



**TOWARDS A POLICY ON
CULTURE**



**Sinn Féin:
Dréacht pholasai
ar chultúr**



INTRODUCTION

WE WRITE "towards a policy on culture" because the final policy document of Sinn Féin in this respect will be the attitude, living example and support for the traditional culture of Ireland expressed by the average Sinn Féin member from day to day.

Although by definition culture is every aspect of the life of an individual, a group or a larger society, what we are concerned about primarily in this document is that which makes up the essentials of the traditional Irish identity, readily recognisable at any period in the history of the Irish people.

According to the experts, by far the most important element in any culture is its own particular language. Thus we agree with the late IRA activist, professor, lecturer and revolutionary writer, Mairtin Ó Cadhain, when he stated: "*Tosbuidh athghabháil na hÉireann le hathghabháil na Gaeilge*" (the reconquest of Ireland will begin with the reconquest of the Irish language).

Hence we present this draft policy document for consideration at all levels of Sinn Féin. See the concluding paragraph of the document regarding feed-back to the education committee at Ard-Oifig, 44 Cearnóg Parnell, Baile Átha Cliath 1.

TOWARDS A POLICY ON CULTURE

THE TASK before Sinn Féin today, as before the 1918 elections, is to change the perspective of the Irish people, who have the only really essential resource for survival, their determination. The instinct of the Irish people remains true to tradition: they will continue to support the men of force. If given resolute, scientific and principled leadership they will restore the Irish language. We believe that only the Republican Movement today can give them that leadership.

The situation of the Irish language today is critical. Because of economic pressure — from Dublin, Belfast, London, Brussels — very few parents today are rearing their children in the Gaeltacht through the medium of the Irish language or even bilingually: English now dominates the firesides of what up to recently were known as Gaeltacht districts. If this continues there will be no traditional Irish-speaking area left in Ireland by the year 2000.

This document, therefore, comes at a moment of crisis for the Irish people, the Irish nation. The job of changing the linguistic perspective of the people cannot be put on the long finger. It is no use promising that "when we win we will save the Irish language". We have to save the Irish language now, while winning, just as we have to pave the way for socialism in the process of winning. These things are all part of the one and indivisible revolution.

What, then, is to be done?

Firstly, we have to exploit to the limit existing Sinn Féin policy, as reflected in resolutions passed at ardfheiseanna: the exclusive use of the Irish versions of given names and surnames; the exclusive use of the proper Irish versions of placenames (An Uaimh instead of Navan, Muine Bheag instead of Bagenalstown, Droichead Nua instead of Newbridge, Mostrim instead

Edgeworthstown, Ceanannas Mór instead of Kells; but also Baile Átha Cliath instead of blin, Béal Feirste instead of Belfast, Corcaigh and Gaillimh instead of Cork and Galway). It is of no use at all for ardheiseanna to pass resolutions unless those resolutions are followed by the letter by Sinn Féin officers, the example being given in the first place by ard-omhairle members. As regards the use of the correct placenames, where some confusion is likely to exist the correct version might be used, followed by the English version in brackets, only for a limited period.

Again, it is intended that such usage should not be isolated – in which case it would be rely lip service – but part of the overall cultural revolution which, we would urge, should follow a very definite plan phased over a period of years, the objective being that, at the end of that period, every cumann of Sinn Féin would conduct its business entirely through Irish and it would be the normal means of communication between Sinn Féin members, new members going to pass through a training programme, including a good working knowledge of Irish, or becoming full members.

Obviously, this is a recommendation. For it to become Sinn Féin policy it would have to be proposed and approved at an ardfheis.

EXISTING POLICY

It is Sinn Féin policy already to use the Irish terms for the various offices: cathaoirleach (chairman), rúnai (secretary), cisteoir (treasurer), oifigeach chaidrimh phoiblí or OCP (public relations officer or PRO) and the like but in recent years there has been a tendency to abandon such terms and to use the English versions. Again, Sinn Féin officers must give the good example.

It may help those who feel shy or lack sufficient self-confidence due to lack of educational opportunities to realise that the reconquest journey begins, like all journeys, with one short step, as did the initial conquest; and that the enemy had commonsense on his side in deciding to destroy the Irish identity step by step for until that identity was destroyed and another substituted his victory would not be assured.

The first step is the rejection of that version of one's given name or surname which the enemy would have us use, as a formal and permanent act of submission, and the discovery, use and exclusive cultivation of the historic and traditional Irish terms. This must be the first deliberate personal decision in the reconquest and it will make so much easier the next step, the learning of the basic words and phrases of Irish to get us through the average Irish day.

UNIQUE LANGUAGE

Realising, then, that the language belongs to the entire Irish people; that, in fact, it is one of few things left to us which is uniquely our own; and that we have an obligation to defend making ourselves part of it and it part of us, we urge members to:

1. Discuss the cultural issue in general and this document in particular and to comment on it in writing, to the education department. Other levels of the Sinn Féin organisation are invited to discuss this and make submissions in writing. The intention is to find the consensus opinion within Sinn Féin and the strength of its determination and commitment to bring about a cultural revolution to a planned, successful conclusion.

2. Sinn Féin members will prove their commitment by learning Irish, preferably by means of a "crash course", possibly in co-operation with Conradh na Gaeilge, Cumann Luthchleas Gael (AA), Gaeil-Linn, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann or some such Irish/Ireland grouping, thus reducing the cost of the learning but also strengthening the reputation of the Republican movement in the minds of such potential allies as sound in the fundamentals of Irish national identity.

3. Join or support all those organisations or festivals which help to strengthen the Irish

identity at various levels (éigís, feiseanna, féilte and the like), but also consider it part of Sinn Féin activities to analyse and uncover the activities of persons and groups organising local events which degrade Ireland and her people (beauty contests, for example) and which bring benefit to tiny gommeen minorities.

It is important for republicans to be seen to be concerned and involved in this way at all levels, to be prepared to work hard for what is worthwhile, and to be willing to serve on the working committees, thus gaining an opportunity of influencing the content and style of local celebrations and events as the Irish Republican Brotherhood was so successful in doing in its time. The cumann might even sponsor one or two competitions at local feiseanna.

●4. Organise "crash courses" in Irish if such are not available locally. In this event the special officer appointed by Cumann Luthchleas Gael for the promotion of Irish should be approached. It may be essential, because of the re-writing of history, for Sinn Féin cumainn to organise and run history classes and lectures, tours with commentaries, and even to publish pamphlets or booklets or, at the very least, to publish items of local historical interest in the cumann broadsheet.

●5. Include at least some Irish in every republican publication, including the cumann broadsheet. The subject treated should be interesting and important. Short sentences make for easier and quicker comprehension. The cumann's address always should be in Irish as should the date and place of issue.

IRISH PRESENCE

6. Ensure that the Irish language always is present very obviously where the Republican Movement is present. For example, where pickets or marches are in progress some of the placards carried should carry slogans in Irish. Ideally, half of the matter displayed should be in Irish. The same principle should apply to posters. The choice of script may be left open, some people believing that the Irish script has a more emotional impact. However, it should be remembered that the Irish script has virtually disappeared and that the younger people, fresh from school, will be more familiar with the Roman script.

Each cumann should invest in copies of the Irish-English dictionary (Ó Dónaill) and the English-Irish dictionary (De Bhaldráithe) so that words may be spelt correctly in posters, placards and broadsheets. Irish should be heard at every Sinn Féin public meeting. In Gaeltacht areas Irish only should be used.

●7. Although sociologists recognise that language is the most important element of culture it is important to understand that the entire Irish culture is under attack and that one of the major weaknesses (deliberate?) of the "Free" State educational system was not to teach the entire culture. Sinn Féin must not fall into the same trap. It is only in the Murder-Machine type of schooling that culture is broken up artificially and put into separate boxes (some of which are put away under lock and key, to be available only to the system's trusted researchers and propagandists). Language, songs, music, history, folklore, dances, games, much of the work of artisans and artists, many of the local customs, the people's organisations, especially their trade unions, the broad philosophy of the people, their particular sense of humour, those factors which instinctively cause distaste or celebration. The length and breadth of the culture is the objective.

It may seem rather a lot – and somewhat alarming – that the Sinn Féin member should be expected to reach a standard of education not often found in an Irish university graduate. We must realise, however, that our objective is liberation and, with Davis (and, of course, Pearse and Connolly) that to be educated is to be free. If we do not make ourselves an integral part of the culture we cannot hope to be convincing to those outside Sinn Féin when we ask them to join us to save the Irish identity from being smothered by the philosophy of the multinationals (and the medium is the message, as McLuhin has pointed out).

●8. Educate ourselves in the entire culture by maintaining contact hours with the language, having learned it (otherwise the skill acquired, will decrease until little remains); by listening to Irish language songs regularly until style and spirit are understood and absorbed (discs, tapes,

visits to concerts, sessions, fleáinna; learning basic Irish dancing and sets, going where they are done well (particularly Co. Clare); organising ceilithe; running classes for the local young people in conjunction with other bodies; arranging for illustrated lectures, under cumann auspices, but open to the general public (the Sinn Féin educational department from its own resources can provide many of the lecturers already but well versed local people usually can be prevailed upon to give such lectures and should be availed of to the fullest extent possible as a principle of strategy as well as of education); helping local talent by publication, prizes, scholarships (to Eigse Willie Clancy, Scoil Eigse an Chomhaltais, Scoil Mherriman, the Gaeltacht); people usually will be eager to subscribe to special local collections to finance such patronage); by building up a good cumann library of books, discs and tapes, open to the public even if only to a limited extent (reference, for example); having a shop window or stall where the best material available, in both languages, helping to understand the Irish identity, may be seen regularly and for sale; arranging exhibitions, preferably in conjunction with other bodies, of paintings, photographs, engravings, artefacts, sculpture, examples of local traditional skills (in wood, iron, stone, textiles and the like), being very careful to have valuable material insured and to return all exhibits on loan to donors without delay; by organising éigsi, féilte or feiseanna (again, ideally, along with other bodies). Where nothing of this nature exists already or where a revival is indicated, the feast day of the local patron saint may be availed of to provide hours of joy for the people of the parish through athletics, a game of hurling, exhibitions, lectures, music sessions, literary, musical, singing and dancing competitions to encourage local talent, fishing contests and, to crown all, a scoraíocht that night (songs, music, Irish dances, sets).

Obviously, the local national martyrs may be honoured in like manner. Obviously, again, Christianity is part of the Irish culture (as is unbelief, disbelief, agnosticism and anti-clericalism) and, at the lowest level, that of tactics, at least, it is sensible to facilitate religion as an integral part of the general festivities. In such an event, however, it is essential that all the religious beliefs represented locally be invited to contribute. An ecumenical service, in both languages, might be the answer. If there is a local Jewish presence it should not be ignored.

●9. Persuade the ardfheis to adopt a calendar for the linguistic reconquest of the party under which, by an agreed date, every Sinn Féin member would have a good basic knowledge of the language; all Sinn Féin work would be done through the medium of the Irish language; all seeking Sinn Féin membership henceforth would have to be proficient in Irish or would pass through a stage of provisional membership, attending 'crash courses' in Irish and Sinn Féin policy in general.

●10. Persuade the ardfheis to adopt as a Sinn Féin objective the institution, staffing and growth of Foras an Phiarsaigh.

●11. Persuade the ardhomhairle to appoint a select committee to have discussions with an tOireachtas, the objective being inter alia, for the language movement to meet the literary challenges of the day by creating new moulds and modes, thus improving the quality of contributions so that, once again, the leadership in thought may be seen by all clearly to be given by those writing in the Irish language. Also, Sinn Féin might become a patron of one or more competitions.

●12. Increase participation by cumainn in the competition to gain the Robert Emmet Trophy. Are cumainn satisfied with the competition as it exists at present? Have they suggestions for improving the competition? Let us have them in writing.

●13. In general, exploit the contradictions to the full and publicise them widely and regularly. For example, the 'Free' State pretends to back the movement to restore the Irish language to the dominant position in Ireland yet, in fact, obstructs at virtually every step this aim. There is hardly a bilingual traffic sign in the entire 26 counties, outside Gaeltacht areas; gardaí seldom are willing to speak Irish to those they seek to question on any matter; civil servants act in like manner - insistence on speaking Irish inevitably involves a long delay on phone or in office; bilingual forms are few and all-Irish forms usually are far more difficult to obtain than all-English ones; semi-state bodies (such as health boards) virtually have outlawed Irish; few establishment politicians know Irish, fewer still want to use it, and using a language ensures its life; very few establishment figures are rearing their children bilingually from the cradle or support all-Irish schools; few politicians are prepared to recognise the

Gaeltacht during electoral campaigns, in literature or when addressing meetings; very, very few of the establishment politicians are to be seen at Oireachtas events, at the éigsi or similar local celebrations or, indeed, at anything savouring in the slightest of the cultural in either language.

SINCERITY

The people will appreciate Sinn Féin exposing such hypocrisy and can be counted upon to sympathise and support Sinn Féin if Sinn Féin is seen to be sincere (the tree is judged by its fruit). The people clearly understood the contradictions at the funeral of Tom Barry, judging by their comments. There are a thousand opportunities every week for republicans to point to Leinster House contradictions in relation to the Irish identity without ever mentioning the Vichy-like collaboration between Dublin's neo-colonial regime and the Crown forces.

An ardhomhairle has appointed a cultural officer who is a member of the education committee, which has discussed the matter in this discussion document, amended or expanded it, and finally, has approved it, for the party's democratic decision.

It is recommended that this officer be known generally, initially, as oifigeach dúchais (cultural officer), eventually dropping the words in parenthesis.

Should oifigí dúchais (cultural officers) be appointed at other levels of Sinn Féin? By this means it might be possible, by regular meetings of such officers, to monitor progress, to isolate and eliminate errors and to identify weaknesses.

The educational committee recommends that, where possible, such terms as "mid-west" should not be used and that, instead, the traditional Irish terms be substituted: e.g., Urmhumhain, Oirialla, Fearná, Breifne, Cualann.

The educational committee, finally, stresses the need for a thorough discussion of this document at all levels and for the fruits of such discussion to be sent in writing to the committee by Aibreán 1 (April 1), our hope being that this document may be brought up to date, incorporating the consensus, by the annual ardfheis.

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