.01, compared to £172.01 in Britain.

Almost 23% of the Six Counties' population have incomes under £50.00 per week.

Poverty resulting from low pay and high prices is more likely to be found within the nationalist community. Sinn Féin calls for a vastly improved standard of social wage, eg increases in child benefit or other benefits and services that the low paid are entitled to.

It is estimated that 20% of the North's workforce is made up of part-time workers. Part-time workers suffer discrimination in terms of pay, status, working conditions, job-security rights and opportunities as well as benefit entitlements. Eight out of ten of these workers are believed to be women. Sinn Féin believes that part-time workers are entitled to the same employment rights as full timers. All workers, whether full or part-time, should be paid a fair wage.

Part-time workers should be entitled to the same benefits as full-time workers — these should include:

- Long-term sickness benefit;
- A minimum hourly wage;
- Discrimination against women part-time workers should be ended;
- Child-care facilities should be available for parents who want to become full time;
- Part-time workers should be allowed to join pension schemes on the same basis as full timers;
- Holiday arrangements, bonus schemes, tea breaks and general working conditions should be on par with full-time workers;
- Part-time workers should be entitled to the same rights to sick and maternity pay as full timers;
- Part-time workers should not be discriminated against in terms of training and promotion.

The European Commission has published three draft directives on the issue of part-time workers which member states are expected to have had in place by 1992. Sinn Féin gives qualified support to these directives while recognising that there are areas of concern not covered by the proposed legislation.

The British government went to great lengths to sell its revised fair-employment legislation as tough and effective. However, a leaked document from the Department of Economic Development (DED) in September 1992 proved the hollowness of the British government claims. It stated that: "On all major social and economic indicators Catholics are worse

off than Protestants." Catholics are two-and-a-half times as likely to be unemployed as Protestants. "Catholics are more likely to experience long-term unemployment, Catholics are significantly less likely than Protestants to hold professional, managerial or other non-manual positions... there is a greater provision of grammar-school places for Protestants than Catholic children. Significantly more Catholics than Protestants live in public sector housing and experience overcrowding". The document also states that this situation is unlikely to change significantly over the next decade in spite of strengthened fair-employment legislation. The DED accepts that the persistence of "serious difference in the social and economic conditions experienced by Catholics and Protestants" is "central to the continuing divisions" in the Six Counties.

Sinn Féin proposes:

- Clear and comprehensive legal powers to eradicate discrimination and to ensure that equality for all is realised;
- Support for the McBride Principles abroad and for all campaigns for equality in the Six Counties;
- Affirmative action as the key to redressing the imbalance in the workforce shown by successive FEC reports;
- The gross imbalance in the unemployment ratio must also be addressed vigorously with a timetable for its eradication;
- An end to the system of political vetting of community and voluntary groups.

Sinn Féin does not believe that the eradication of discrimination can be achieved within the confines of the Six Counties state or under the auspices of a British government. Nevertheless, the responsibility to tackle this historic and structural problem lies with the British government as creator of the Six-County state. Sinn Féin believes that the ultimate criterion of any legislation is the actual effect of its implementation, it must lead to an end to sectarian discrimination in employment within tangible timescales.

Agricultural employment in the North has plummeted by 17,000 or 30% during the past 20 years. Farming incomes are well below average industrial earnings. The reason for this lies in the unequal nature of farming — where 30% of farms account for 70% of production. For the remaining

majority, farming does not provide full-time employment. These trends are likely to continue with the current changes in the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) bound to accelerate the exodus from the land. The CAP policies for their part, have consistently favoured the larger farms vis-a-vis the smaller ones, mainly by linking subsidies to output. A solution has to go beyond farming income to provide employment in rural areas through an integrated rural-development programme. Only this way can rural poverty, depreciation and unemployment be effectively tackled.

The British government 'job creation' agencies have failed to direct potential employment towards the most disadvantaged rural areas. The increasing concentration of services such as post offices, local schools and health centres in the district towns has led to the further run down of the remote rural areas. This is exacerbated by the decline in public-service employment following the withdrawal of these services.

To counter this process Sinn Féin calls for:

- An increase in EU structural funds, independent of any quotas;
- No dismantling of CAP supports until improved alternative structures have been put in place;
- Regional spending to be targeted more directly into the areas where it is most needed;
- A prioritisation of job creation outside farming in the rural areas;
- A reversal of the decline in social services in rural areas;
- The elaboration of a comprehensive Rural Development Plan with full input by the farming community.

The 26 Counties

The fundamental aim of any state's economic strategy must be to provide a secure, stable and decent standard of living for its people. The Dublin government has failed to do this. There are over 300,000 unemployed and more than one million live in poverty while billions of pounds are taken out of the economy by multinationals. The government response to this is to 'scapegoat' the unemployed as a 'solution' to the unemployment crisis. This prompted Sinn Féin to unify its jobs and social-welfare campaigns. Sinn Féin

opposed the Maastricht Treaty, is fighting social-welfare cuts and campaigning for jobs.

In the Maastricht referendum campaign, Sinn Féin supported the National Platform in pointing out the devastating, deflationary effects of moves towards EMU, as well as the adverse effects on Irish independence and neutrality. Sinn Féin strongly supports the efforts of the Irish National Organisation for the Unemployed, which is mobilising to begin the fightback against the corrupt system that has consigned so many to the dole or the emigration boat.

Sinn Féin wants to present a visionary and credible alternative based on a 'decentralised socialism' that would be realistic, flexible and adapted to the needs of the Irish people. For example, Sinn Féin has proposed the establishment of County Development Boards with wide powers and resources to undertake economic activity based on local knowledge, needs and accountability. Sinn Féin is also in favour of establishing a state bank as promised in the 'Programme for Government'. A state bank is essential if the scandalous overcharging of ordinary bank customers, the massive export of capital and the shortage of venture capital for industrial development is to be tackled.

As Ireland's economy has become more integrated into the European market, our agricultural problems have intensified. Irish agriculture is truly in a state of crisis and this is despite the fact that agriculture has been traditionally our biggest employer and our largest exporter. Thousands of Irish farmers have had to abandon the land. Small to medium farms have been hardest hit. Those who are dependent on such farms for their livelihoods are the real victims of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) price support system which has favoured the wealthiest 20% of farmers on this island. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was of course not designed to develop Irish agriculture. Instead of arguing at EU level for an agricultural policy which recognised the need to develop agriculture in the so-called peripheral areas. Twenty Six County governments have settled for cash pay-offs. Of the benefits received by Irish farmers under CAP, 80% goes directly into the pockets of the top 20%. Under CAP 2 and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), farmers will continue to be forced off the land, with increasing unemployment and rural depopulation. Countless Irish farmers are paying the price today for expanding as they were encouraged to do in the 1970s. Many are

now unable to meet repayments for land, machinery and stock which they were persuaded to purchase under the false impression of an impending economic boom in the agricultural sector.

As a result of EU policy on food surplus, a series of disincentives have been aimed at Irish farmers. Quotas and subsidies have been cut again and again, leading to an exodus from the land by those who had come to depend on intervention for their very survival. Poverty, unemployment and emigration are the options confronting the farming community as farm incomes have fallen drastically.

There is an increasing awareness nowadays of the need for an integrated programme of rural development if the countryside is to lose neither its character nor its population. Although there is an emphasis on the creation of small rural businesses, on agri-tourism and on farm diversification, the dice is still heavily loaded against the farming community.

The 26 Counties owns nearly 20% of the EU sea area yet is allowed only 4% of the catch. This scandalous situation is compounded by EU restrictions on the size of a fleet which is compatible with the low level of its quotas. The Irish fishing industry must be allowed to develop. Sinn Féin proposes that the Irish Fishing Industry should be allocated quotas which reflect its potential for development and investments should be made in the upgrading of the fishing fleet, harbour facilities and the development of fish processing.

Over the last year a number of important agencies responsible for the development of economic policy in both the Six and the 26-County states have expressed the need for greater economic links within the island of Ireland. With the single European Market in place, the Confederations of the British and Irish Industry have stated that substantial numbers of new jobs could be created as the result of increased trade within Ireland. Other economists have recently joined the debate and have argued for an economic corridor to be established between Dublin and Belfast.

Sinn Féin welcomes the debate on a unified economy, no matter how belated. However, Sinn Féin firmly believes that there cannot be economic unification in a partitioned country. The logic of these arguments points not only to economic unity, but ultimately to political unity. We must continue to heal

the enforced division of our country which is a major block to social and economic progress, North and South. Partition has resulted in a reduced domestic market, wasteful duplication and disruption of the border areas. It has led to a mentality of dependency, North and South, which has prevented the development of a self-reliant, indigenous industrial base and which has meant continual mass unemployment, poverty and emigration in both states. By ending this division and by building a new egalitarian democracy in Ireland, based on the republican principles of self-reliance and local democracy, we will all be playing our part in the construction of new economic order which puts people first.

Sinn Féin condemns the sale of national assets for short-term gains. Experience elsewhere has shown that such sales are likely to lead to higher consumer prices, reduced services and job losses.

With regard to job creation, grants have been directed at multinationals whose job creation record is much poorer than the cash starved semi-state companies. Sinn Féin believes that IDA funds should be diverted away from funding multinationals and instead used to invest in the Irish public companies who are major employers. Also, the levels of compensation being paid to Ireland through the structural fund and the 'cohesion' fund will not compensate for the inevitable damage to our economy. Under these circumstances we will not be able to close the gap between Irish living standards and the average EU standards of living.

We need to identify and highlight the many sources of wealth in Ireland and demonstrate that if these were properly taxed, not only would there be no excuse for social-welfare cuts, but there would be funds available for matching the work that needs to be done (building houses, refurbishing schools, staffing hospitals, providing local services, substituting imports etc) with the large pool of available labour. Such a programme of growth will put people back in meaningful employment.

Central to any campaigning on the economic crisis, is the need to focus awareness on the key role played by partition. British economic strategy in the North is preventing any possibility of developing a real economic strategy capable of addressing the current crisis. Irish unity and independence will form the only basis for creating an economic democracy.

In the 20 years since Ireland's entry into the European Community, EU institutions have been developed and consolidated, and there now exists a generation for which the only political reality it has experienced is that of Ireland within the EU. These institutions have likewise gained an acceptance and legitimacy in the minds of the majority of Irish people North and South. In particular, it cannot be denied that the implementation of the Single European Act in 1992 and the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty have locked Ireland firmly into the EU for the foreseeable future.

Democratic forces, including republicans, have remained highly critical of the European Community. Sinn Féin believes that the EU is an alliance of the industrialised capitalist powers which have formed a bloc to advance their own interests against those of the poorer countries. Sinn Féin has no illusions that the fundamental nature of the EU can be reformed from within or that overall EU membership can have a beneficial effect on the development of social and economic life in Ireland. The underlying economic and political processes of the EU are the product of an imperialist ideology. The essence of this is that the European Union is a vehicle for the creation of an economic and political super power.

Sinn Féin has consistently opposed the formation of an EU Super state. There is the failure of Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) to resolve the conflict between the EU super state which wants to "assert itself on the international scene" and the need for a democratic economic policy that would tackle the fundamental economic problems in our economy. There is the erosion of Irish neutrality through participation on the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Western European Union. There is the erosion of national self-determination and

democracy in the EU member states through the powers of EU institutions. There is the CAP intervention which has damaged Irish agriculture, it has failed to ensure a fair standard of living for farmers, the benefits accruing mainly to large landowners who are only a minority of the farming community in Ireland. Sinn Féin also contested the claim that a borderless EU will bring unity to Ireland. EU unity will not remove the military border of British occupation from Ireland. The Sinn Féin position was outlined in the party pamphlet *Democracy or Dependency – the case against Maastricht*.

But as long as Ireland, North and South, remains a constituent part of the EU, we have an obligation to demand that the Irish people derive their fair share of whatever benefits may be forthcoming. In cases where European legislation is more progressive than domestic legislation, we have no hesitation in insisting that the Dublin and Westminster governments implement at least equivalent legislation in Ireland. We should work with other progressive forces both at home and in other countries to defend other people's interests. Sinn Féin will be at the forefront of any campaigns opposed to the further erosion of national sovereignty and self-determination by the EU.

Sinn Féin believes that a people's Europe, and not a bankers' club, should underpin the aims of the community. An alternative Europe should be the alliance of economies where the emphasis would be on full employment, on coordinating an environmental programme across frontiers, a Europe which would represent the interests of all Irish people, which would protect their economic rights, their local economies, their agricultural communities and their human rights.



PRISONERS – POLITICAL HOSTAGES



Since 1968 thousands of Irish men and women have been imprisoned as a result of the struggle for national liberation. More are incarcerated in prisons outside Ireland. The British government is continually engaged in attempts to criminalise these prisoners and in turn criminalise the struggle that the prisoners represent. This has led to many campaign centred on conditions within the prisons.

Strip-searching

The strip-searching of women prisoners in Maghaberry and Durham prisons has been widely condemned. Strip-searching is still being carried out despite the fact that the prison regimes have access to highly-sophisticated technology which makes strip searching unnecessary. The continued use of strip searching highlights the vindictive nature of the prison regimes and also underlines the way in which these regimes attempt to break and control the prisoners. Sinn Féin believes that strip-searching is sexual assault and calls for it to cease immediately.

Transfer

There are about 40 republican POWs held in jails in England. These prisoners have continually requested the British Home Office to let them serve their sentences in prisons close to their families. Despite the hardships caused to the families these requests have been refused, yet all British soldiers charged with offences in Ireland are immediately transferred to England. Irish prisoners are refused transfers despite the fact that Maghaberry is half empty. Sinn Féin has reservations about the British Home Office announcement of a change in attitude to the transfer of prisoners from prisons in Britain to prisons in the Six Counties. Transfers are not permanent, those prisoners held in 'special secure units' can be refused transfer and prisoners from the 26 Counties are excluded unless there are "exceptional and compelling circumstances".

Few prisoners have so far been transferred from Britain and the Dublin government has yet to ratify the European legislation which binds governments to transfer foreign nations. Sinn Féin calls on the Dublin government to sign the relevant legislation which will then open the door for republican prisoners from the 26 Counties to be transferred here.

Lifers

There are many republican prisoners in Ireland and Britain serving life sentences, many of them having served between 1-18 years in jail with no sign of a release date. The workings of the Life Sentence Review Board (LSRB), which decides if a prisoner should be released, in effect means that the British government can hold 40% of the prison population indefinitely because of their political beliefs. The involvement of British Direct Ruler Patrick Mayhew in the decisions as to when lifers should be released has meant that some lifers who were scheduled for release by the LSRB have had the decisions overturned. In doing so he has revealed the political nature of releases, undermined the review board's claims of independence and exposed the political hostage scenario and the need for a campaign to secure the release of all political prisoners.

The Campaign for Lifers has put forward a number of proposals on behalf of the republican prisoners for changes to the life sentence review procedure. Sinn Féin fully supports the six proposals:

1. An end to indeterminate sentences;
2. An end to secret reports. All reports should be open to challenge by the prisoner concerned;
3. All prisoners should have the right to know why their case has been put back;
4. The objective criteria for release should be made known to all prisoners;
5. Given that the LSRB has the power to refer a prisoner back for the equivalent of a ten-year sentence, a prisoner should have the right to legal representation at a review board hearing;
6. A prisoner should have the right to know the names of the people reviewing their case and be entitled to challenge at least two of them if mitigating circumstances exist.

Parole

The Northern Ireland Office (NIO) has sought to divert attention away from the workings of the LSRB by introducing a parole scheme for life/SOSP prisoners who have served eleven or more years. Under this scheme these prisoners are allowed to spend 14 days per year with their families. While this development is welcome Sinn Féin believes it is largely a cosmetic gesture, insufficient to deal with this issue, and calls for the full implementation of the prisoners' six proposals.

Extradition

The principles governing the use of extradition for politically motivated offences has been seriously eroded in recent years, both in Ireland, Europe and North America. Sinn Féin opposes the extradition of anyone accused of a political offence. We will campaign for the repeal of extradition legislation in the South and for the introduction of legal protection for those accused of politically related offences.

Forced integration

Since 1976 British government penal policy has sought to force loyalist and republican prisoners to integrate within the prisons. This policy failed in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh and there have been various attempts at forced integration in other jails, the most blatant attempt being in Belfast's Crumlin Road Jail.

Despite calls from political and church leaders to end this policy the NIO persists in forcing republican and loyalists to integrate. Sinn Féin supports the demand for an end to forced integration by prisoners and their relatives.

General conditions

Republican POWs have been constantly campaigning for an improvement in prison conditions. Because of the large number of long-term prisoners most of the required improvements are centred around maintaining the family unit, ie longer and more private visits, areas where parents can amuse small children while on a visit, as well as conjugal rights for long-term prisoners. Sinn Féin will support campaigns or demands aimed at improving prison conditions for all prisoners.

Censorship

Sinn Féin has consistently demanded that all those with responsibility for the various media functions in our country ensure that all opinions are fairly represented. Sinn Féin welcomes the decision of the Dublin government to allow the censorship of Sinn Féin under Section 31 of the Broadcasting Act to lapse. This was a major victory for free speech and freedom of information. Credit is due to all those who tirelessly campaigned for an end to censorship for over two decades.

Sinn Féin is committed to continuing opposition to political censorship in all its form. The British broadcasting ban which gags the representatives of 36% of the nationalist people of the Six Counties and denies the people of Britain the fact, about the war being carried on in their name, must be campaigned against and overturned.

Democratic rights — human rights

Sinn Féin has been to the forefront in the fight for democratic rights. It has consistently challenged the British government on its increasing use of repressive legislation to maintain partition. Sinn Féin has vigorously opposed the use of emergency legislation such as the Emergency Provisions Act and the Prevention of Terrorism Act. We condemn the use of these acts and of the Public Order Order to harass and intimidate the nationalist community in the Six Counties. The new Emergency Provisions Bill sees a further significant reduction in basic human rights and should be rejected. Sinn Féin also condemns the use of the PTA to intimidate and harass the Irish community in Britain, and the arbitrary use of exclusion orders.

The Diplock Court system is a travesty of justice. It should therefore be immediately scrapped. Sinn Féin will continue to campaign for the removal of the Public Order Order, the Broadcasting Act, The Elected Authorities Act which introduced a 'Declaration of Non-violence', and for a full, public and independent inquiry into the British government shoot-to-kill policy. Sinn Féin seeks the introduction of major structural reforms which will enhance civil liberties and remove injustice. Sinn Féin is in favour of the scrapping of all emergency laws introduced in recent years. Sinn Féin calls for:

1. The disbandment of the RIR/RUC;

2. Banning of Plastic Bullets;

3. An independent inquiry into all shoot-to-kill incidents;

4. The European Convention on Human Rights to be fully respected by Britain;

5. Legal reform, including trial by jury, the right to silence and an end to internment by remand;

6. An end to 'political vetting'.

Britain's terror campaign

Pro-British death squads, operating from loyalist areas with apparent impunity, are responsible for many murders of nationalists in the North. These murder gangs have been increasingly active amidst clear evidence of ongoing collusion with British forces. The Stevens Inquiry was specifically designed to camouflage the problem of collusion. This whitewash exercise did not identify those responsible for providing information to the death squads and did not put an end to the practice. The Nelson trial pointed to the extent to which the British intelligence agencies control and influence the loyalist death squads. The UDA is a product of British counterinsurgency policy and since its formation has been a tool of Britain's security apparatus. The banning of the UDA was not a serious effort to tackle the loyalist murder gangs. It is a nonsense to expect that the same forces which have worked so closely with the UDA will not take effective action against it.

In addition to the increase in sectarian attacks on rural areas of the North, in nationalist Belfast there is also significantly heightened tension following a series of murders and attempted murders of nationalists, leading to several local community groups demanding the closure of access roads and the construction of walls and fences.

Allegations of brutality by British forces continue to be raised by international human rights agencies. The Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers published a report of the 'emergency powers' which examined the interrogation methods used by the RUC, the Diplock Courts, the right to silence and the Casement trials. The report was severely critical of Britain's legal and judicial systems, describing the Diplock Court system as a "radical package of draconian measures" where the rights of individuals had earlier been abolished or eroded.

Casement Accused

Several days after the funeral of the three IRA Volunteers killed in Gibraltar, during which three people were killed by a loyalist gunman, mourners at the funeral of IRA Volunteer Caoimhín Mac Brádaigh, who was one of those killed, displayed courage and heroism in again tackling two armed men who appeared to be threatening the cortege. In an act of revenge against the people of West Belfast the RUC has, in the years since, arrested scores of people, charging many and establishing nine show trials with 37 defendants.

Sinn Féin supports the Casement Accused Committee in demanding the immediate release of all those convicted in a series of show trials.

Crime

The discussion on the problem of crime tends to focus on crime against poverty. The problem of 'white collar' crime such as fraud, tax evasion and illicit planning deals and land speculation while involving vast amounts of money, are largely ignored. Crime prevention is seen in terms of the protection of property and punishment. There is little or no attempt made to look at the causes of crime and its link to this unjust and unequal society. Most crime has its roots in the growing division between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots', in the growth in availability and advertising of consumer goods which is placing pressure on low income groups, especially youth. The Dublin and London governments' education, employment and social segregation housing policies only add to the alienation felt by young people.

There is no shortage of gardaí in the 26-County state; per head of the population the South has twice as many police as the USA. Under the Criminal Justice Act gardaí have wide ranging powers of detention.

Sinn Féin calls for the elimination of prison sentences for minor offences such as shop-lifting and for those with alcohol and drug problems, the creation of back-up services for recently-released prisoners, increase the expenditure on youth work and the provision of alternatives to drug abuse, 'joy riding' and crime. Sinn Féin believes that investment in real jobs, better educational opportunities and the provision of community and social amenities, plus

the creation of an equal and just society, is the only long-term solution to these problems.

Political vetting

There should be no political vetting by the British government of community and voluntary groups. The withdrawal of grant aid as a result of such vetting amounts of arbitrary and undemocratic discrimination. The blacklisting of voluntary and community groups is evidence of the British government's efforts to control and direct the activities of the voluntary sector. Over 20 groups have been affected by this policy. The production of Public Interest Immunity Certificates to shield from public scrutiny those who implement this policy of blacklisting is a scandalous misuse of power. Sinn Féin supports the efforts of the voluntary sector in trying to expose and challenge this policy, and for the full restoration of funding to those groups who have had grants withdrawn as a result of political vetting.

Drug abuse

The increasing abuse of heroin and other addictive drugs among young people, especially in the Dublin area, must be viewed with alarm and evidence of the spread of drug pushing and drug abuse in the North, especially the greater Belfast area, is worrying. Sinn Féin condemns the totally inadequate response of the Dublin government's proposal to deal with this epidemic. Not only does it not recognise the underlying social and economic injustices of which drug abuse is a symptom, but utterly fails to provide the major resources needed to remove the symptom. Their failure has left communities with no option but to tackle this problem themselves. Sinn Féin believes that community mobilisation is central to any strategy against drugs. Sinn Féin calls for a mobilisation of health, education and statutory agencies North and South to fight back against this serious problem. The coordination of existing resources and the significant introduction of new resources can combat this growing problem including funding from both the Dublin and London governments and additional funding and expertise from the EU.

The official response to the threat from AIDS is inadequate. At present those at greatest risk in

Ireland are intravenous drug users, but AIDS also affects other sections of the population. To prevent the spread of AIDS, Sinn Féin calls for the following steps to be taken immediately:

1. A preventative education programme for the general public;
2. Preventative education programmes for high risk groups. This should be done in conjunction with voluntary organisations who have the experience and the contacts, but not the resources to fund such a programme;
3. An education programme for schools. This should start at primary level with a programme geared specially towards young children;
4. The introduction of a needle exchange programme;
5. Reform the contraception laws in the 26 Counties to make condoms more freely available.

Sinn Féin recognises the efforts of and congratulates anti-drugs groups throughout Ireland who have sought to tackle the drugs problem in their areas in the absence of any worthwhile action against the drugs epidemic.

Sexuality

Sinn Féin calls for the decriminalisation of homosexual acts between men and for full equal rights for lesbian women and gay men.

Divorce

Sinn Féin supports the introduction in the 26 Counties of no fault divorce based on the irretrievable breakdown of marriage and a period of separation.

Child sexual abuse

Child sexual abuse is widespread in society. As a result of increasing publicity on this issue and the fact that survivors are no longer willing to keep silent about the trauma which has so radically affected all aspects of their lives, many more women and children are willing to talk about their experiences and to seek help in coping with the situation. The Belfast Rape Crisis Centre reports an increase of over 250% in the last two years of calls from both adult survivors of sexual abuse and mothers of children who have been sexually abused.

Sinn Féin believes that it is necessary to study

carefully the reactions of the various agencies to child sexual abuse and the type of preventative and interventionist programmes that are being developed. It is imperative that the safety of the child is a priority and this must be ensured with proper consultation and cooperation of the non-abusing parent. It should also take into consideration the effects of any intervention.

Sinn Féin calls for:

- A register of abusers to be kept by social services in order to protect children;
- Video links in court should be automatically available for children in all cases;
- Abusers should be automatically removed from the family home, instead of the children who are not the perpetrators of the crime;
- Adequate financial support should be allocated to Rape Crisis Centres for their work with survivors of sexual violence;
- (It is recommended that) social workers and psychiatrists do not work with both the survivor and the abuser, as a conflict of interest could arise;
- Changes in practice so that an overhaul of law regarding child sexual abuse and incest so that it deals with sexual abuse by adoptive parents and so children, who are at present may only be witnesses to the sexual violence they have suffered, should have the right to their own legal representation in court.

Young people

Sinn Féin calls for an improvement in facilities and conditions in the various job training schemes, an adequate allowance for young people whilst in training and the right of those on such schemes to join trade unions and an end to restrictive regulations.

People under 25 make up a sizeable proportion of the population of the Six Counties. They bear the brunt of many of the worst social and economic problems as well as being the main target for harassment by the British crown forces in nationalist areas.

The extent of youth unemployment and emigration is an indictment of the political system. In the Six Counties a quarter of those on unemployment benefit are under 25, but this does not reflect the true extent of joblessness given the

various schemes introduced by the British government to manipulate the unemployment figures. Such schemes do not represent action to create real jobs nor do they, in most cases, provide adequate training for specific jobs. This adds to the disillusionment of young people.

Proper training and education are basic rights and Sinn Féin believes there should be youth representatives on education bodies. Sinn Féin calls for greater investment in leisure and sports facilities of young people and staffed play areas for younger children.

High unemployment, the prospect of emigration, state harassment and a poor environment have all contributed to a climate of hopelessness, from which anti-social behaviour often results. Sinn Féin, through public debate and in its dialogue with young people involved in such activities, is anxious to explore all ways of reducing anti-social behaviour and for alleviating the pressure on nationalist communities which suffer the full extent of such behaviour.

Sinn Féin calls for greater investment of time and

resources and finance by the state and statutory agencies to help tackle this problem.

Sinn Féin urges immediate discussion among all political parties on this vital issue.

Sex education

The issue of sex education for young people has been a controversial issue in the Six Counties. Sinn Féin has long been on record for its support of a full and comprehensive programme for young people.

Comprehensive sex education for young people should ensure proper and informed discussion and adequate information on issues such as sex and sexuality, relationships, contraception, pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS.

Sinn Féin supports the setting up of the Brooke Clinic in Belfast, the establishment of such a centre is a step in the right direction. Sinn Féin also believes that parents, wherever possible, should be involved about making decisions the sex education their children receive in school and be in a position to have informed discussion and reach decisions with young people about their bodies and their sexuality.

Partition and the creation of two conservative statelets continue to impact on women's lives on both sides of the border. Irish women do not have economic independence, access to child care or proper health care. Nationalist women in the Six Counties still live under military occupation and suffer sexual harassment by British crown forces in the streets, in interrogation centres and the horror of strip searches in Maghaberry Jail.

Sinn Féin recognises that a large section of women on this island want a constitution that embraces a secular state. Sinn Féin believes that the constitution should provide safeguards to ensure gender equality, which includes the right to live in a society where women are safe from attack in their homes and on their streets. The constitution should also provide for an education system which will, as part of its curriculum, recognise women's contribution both historically and contemporarily, and ensure that sexism and stereotyping of women are addressed at an early age.

Sinn Féin will continue to actively promote women in all aspects of the party, to identify and prioritise women's issues in our women's policy document and in the day-to-day work of Sinn Féin, as well as engaging women's groups in discussion and debate on our vision for a new Ireland.

While there have been some improvements in the last ten years, women face significant difficulties in their daily lives as a result of long years of discrimination and injustice directed against them. Despite the existence of legislation which is supposedly geared towards eradication of inequality in the work place, women are still at a considerable disadvantage. Even though women make up 44% of the workforce, their qualitative position has not changed, evidenced by the fact that 41% of women's jobs are part-time.

Legislation incorporating affirmative action programmes with goals and timetables must be introduced. There should be a comprehensive system of training and retraining for women. Any training programme should include provision for flexible hours. Child care facilities must be a vital part of any training programme.

Women generally continue to be paid less than men for work of equal value. The equal pay

legislation must be simplified and greater resources allocated in the fight against inequality.

Adequate health services must be provided for women as a matter of urgency, particularly during pregnancy. Screening for breast cancer should be available to all women from the age of puberty as should smear testing for cervical cancer.

Recognising that childbirth is a natural process, women as far as possible, should have control over their pregnancy and childbirth, including the decision on where to have the child. Sinn Féin advocates decentralised maternity care, ensuring that women are not subjected to highly-institutionalised care at this time in their lives, and with special efforts to cope with the extreme common syndrome of post-natal depression. Where possible, every woman should have the choice of female obstetricians. The present trend of running down the role and numbers of the professional midwife should be reversed.

Child care facilities in Ireland are among the worst in Europe. Sinn Féin believes that the aim must be to give all women the choice of working inside the home or outside the home, or a combination of these roles.

Child care must be shared as an equal responsibility between both parents and also of society as a whole, which must organise its economic life in accordance with this responsibility. Twenty-four hour child-care centres must be provided, staffed by qualified, caring, well-paid people, in an adequate setting to provide a safe, secure and stimulating environment for children while their parents work. This is particularly necessary for one-parent families and for equal opportunities for women.

Abortion

Sinn Féin condemns the failure of the Dublin government to enact legislation following the abortion referenda in 1992. Despite the result of the referenda, very little has changed for women in the 26 Counties. Without legislation, women cannot obtain information on abortion and are still being forced to contact helplines which are no substitute for nondirective counselling.

Sinn Féin believes that nondirective pregnancy counselling embodying all choices should be freely available. Sinn Féin is opposed to the attitudes and

forces in society which compel women to have abortions and criminalise those who do make this decision. The party accepts the need for abortion where a woman's life is at risk or in grave danger, and in cases of rape or child sexual abuse.

Sexism

Sinn Féin calls for a greater effort within our education system to tackle the problem of sexism and sex stereotyping. We believe that coeducation in the true sense of the word, with equal attention being paid to male and female, is essential. We also realise that coeducation in itself will not bring equality. Equal access to all subjects on the curriculum, changes in teacher-training methods, courses and schoolbooks are also essential.

Although Sinn Féin believes that sexism and stereotyping can only be gradually eradicated, there are many blatant aspects of sexist thinking that should be fought immediately. Sinn Féin particularly condemns the use of women's bodies in the advertising of commodities.

Sinn Féin believes that the attitudes in society which give rise to sexual violence against women need to be challenged by means of education and effective campaigns. Women define rape as an act of forcible sexual violation which is either carried out to degrade, humiliate or punish the victim.

Rape can involve intimidation with threats or weapons, sexual and mental humiliation, forced oral or anal rape. Although the law does not consider the latter two to be rape, women definitely do. Sinn Féin believes rape is not a sexual crime; it is a crime of violence which uses sex as a weapon, its motivation is hostility and aggression and that to change attitudes towards sexual violence it is necessary to change attitudes towards women.

Sinn Féin calls for the provision of adequate

support for the survivors of sexual violence. Rape crisis centres should be given adequate funding.

The law should clearly state that there must be an objective test of consent in rape cases – submission should never be seen as consent. The definition of rape should be changed to include oral and anal rape, as well as rape with foreign objects. Under no circumstances should the past sexual history of the woman be used in court cases, it has no bearing on the case.

The law should recognise rape within marriage.

The woman in a rape case should have the right to individual legal representation.

Rape and sexual assault cases should be held in camera.

Anonymity of the complainant must always be assured.

Juries in rape cases should have an equal balance between the sexes.

The effects of rape should be duly recognised by both the legal system and the medical profession.

Women who have survived rape should be treated with dignity and sympathy and both the above professions should provide proper training on sexual violence and its effects.

Discrimination

Sinn Féin demands an end to discrimination against women with regard to loans, grants, hire-purchase agreements, mortgages and general shopping.

In relation to the entitlement to social welfare, Sinn Féin believes that the designation of unmarried mothers, deserted wife and widow should be abolished and one category, that of single parent, be substituted and apply equally to male and female. There should be protection of a family home so that it cannot be sold, mortgaged or otherwise disposed of without the consent of both partners.

Social legislation

The Dublin government, in an effort to camouflage their failure to address the poverty issue, has portrayed social welfare recipients as 'spongers' who are intent on defrauding the state. Campaign groups point out that the percentage of government spending on social welfare has in fact fallen over the past number of years in spite of the fact that more and more people found themselves out of work.

Sinn Féin, along with other groups working on this issue, reiterates the call for the government to implement the recommendations of the Commission on Social Welfare and to increase social-welfare payments along the lines set out in this report. Sinn Féin will continue to highlight the plight of social welfare recipients and will point out to women that they are entitled to back payments arising out of EU equality legislation. Sinn Féin members, through our advice centres, will continue to inform people of their entitlements and will help those who need assistance in dealing with their claims for social-welfare benefit.

Consumer rights, debts and fuel poverty.

Sinn Féin calls for a legally-binding consumer's charter.

Although the Payment of Debt Act has been scrapped, most of the laws it contained have been introduced into law in other guises. The higher cost of living here in terms of fuel, clothing and food prices places a further burden on the poor in the Six Counties. Fuel poverty has become a major problem in the Six Counties for elderly people and for poor families, especially those with children.

The relationship between poverty, ill-health and death is of vital social concern and greater resources must be made available to effectively tackle this issue. Sinn Féin calls for a debt counselling service to be provided and additional resources made available, both from central funds and councils, to assist existing advice agencies to tackle this problem.

There is a need for greater funding to research the problem of debt and limits should be placed on the availability of credit. There should be a comprehensive fuel benefit, set at a realistic level for those receiving income support, family credit,

retirement pension, severe disablement allowance and invalidity benefit.

The amount of electricity debt to be repaid through voluntary agreements should not be made under threat of disconnection against those groups receiving benefits. During periods of severe weather, all householders on income support should automatically receive assistance with heating costs, without having to apply for it. There is an urgent need for a comprehensive research programme into fuel poverty and its effects.

Income support and the Social Fund

The changes introduced into the society security system since April 1988, by the British government, have substantially increased poverty. Those in need have had access to less financial help than previously. Reports by the Child Poverty Action Group, St Vincent de Paul and others reveal a growing number of people slipping into poverty.

Sinn Féin calls for the scrapping of the loan system and the writing-off of outstanding repayments. Benefits should be increased to a level compatible to half the average wage.

We support the demand of the voluntary agencies that there should be a substantial increase in social security budget, returning it to the level it would otherwise have been but for the 1988 changes. The system of awarding community care grants must be radically changed to one of grants in cases of a risk to health and safety. Of particular importance is the need for an independent element in the system of awarding grants.

Lone parents

There are almost 40,000 lone parents in the Six Counties, involving some 70,000 children. Almost three quarters of these live on or below the poverty line and around 80% rely on income support as their main source of income.

The increase in child benefit is totally inadequate. It fails to bring child benefit up to the level it would have been, but for the freeze three years ago. The very limited amount of well-paid work for women in the Six Counties is the major cause of reliance on income support among lone parents. Another major factor would be the nonexistence of statutory pre-school day-care facilities in the Six Counties.

Sinn Féin calls for an immediate increase in child benefit to an economically realistic level. One Parent Child Benefit should be paid to all lone parents irrespective of whether or not they claim income support (at present income support is reduced in accordance with the amount paid through child benefit). The present arrangements discriminate against those not in employment.

The additional amount paid to a lone parent should also be raised to an economically-realistic level and not regarded as income in assessing entitlement to other benefits.

Prisoners' wives should be recognised as lone parents by the state, thus making them eligible for cover under lone parent legislation.

The health service

Sinn Féin calls for a major investment of capital into the health service. We remain absolutely opposed to the privatisation of ancillary health services and support trade unions in their efforts to oppose it. Sinn Féin supports trade union efforts to secure in-house tenders to protect jobs and the quality of service.

Sinn Féin rejects the policy of 'opting-out' and of setting cash-limited budgets for doctors. The party is opposed to the centralisation of maternity services and the closure of maternity units. Public health policies have led to the improvement in public health. Preventative health policies must therefore form the basis of any sensible health strategy. A public health service is central to the implementation of such a strategy.

The health service is, however, under threat. Funding is failing to meet demand; hospitals are being encouraged to 'opt out', and hospital services are being privatised. The result is demoralisation, closures, job losses and a lower standard of health care.

The basis of any planned public health policy must be the primary health care provided by the doctor and community health services. However, this too is under threat from a reduction in funding, a restructuring of the health service and the introduction of budgets for doctors.

Sinn Féin believes that any new structures in the health service must be democratically accountable to the community. The community care programme,

which in principle is about returning people to live within the community, cannot attain the objectives set for it because of a deliberate lack of resources. Quite simply, for the British government, community care is only about saving money.

Sinn Féin also condemns the erosion of the home help service. Home helps provide an essential service to the community and more money, not less, must be allocated to provide an efficient service.

AIDS

Sinn Féin calls for an intensive education programme as a first step towards combating AIDS. Preventative education programmes, with clear, accurate and detailed information, are essential. Since first being identified, AIDS has presented the world's medical profession with a major challenge. To date, developing a vaccine has proved extremely difficult. According to the Gay Health Action Group in Dublin, international experience "suggests that the most effective way to reach people in the higher risk groups is by the distribution of information by voluntary (or other) organisations working within these groups".

Sinn Féin demands adequate funding for voluntary groups if they are to be effective. Such resourcing must take account of the need to produce leaflets, videos, cards, telephone information services and posters. A sensible education programme directed at HIV drug users requires intensive work at street level.

High-risk groups which need detailed information are health-care workers, hospital staff, prison officials and prisoners. A sustained and intensive education programme here is essential. Sinn Féin believes that to reach everyone a comprehensive public education programme must be produced by the state. Voluntary organisations can never reach everybody even within their own groups, and AIDS exists outside of these groups.

Those who become victims of this disease need the full support of the community and the state. They must have access to the best medical care the state can provide and be assured of the state's commitment to providing maximum support both to them and their families throughout their ordeal. In addition, it is essential that the state introduces laws to ensure that AIDS victims cannot be discriminated against.

During the life time of the last two Dublin governments, the gap between the standard of health care available to private and public patients has widened still further. Sinn Féin calls for adequate funding for the general medical scheme, the upgrading of public health facilities and the complete separation of public and private medicine (at present public health expenditure subsidises private medicine) and the extension of the range of treatments available to medical card patients to include family planning.

People with disabilities

Sinn Féin demands a major and fundamental review of the British government community care proposals and that urgent steps be taken to initiate structural changes which will improve the standard of living for disabled people and their carers.

There are no accurate statistics in the Six Counties on the levels of disability. However, the daily lives of thousands of people are affected by every aspect of disability. Disabled people face a multitude of difficulties – poverty, inaccessibility to employment, further education, transport, cinemas, hotels, theatres and shops. In addition, disabled people have to cope with public behaviour which often includes prejudice, patronising attitudes and discrimination.

Many other difficulties have been inflicted upon disabled people and carers as a consequence of Tory government policies. Thus, the running down of the health service and the dismantling of the welfare state has caused problems throughout the Six Counties. In comparison to Britain, food, fuel, clothing and transport costs are higher in the Six Counties. The link between poverty and disability is an obvious one.

Sinn Féin believes that disabled people and their carers should not be allowed to be isolated and stigmatised. We believe that the necessary resources should be put into the health service and social security system to ensure that disabled people can obtain adequate health care and that social-welfare benefits are sufficient to raise the living standards of disabled people and carers. There is a need to strengthen legislation to tackle the problem of discrimination in employment. New criteria and legislation are required to meet the needs of disabled people in terms of housing, transport and accessibility to public buildings.

The elderly

In the Six Counties, one in four elderly people relies on income support to supplement their state pensions.

Elderly people tend to live in older, poorer-quality housing and to spend more time at home than any other group in the population. They spend a higher proportion of their income on necessities such as food and fuel. In the Six Counties, pensioners spend approximately 20% of total income on fuel, compared with 11% in Britain.

Elderly people living in rural areas experience particular problems. There is a loss of contact with former colleagues on retirement. The depopulation of marginal rural areas results inevitably in a loss of family support and help and relative deprivation in terms of poor housing. There are also fewer spare-time activities and a general lack of information about social-welfare services. The fear of loneliness, illness and dependence is greater.

Sinn Féin demands an immediate increase in state pensions. Pensions should be at least 50% of national average earnings. We call for the planning of 'pick-up and bring' services to assist mobility, greater coordination in planning and providing services in rural areas, more centres catering for pensioners social needs, and free bus travel for all pensioners.

Housing and homelessness

All citizens have a right to expect that the state will ensure that housing of a good quality will be provided. New building should therefore be determined on the basis of assessed need and not financial constraints.

Sinn Féin calls for an immediate allocation of funds to confront the major housing problems of homelessness, disrepair and overcrowding. We stand for an increase in the number of rural priority areas to allow the greatest number of unfit dwellings to be included under the programme.

One of the most disturbing aspects of housing unfitness in the Six Counties is the issue of rural unfitness. While the decision of the executive to designate 67 rural priority areas is welcome, it is not enough to deal with this problem. Over 6,400 rural dwellings are contained in these rural priority areas out of an estimated 28,000.

Sinn Féin believes that the Housing Executive

should undertake a thorough review of the grants system, the amounts available and its flexibility. We welcome the proposal for a replacement grant, outlined in the Executive Rural Housing policy document *The Way Forward*. At current estimates, there are around 2,600 dwellings in need of such a grant with 75% of them in rural areas.

According to SHELTER, there are a lack of basic amenities in 13,000 rural dwellings, the vast majority of which are in the private sector. In addition, about 3,000 rural dwellings are unconnected to mains water and electricity. Sinn Féin believes that there must be a definition of rural areas to allow for a clear recognition of the different sectors — countryside, villages, etc.

Sinn Féin calls on the government to pass the legislation required which would allow all local authorities to replenish their housing stock by ensuring that 10% of all future private developments of over 20 houses, residential units, pass into the hands of local authority. Such legislation would help to alleviate the vast housing lists in Ireland's urban centres and would give a return on the huge capital investment which local authorities must provide,

through various services, to private housing estates and apartment blocks.

According to SHELTER, almost 30,000 people in the Six Counties are without a home. Homelessness is rising rapidly, particularly among the 16 to 25 year-olds. Given that 24% of our population are under 15, the outlook for youth homelessness in the next decade is decidedly grim.

Greater consideration must be given to homeless single persons and small families in the housing strategy. The 'priority' category should be extended to include single homeless people, the 'intentionality' clause dropped and an independent appeal procedure established. Tenants should be fully involved, as of right, at every stage in the planning of their homes, maintenance programmes and environmental improvement schemes.

The existing housing stock must be properly and adequately insulated and heated and statutory minimum standards should be provided in all new housing, including noise insulation, damp-proofing and energy conservation. There should be an end to delaying nonemergency repairs.



Over the years, local government has been weakened by increased centralisation. Sinn Féin will campaign, not only for the reversal of this trend, but for a radical decentralisation of governmental structures to give Irish people a real say in their own government.

Funding local government

Local government is in immediate need of a substantial injection of money to fulfill even its present statutory obligations. Own resources funding for local authorities is a prerequisite for local democracy. The present powers to levy service charges are inequitable, inefficient and are a form of double taxation. Service charges do not compensate local authorities for the failure of central government to increase the annual rates support grant in line with inflation. All such charges must be abolished.

To enable local authorities to take a new and greater role in determining and providing public services, money now spent by central government on such things as education, health etc, will have to be transferred to local government. As well as devolving powers on local authorities, central government must devolve a proportion of the finances it currently controls.

Eventually, it is envisaged that local authorities will become tax collectors of many of the taxes now collected by central government, retaining taxes collected within their areas to finance the running of the councils.

Forthwith, all road tax collected should be retained by County Councils for expenditure on the county and regional road works. Local councils will retain control over the way commercial rates are determined and collected. Local authorities would be given discretion to vary the rates they apply – for example, they could impose higher rates for financial institutions. A state-wide review of valuations is an urgent requirement. The present basis for the payment of rates should be extended to include plant as well as commercial property.

Local authorities will have the power to levy a special rate on large land holdings and residences, the rates exemption limit etc to be set by the individual councils. Grants from central government to local government should be in the form of block grants to allow for the maximum

amount of local discretion. There must also be an equalisation grant which would be paid to disadvantaged authorities from central funds to ensure that they could provide all the necessary services in their areas. Areas with exceptional needs should receive special payments. That means there will be positive discrimination in such areas as education spending for district councils that contain communities with special needs.

Block grants for local government should be made up of a percentage of the total tax not less than a predetermined figure. A body to determine the allocation of money should be established. It should be composed primarily of local government representatives and include representatives from central government departments. The money should be distributed in such a way that takes into account the needs of an area and its resources.

The top three tiers of local government will have power to raise their own finance and receive grants. Block grants from central government would be allocated according to the functions and roles in health, education, housing etc, allocated to the respective councils.

The valuation and collection of commercial rates will be a function of the district councils. County councils will value and collect the special rate on large land holdings and residences. Housing rents will be the responsibility of district councils as they will have authority over housing. Road tax would be collected by county councils as they will have responsibility for road maintenance.

A joint committee of district and county council elected representatives would iron out respective budget deficits of district and county councils.

The present level of block grants from central government will continue and be increased as more powers are devolved from central government to local government. As the powers of local government increase and more tax collection takes place at local level this will not mean that ordinary people pay more tax. There will be a fairer distribution of the tax burden with big business, financial institutions and the wealthy paying a bigger share. It will mean that more tax will be retained locally, rather than being paid into central government funds.



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Sinn Féin believes that the Irish language should have equal status with English. Discrimination against the Irish language remains one of the hallmarks of the political administration in both the Six and the 26 Counties. It is one of the main factors in the ongoing battle for control of the development of Irish culture, together with repression and the revision of history.

Sinn Féin is committed to combating this process, highlighting the discrimination which takes place and helping to redress the imbalance through practical projects which promote our language and our culture. We pledge our continuing support for Glór na nGael, the GAA, Cumann Camogaíochte, Comhaltas Ceolteoirí Éireann and Conradh na Gaeilge.

We reiterate once again that republicans have no monopoly on the Irish language and culture and call on the unionists to end their boycott of the language and take up its active use.

In the Six Counties, Sinn Féin calls on the Department for Education to remove all obstacles to Irish-medium education and to place it on a par with integrated schools. Schools with 25 pupils and teaching in the indigenous language should qualify for government aid.

We call for an Irish Language Act to be drawn up to ensure that the treatment of Irish in the Six Counties is at least on a par with the treatment of Welsh in Wales.

Sinn Féin believes that every Irish speaker should have the right to deal with all levels of governmental administration and with all state and semi-state bodies in Irish. All prisoners should have the right to

speak Irish during visits and to send and receive correspondence in Irish.

Sinn Féin calls on the British and Dublin governments to sign the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, the EU's binding convention on linguistic rights.

Sinn Féin welcomes the announcement that Teilifís na Gaeilge will begin transmission in 1995 and views it as a major step forward in the cultural reconquest of Ireland. To ensure its continuity, its success and the permanence of jobs created, we propose that its finance comes directly from the state and avoids a dependence on the National Lottery.

Sinn Féin calls on the new head of the IRTC, as a priority, to initiate a review of all the licences granted to independent radio stations and to enforce criteria based on catering for a wider range of musical tastes. All licences were issued with a condition that a percentage of programming be through Irish. Sinn Féin calls for that percentage to be at least 12.5% ie, three hours in every twenty four, rising thereafter. Those not abiding by these guidelines should have their licences revoked.

Cultural environment

The destruction of our cultural heritage, whether through the neglect of historic buildings, or the pilfering of national arts treasures by profiteers, is a matter of extreme concern. Sinn Féin believes that the introduction of strengthened legislation is needed to protect our cultural environment and to develop it as an amenity to be enjoyed by everyone.



EDUCATION



Sinn Féin is opposed to teachers being made redundant and calls for a reduction in class numbers. Teachers' wage levels should be improved and they should have the right to negotiate wages and conditions. Students and parents should be adequately represented on bodies that decide curricula. Parents and teachers, democratically-elected, must have the majority voice on school management committees.

Cutbacks in education and student loan schemes have affected access to education for a large number of people. Student loans will disproportionately limit the access of Catholics to higher education as the economic disadvantages to Catholics will prevent many capable young people from pursuing third-level education. Sinn Féin demands that student grants for those in further education be raised to an adequate, acceptable level.

There is a clear demand for greater access to further education. Sinn Féin believes that money must be made available to permit the evolution of an adult education system that is centred on local communities and will allow people to identify their educational needs.

The current non-status of the Irish language within the education system must be changed now to

reflect the aspirations of the nationalist people. It is an insult that the language of our country is given the status of a foreign language. Sinn Féin demands that the discrimination against Irish culture and history and the Irish language be ended immediately.

Recent 'reforms' by the British government contain a hidden agenda which seeks to undermine the nationalist identity by measures that limit the opportunities for an Irish identified education.

More overt attacks on the Irish/nationalist identity are being taken through the introduction of the 'Education for Mutual Understanding' (EMU) and the special support given to integrated schools, while discriminating against Irish-language schools.

Sinn Féin calls for Irish to be afforded an important role in the curriculum of all primary and secondary schools and for Irish-medium schools to receive equality of access to funding as integrated schools. Most immediately, the Meán Scoil in West Belfast should be fully resourced by the Department of Education. Sinn Féin calls for a comprehensive system of education capable of providing a wide range of subjects to cater for the interests of the pupils and the needs of the community.

Sinn Féin demands that nursery education should be made available for all who may wish for it.

To ensure that the treatment of Irish in the six Counties is at least on a par with the treatment of Welsh in Wales, Sinn Féin believes that every Irish speaker should have the right to deal with all levels of governmental administration and with all state and semi-state bodies in Irish. All persons should have the right to be spoken to in their own language. Sinn Féin demands that the budget deficit of district and county councils

The present level of block grants from central government will continue and be increased as more powers are devolved from central government to local government. As the powers of local government increase and more tax collection takes place at local level this will not mean that ordinary people pay more tax. There will be a fairer distribution of the tax burden with big business, financial institutions and the wealthy paying a bigger share. It will mean that more tax will be retained locally, rather than being paid into central government funds.



TRAVELLERS



Sinn Féin condemns the of evictions Travellers taking place throughout the country as acts of violence against an oppressed minority. We also condemn the frequent relegation of this community to racist and sectarian categories.

Sinn Féin will take positive action, including the lobbying of local councils, to support the right of Travelling people to live in settled accommodation of their choice – whether it be houses, permanent serviced sites or temporary sites.

Sinn Féin will stand by a principled position of support for Travellers even if it involves the opposition of the settled population. We believe that the rights of the Travellers can best be defended by Travellers themselves. In any area, therefore, where there is a stable population of Travellers, Sinn Féin will encourage and give support to Travellers to set up their own committees and elect their own spokespersons.

- Active neutrality and nonalignment will mean:
 - Promoting nuclear disarmament;
 - Promoting peace internationally;
 - The whole of Ireland should be declared a nuclear-free zone;
 - Active involvement in the Non-Aligned Nations group;
 - Increased independence in economic and political policies. This also means maintaining ideological independence in international bodies such as the United Nations;
 - A written constitutional statement of neutrality and nonalignment;
 - Nonparticipation in international conferences and

Sinn Féin is totally committed to a position of neutrality and nonalignment, both in the context of the 26 Counties and of a future 32-County state.

Neutrality defines our determination not to become involved in any future military conflict and our present determination to remain outside any military alliances. Sinn Féin views neutrality and nonalignment as a positive political statement, not as a political expedient to be set aside some time in the future either in the context of a closer European co-operation in a British withdrawal.

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- Increased independence in economic and political policies. This also means maintaining ideological independence in international bodies such as the United Nations;
- A written constitutional statement of neutrality and nonalignment;
- Nonparticipation in international conferences and

meetings with either NATO or the Warsaw Pact.

Ireland's political and military neutrality has always been seriously compromised by membership of the EU. Decisions are being taken both under the auspices of EU institutions, under cover of semi-secret intergovernmental bodies such as Trevi Group and the agreement for 'European Political Cooperation', which progressively undermines any pretence of an independent foreign policy for any of the member states, regardless of Ireland's formally neutral position.

The recent decision by the Dublin government to accept an observer status at the Western European Union is simply public confirmation of this. Ireland does not even retain the right to issue visas to citizens of non-EU countries without the agreement of its EU 'partners'. It should be remembered that bodies such as the Trevi Group, Western European Union, and European Political Cooperation are accountable to neither the European Parliament nor the national parliaments of the member countries.

Sinn Féin will be at the forefront of any campaign which is opposed to the further erosion of national sovereignty and self-determination by the European Union.

Title: Sinn Féin Policy Document

Organisation: Sinn Féin

Date: 1994 c.

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