

Republican SINN FÉIN Poblachtach

Aitheasc an Uachtarán



100ú Sinn Féin Ard Fheis 2004

Presidential Address to Ard-Fheis from Ruairí Ó Brádaigh

A Chathaoirligh, a theachtaí is a cháirde ar fad,

Fearaim fíor-chaoín fáilte rómhaibh go léir ag an Ard-Fheis seo, and 100ú ceann de chuid Shinn Féin. You are all most welcome to this, the hundredth Ard-Fheis of Sinn Féin. The next year will mark the centenary of the foundation of the Sinn Féin organisation: it was launched in the Rotunda, Dublin on November 28, 1905.

During the coming year we will be required to mark this occasion in a series of events at which we shall demonstrate that 2005 is the 100th anniversary of our foundation and celebrate a century of struggle against English rule in Ireland. The basis of Sinn Féin was and is that since England has no right to rule our country, the Irish representation should be withdrawn from the English parliament and an All-Ireland assembly be convened at home which would rule all 32 counties.

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Others who broke the Sinn Féin constitution in 1986 participate in the two partition parliaments forced on the Irish people by England and have offices in and expenses from Westminster. That being so they forfeit all claim to the historic name of Sinn Féin.

At the outset it is appropriate to refer to the recent death in New York of our distinguished Patron, George Harrison. George succeeded Michael Flannery and before him Tom Maguire and his passing in his 90th year occasioned a keen sense of loss among true Republicans and comrades in the international struggle for national liberation and justice.

George joined the East Mayo Battalion, IRA in the 1930s and following his emigration to the United States he became a life-long worker for Irish liberation for more than 60 years. His messages of encouragement to successive Ard-Fheiseanna will be recalled and his departure from the scene will leave a huge gap in the ranks of Irish American supporters of the Republican Movement in Ireland.

Outstanding was the statement issued by him together with the late Tom Falvey in 1986 when the All-Ireland Republic was abandoned by the latest group of collaborators with English rule here. Having rejected their move to accept the 26-County parliament and institutions, they stated without hesitation:

"We reaffirm our support to those who stand solidly behind the traditional Republican policy of abstention or boycott of all British-imposed institutions of servility and replace – not reform them – with Republican institutions of liberty and freedom".

During the year also another faithful Irish Republican passed on with the death of Peter Farley of New Jersey. Pete worked with us down the decades, stood firmly with the All-Ireland Republic in 1986, and since then was the main distributor of SAOIRSE in the United States. Leaba i measc na bhFíníní go raibh aca beirt.

A chairde, another eventful year in our struggle for freedom, justice and peace has just concluded. On the world scene opposition to the continued illegal occupation of Iraq by US and British forces has persisted and Republican Sinn Féin has joined in the anti-war protests. Specifically we participated in the Dublin demonstration on March 20, the first anniversary of this imperialist war, under our own banner.

Likewise during President Bush's 18-hour visit to Shannon and Co Clare on June 25/26, our members were prominent in the pickets and demonstrations held in various centres across the country. They joined the thousands of Irish people who by their presence on the streets and roads of the 26 Counties made clear in no uncertain terms their opposition to the visit of a man who with Tony Blair presided over the Anglo-US invasion and subjugation of the Iraqi people in defiance of the United Nations and the illegal detention and torture of political prisoners in Iraq and at Guantanamo Bay.

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Also they protested against the flouting of neutrality by the Dublin government in granting landing and refuelling facilities to US warplanes at Shannon and Baldonnel in support of this war of conquest. Recently it has been alleged that the 26-County State is not neutral but is non-aligned. Republican Sinn Féin, for its part, stands on a policy of neutrality and non-alignment, opposing all support for imperialist wars of whatever kind. The steady whittling away of such a policy by Leinster House administrations in recent years has eroded the honourable regard with which Ireland was once viewed by the formerly colonised peoples of the world.

Three reasons were given publicly for the invasion and occupation of Iraq. Two of these were found to be manifestly without foundation: (1) the possession of weapons of mass destruction and (2) linkage with Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda. Obviously US intelligence has been shown to be wanting.

There remains the third reason: the removal of the regime of Saddam Hussein. To invade another country in a pre-emptive strike simply to overthrow its government – even one as objectionable as that of Saddam Hussein – is totally contrary to the Charter of the United Nations Organisation. The horrific consequences of such action in the case of Iraq has been with us even up to the present. Nowhere in American or British official statements has there been mention of a fourth reason: the assertion of domination in the Middle East and control of oil supplies at bargain rates.

Similarly, the designation of Republican Sinn Féin as a “foreign terrorist organisation” by the US State Department on July 14 last was false, based on faulty intelligence and does a grave injustice to all those working for a just political solution to the conflict in the Six British-occupied Counties of Ireland.

The State Department stated that Republican Sinn Féin was an “alias” for the Continuity Irish Republican Army. In other words we had no existence as a political organisation and we were simply an assumed name for another body. Penalties were prescribed including seizure of Republican Sinn Féin assets in the US and denial of visas to leaders attempting to visit that country.

With respect, President Bush and Secretary of State Colin Powell, you will find Sinn Féin in any encyclopaedia; one such describes it as “an Irish Nationalist movement that demanded an Irish government independent of Great Britain”. Or you could have recourse to a dictionary; e.g. Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary describes Sinn Féin as “a political movement and party in Ireland championing a republic and later opposing partition”.

Sinn Féin (in English “Ourselves” – based on self-reliance) was founded in 1905 many years before the IRA came into existence in 1916. Sinn Féin adopted a definite Republican Constitution in 1917, hence Republican Sinn Féin. Next year, 2005, we celebrate our centenary.

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Mr President and Mr Secretary of State, if either or both of you sat the Irish Junior Certificate examination in history and you wrote, in answer to a question, that "Sinn Féin" was just an alias or assumed name for the IRA, you would certainly fail that question. No marks, gentlemen.

Raidió na Gaeltachta in Ireland and Raidió Free Éireann in New York both highlighted the issue and interviewed the President of Republican Sinn Féin. The Irish Echo newspaper, New York also featured the matter prominently. In addition, our Vice-President, Des Long, wrote to the US Ambassador, Mr James C Kenny, in Dublin enclosing policy documents and asking him to meet a delegation of three from this organisation to discuss our political policies. We sought to correct a grave error on the part of his government.

There was no reply, not even an acknowledgement, and so another letter – registered this time – was sent. This second missive was also ignored. Therefore on September 25, the eve of the All-Ireland Football Final, a picket of Republican Sinn Féin members and Na Fianna Éireann was placed on the US Embassy in Dublin and a message was delivered by hand. Similar action was taken at consulates in Belfast and Edinburgh, Scotland, and at the Embassy in London. With no reply four weeks later, An Ard-Chomhairle felt they had no option but to bring the State Department action and the Embassy attitude to public notice by addressing an Open Letter to them and by ventilating the issue at this Ard-fheis.

Harassment of true Republicans by the British and the 26-County governments continued during the year. Shortly after last year's Ard-Fheis the last of the Lavelle family of Donagh, Lisnaskea, Co Fermanagh was released on bail, having spent ten months in prison on remand. At the same time all charges against the son, Emmet were dropped.

The parents, Michael and Mary Lavelle, had to wait until this October for their case on conspiracy charges to be dealt with. The Crown prosecution case was rejected without a defence being heard and both were cleared.

Their home had been raided by RUC/PSNI and the family expelled for 24 hours while it was occupied and searched. Most of a year was spent in jail by two family members plus another ten months awaiting proceedings

— and all about nothing! Such can be the lot of Republican families in Six Occupied Counties.

South of the Border the campaign of harassment and criminalisation has been stepped up. On September 11 two members of our Ard-Chomhairle were stopped and questioned in the street as they left Ard-Oifig in Dublin. Papers and documents relating to an Ard-Chomhairle meeting, which they had just attended, were seized. These have yet to be returned.

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In Galway last December a veteran Republican Sinn Féin member was arrested for selling SAOIRSE – Irish Freedom in Eyre Square, a practice he has engaged in every month since he returned from the United States in 1972. He had to wait until this October for the charges to be dismissed, the judge saying that under the Casual Trading Act no licence was necessary when he was not trading for profit.

All round these actions against us are taken because we simply refuse to accept English rule in Ireland. We refuse to bend in the face of such harassment and will continue to put forward EIRE NUA, our proposals for a four-province federal Ireland with optimum decentralisation of power and decision-making. It remains the only clear and credible alternative to the failed and unworkable Stormont Agreement.

Le linn na bliana seo caite, sheas ár mbaill go daingean ar son a dteanga. Ghlacadar páirt san bhfeachtas “Stadas don Ghaeilge” fé threorú Chonradh na Gaeilge. B'é an aidhm ag an bhfeachtas stadas oifigiúil oibre a bheith ag an nGaeilge san Aontas Eorpach maraon le naoi dteangacha eile, a bhfurmhór mór le náisiúin beaga a rabhthas ag glacadh leo.

Rinne rialtas Stát na 26 Chontae faillí san ghnó seo breis agus 30 bliain ó shoin agus iad ag dul isteach san Chomhphobal Eorpach.

Ritheadh rún ag an Ard-Chomhairle “go dtugtar stadas oifigiúil don Ghaeilge gach áit gur féidir agus go ndearbhódh Sinn Féin Poblachtach go dtacaíonn said leis an bhfeachtas Stádas don Ghaeilge”. Bhíomar páirteach sa sluachorraíl a reachtaigh an Conradh i mBaile Átha Cliath agus scaipeamar an bhilleóg gorm “Seas an Fód ar son na Teanga”.

We are glad to record that Republican Sinn Féin took part in the campaign of Stádas don Ghaeilge which forced the 26-County administration to seek official working status for the Irish language within the EU last July. This is something that the Fianna Fail administration neglected to seek when the 26-County State joined the EEC more than 30 years ago.

With nine new languages achieving that status the time was never more opportune since the failure of the early 1970s. These are the languages of small nations like ourselves – with the exception of Poland – but their self-respect did not allow them to disregard their native tongues.

The Irish Times of July 19 last in an editorial said: “It is a decision which will greatly enhance the status of Irish at home and abroad, and give the lie, once again, to the charge that it has no role to play in the modern world”. It went on to call for the development of Gaeltacht-based and Irish-medium third level courses ... as a matter of urgency and it concluded:

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“Even if agreed (by the EU) it cannot in itself ensure that the language will survive. That will take a cultural, voluntary and political effort of a different order of magnitude over the coming generation”.

Republican Sinn Féin took a firm stand against the so-called Citizenship referendum held in June. Having removed the claim to jurisdiction over all 32 Counties in 1998 and replaced it with a constitutional guarantee of citizenship to “every person born on the island of Ireland”, that right was now removed in turn. This was a clear breach of the Stormont Agreement which stated that all the new arrangements were “interlocking and interdependent”.

With the basic right to citizenship for all Irish-born people taken away, citizenship becomes a privilege, which can be given or taken away arbitrarily. The 26-County State has ceded the Six Counties to England – they are no longer since 1998 disputed territory in the eyes of Leinster House. Now the Dublin administration is playing party politics with the right to citizenship. Will it be further sliced away just as neutrality is being eroded?

This is the policy of the DUP in action – changing the Stormont Agreement. Now their demands are being conceded with the support of London and Dublin: (1) by insisting that the surrender of arms be filmed (made “transparent”); (2) by requiring the Provisionals’ military body to disband and (3) by the creation of the “Independent Monitoring Commission”, i.e. British Intelligence personnel who will decide if the Provisionals’ military organisation has disbanded.

All of these are additions to the Agreement and form no part of it. The Provo leadership, for its part, has agreed to another act of “decommissioning” immediately and the surrender of all their remaining military equipment by Christmas. In effect this means the end of the organisation as a military body. It would become an old comrades’ association, London and Dublin have asserted, and P O’Neill has not denied it.

Having secured this the DUP went further and demanded that all decisions by “power-sharing executive” ministers and cross-border bodies should be sanctioned by the Stormont assembly which is of course Unionist-dominated. The Provisionals would yield on the question of policing – joining Policing Board and urging their members to join and support the British police in the Six Counties.

Who is to oppose all this sell-out? Not Fine Gael. Did not John Bruton tell us he is a Home Ruler, that the 1916 Rising was not necessary and that his proudest moment was when he greeted officially the heir to the Crown of England – which claims Six Irish counties as well – in Dublin Castle in 1995. And the Dublin Minister for Foreign Affairs has welcomed the Provos into a coalition with Fianna Fáil. It is “inevitable”, he says. Now we all know what lies ahead – did not Republican Sinn Féin predict it? The day of the re-born Broy Harriers is at hand!

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There is airgead go leór for security – to protect visiting British royalty, their British military funerals and unveiling of memorials from Dublin to Mayo, but the 0.7% of GDP publicly committed to for Third World Aid by 2007 is in serious doubt. With 25 million Euro made so far shunting American troops and their prisoners (without any rights as POWs) through Shannon Airport, is it any wonder the Arab street and the world of Islam no longer take us seriously as a people of neutrality and non-alignment when such deeds are done in our name by the denizens of Leinster House?

North of the Border, the call for the re-opening of the investigation into the murder by a British-backed death-squad of GAA official Séan Brown in May 1997 came not from the RUC/PSNI but rather from the police Ombudsman following a request from the Brown family. The fact that the original investigation was clearly inadequate and slipshod, falling well below the standards of any professional police force, shows only how little has changed.

What it does highlight is while the name of the RUC has changed, the ideology and sectarian nature of this British colonial force has not. Its primary purpose is to uphold English rule in Ireland, part of which has involved collusion in the murder of innocent, uninvolved Nationalists, as the report by the retired Canadian judge Peter Cory indicated during the past year.

The belated decision of the British government to hold an inquiry into allegations of collusion in the case of the killing of Belfast human rights solicitor Pat Finucane was announced only after an RUC informer was sentenced for the murder. Well might the solicitor's family have gone on record as wanting to know "not who pulled the trigger but who pulled the strings".

Those who ordered Pat Finucane's death may never be revealed, because rulings in the Bloody Sunday Inquiry, either by chairman Lord Saville or by courts overruling Saville, have excluded evidence on the grounds that it may endanger British "national security" or put the lives of British agents at risk through their public exposure or the revelation of the agencies' modus operandi. Such evidence would be central to the proposed Finucane inquiry.

Furthermore in the case of the Co Armagh "Shoot to kill" incidents in 1982, five British law lords ruled last March that the State's obligation under the British Human Rights Act to carry out "effective and independent" investigation of killings involving State agents did not apply to deaths prior to the enactment of this legislation in October 2000.

How can crucial evidence be compelled in such a situation? Will the Finucane Inquiry, as announced, be a sham and yet another whitewash? A higher court of inquiry is needed – by an international body such as the United Nations. It needs to be empowered to compel witnesses even from British government agencies. Otherwise the Finucane family and the Irish people will again be disappointed.

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South of the Border, the Special Non Jury Court with special laws of evidence continues to operate. This phase of its functioning has lasted 32 years, ever since 1972. On June 21 it passed sentence on a Limerick Republican on a charge of membership of the IRA which was based solely on the "opinion" of a senior policeman. The sentence imposed was five years imprisonment which is tantamount to internment and an abuse of civil liberties. This sentencing was done at short notice and was carried out without solicitor and counsel being present.

Before she became President of the 26-County State – in the mid-1970s actually – Mrs Mary Robinson published a pamphlet about the operations of this Non-jury Court in its first two years. Surely 30 years later it is time for other eminent legal figures to voice their unease at such draconian legislation and the power it places in the hands of the police Special Branch.

The proposals set out by the 26-County Minister for Finance in his Budget speech last December for the relocation of eight departments of state and up to 10,000 civil servants was just a smokescreen to take the public eye off the fact that once again he had produced a financial statement and programme which further widened the gap between rich and poor.

They do not constitute meaningful decentralisation of power and decision-making as set out in our ÉIRE NUA programme. On the contrary they are simply about the relocation of civil servants. Under these proposals, whilst civil servants and their departments are being moved throughout the 26-County State, key decisions will continue to be made in Dublin.

This is in stark contrast to ÉIRE NUA which provides for genuine decentralisation whereby key decision-making will take place at provincial, regional and local level, except for Foreign Affairs, National Defence and overall financing. The latter three functions of government will be carried out at Federal level in the new capital city of Athlone.

Therefore it was refreshing to hear Dr Edward Walsh, former President of the University of Limerick, espousing the idea that the seat of government in Ireland should be separate from the economic capital in order to create a counter-polarity and "correct the Dublin imbalance". For more than 30 years Republican Sinn Féin has been advocating this proposal and putting forward the location of the federal capital in "the city of Athlone", one of Dr Walsh's suggestions.

The ÉIRE NUA (new governmental structures) policy document says on page 20; "It is proposed that – to signify the beginning of a new era and the unity of the country around its geographic centre – Athlone be made the capital city of the New Ireland". In addition to the examples given by Dr Walsh of the separation of the administrative capital from the commercial one in Australia, Brazil and the United

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States, Switzerland has its seat of national government in Bern, totally apart from Zurich and Geneva.

In keeping with a resolution passed by our Ard-fheis last year, An Open Letter was addressed to the GAA by Vice-President Des Dalton calling on the Association to state publicly if the so-called British Combined Services football team is part of an affiliated club of the GAA. He advanced the view that the staging of a number of football matches in recent times between British Crown forces in Ireland and members of the 26-County police and army was part of a wider campaign of normalising the British military and policing presence in Ireland. This presence could never be either normal or acceptable and continues to be the root cause of conflict in our country.

Republican Sinn Féin also deplored the high-jacking of the Sam Maguire Cup following the two previous All-Ireland football finals and its use in attempting to legitimise the British-imposed institution of Stormont. He appealed to the GAA not to allow its proud Association to be incorporated into a campaign which runs counter to the national ideals and ethos upon which it was founded.

Following the tragic and untimely death of Tyrone team captain Cormac McAnallen our organisation extended sincere sympathy to his family and the GAA community throughout Co Tyrone. Some days later we expressed the view that the spectacle of RUC/PSNI at his funeral was hypocritical and distasteful, especially since the same force was among those responsible for the death of Cormac's uncle, Dan McAnallen in 1973. Intruding on the grief of the family and indeed of the wider nationalist community to advance the normalisation agenda could only be described as outrageous.

A most important event during the year was our participation in the local elections in the 26 Counties in June. With seven candidates, one each for Longford and Galway Co Councils, two for Limerick City Council and one in each of Athy Town Council in Kildare and Cóbh and Midleton

Town Councils in Cork an amount of hard work was done in canvassing, leafleting, postering, advertising, raising finance and securing coverage in local newspapers and radio.

In the huge Conamara electoral area of Co Galway, Tomás Ó Curraoin and his team put in a spectacular performance, coming eighth for seven seats. With 1076 first preferences he increased his vote by 84% from 1999. With transfers he reached 1345 before being eliminated on the 14th count. This result speaks for itself and it is well to remember that the great majority of Tomás's first preferences came from his own Gaeltacht area, Bearna, Na Forbacha agus An Spidéal.

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After 30 years, veteran Republican Sinn Féin councillor Seán Lynch lost his seat in the Drumlish area of Co Longford by 90 votes. The Provos contested the area for the first time securing 107 first preferences at the bottom of the poll. Great credit is due to Seán's hard work and that of his few helpers during the campaign.

The Longford Leader commented on "the remarkable record of real public service that will never be surpassed in Co Longford" put in by Seán and his late father Seán F. who was an Independent Republican councillor for 35 years until his death in 1969. Seán junior was chairperson of Longford Co Council in 1980–81 during the H-Blocks and Armagh hunger strikes and was Election Agent for Martin Hurson as candidate in Longford–Westmeath. His service to the All-Ireland Republic, his dedication to duty and commitment are deeply appreciated here today.

A long and hard campaign was fought by the two Limerick City candidates, Seán Ó Neill in Ward 4 and Michael Ryan in Ward 1. Their vote was the highest achieved by Republican Sinn Féin candidates in local elections in the city since Paddy Mulcahy was elected in 1955. In a post-election statement local Director of Elections Joe Lynch said: "We shall continue to work within the community to raise the concerns of the people and we are pleased with the foundation laid in the local elections so that we can now build for the future".

In Cork a father and son contested. Dónal Varian, the trade unionist who so ably defended workers' rights during the Irish Steel sell-off, stood for Cóbh Town Council and came 10th for nine seats. His son, Terence went forward for Midleton Town Council with a result that augurs well for the future. Members from Cork city went out day after day to assist in the campaign.

In Kildare, Des Dalton made his mark in a first outing for Athy Town Council. Again he was 10th for nine seats. The local Leinster Leader said "His final figure of 175 may not seem too far behind the successful candidates who did not reach the quota" and quoted the Republican Sinn Féin candidate as saying: "One thing that clearly emerges from the results — there is a seat there to be won. I am determined more than ever to do just that in five years time".

The Ard-Fheis appreciates the hard work of these standard-bearers for local and All-Ireland democracy and of their teams of workers. For the most part their efforts raised sufficient funding locally; in one or two cases the central election fund helped out and now all expenses are cleared. No praise is high enough for these election workers who went out, faced the people and in four cases narrowly missed election. However, near-misses are not enough. We need successes.

To sum up, a lot more could be done by areas not contesting. The areas fighting for public support feel that. At a minimum, finances could have been raised. Some neighbouring personnel did assist but there was not enough of that. A number of the

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central election directorate were candidates themselves or were otherwise engaged and so were dispersed from giving direction.

A new directorate has already been appointed and will be required to get down to work immediately. The Galway members even now are preparing for the Údarás na Gaeltachta elections next summer and before we realise it the 2009 local elections in the 26 Counties will again be upon us. Let us get ready now.

Incidentally, at the eve of May Day launch of our local election Manifesto, the updated version of Republican Sinn Féin's social and economic programme, SAOL NUA was also introduced to the public. This marked the fulfilment, as required by a Resolution of the 2002 Ard-Fheis, of an undertaking given here at that time.

During the year two reports carried in the print media – and ignored by the 26-County Establishment – deserve to be brought to the attention of the Ard-Fheis. The first is the annual CORI (Conference of Religious of Ireland) socio-economic review published in April which finds that no other EU state spends less proportionally than the 26-County State on social services and supports for the unemployed, the homeless, the elderly, the disabled and other marginalized groups. The 16 “savage cuts” in the last Budget come to mind.

Such findings only highlight the real priorities of an administration which can devote huge sums of public money to pet projects such as Punchestown and can give massive tax breaks to the very rich including the millionaires who do not pay even a single cent in income tax and those within the bloodstock industry.

The social and economic policies of this administration feed into an extreme right-wing agenda; they are policies which are not about serving the needs of the greater number of people but rather about protecting the interests of the elite and privileged few. As CORI starkly points out: “current policy focus will ensure that substantial numbers of people are condemned to live in social exclusion and substantially larger numbers of people will be forced to accept a poor quality of life for the foreseeable future”.

The second document for your consideration is the annual United Nations Human Development Report published in July last. It is an indictment of the 26-County State and particularly the right-wing social and economic policies which have been aggressively pursued by the Fianna Fáil/PD coalition over the past seven years.

The report finds that the 26-County State, in spite of rising prosperity, has the second highest level of poverty in the Western World; the gap between rich and poor is wider only in the United States. As the Irish Times pointed out on July 16 “on a Human Poverty Index” the 26-County State is “ranked 16th out of 17 states, just ahead of the United States”.

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The ever increasing numbers of people who have had to spend days on trolleys in hospital corridors across the state because of bed shortages will not be surprised to learn that of the top ten countries on the Human Development Index, the 26-County State has the lowest life expectancy and is among the lowest in terms of spending on health and education. The report continues: "Some 22.3% of Irish people are functionally illiterate, worse than in any other Western country". Functionally illiterate is defined in the report as lacking the ability to read a timetable or a set of rules for taking tablets.

The response of the Dublin administration is to bury its head in the sand, as it has done with previous UNHD reports; it has attempted to discredit this report by saying that the figures in it are out of date, despite the fact that they themselves supplied the figures. The rest of the world is out of step in how it measures poverty, it seems, not the 26-County State, as the Irish Times pointed out on the day of its publication.

This report underlines the stark reality that the State south of the Border is now closer to Boston than to Berlin, with the current Administration ideologically committed to unbridled economics. Using Gross National Product and Gross Domestic Product as the only measure of economic success has led to a situation where the top ten per cent of the population is almost ten times wealthier than the bottom ten per cent.

Mark well: these are not Republican Sinn Féin statistics. They come from respected national and international bodies which have been compiling them for the past 15 years. As we move on in a new century we need a radical change in direction: the policies set out in SAOL NUA are people-centred and based on sound Republican, democratic socialist, ecological and self-reliance principles, providing people with a real alternative.

The recent decision by the EPA to grant draft licences to Indaver Ireland to operate a municipal waste incinerator in Duleek, Co. Meath and a toxic waste incinerator in Ringaskiddy, Co. Cork has to be condemned due to the health hazards of incineration to the public. The fact is that the EPA is hopelessly compromised by the government – when it appointed Mary Kelly (formerly of IBEC and favouring incineration) as its Director, and more recently appointed Laura Burke, former Project Manager at Indaver for the two incinerators, as Director of Environmental Enforcement. The fox has truly been put in charge of the hen house by this government.

Similarly, the recent decision by the Dublin Government not to adopt a carbon tax is contrary to international practices and destroys any chance of the 26-County State reaching its greenhouse gas emissions targets agreed under the Kyoto Agreement – we are already 120% above our 1990 CO₂ levels, though our allowed emissions target is only a 13% increase.

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Internationally, the nuclear industry is trying to put itself forward as the solution to the climate change being caused by greenhouse gases. Republicans have always opposed nuclear power as being unsustainable and dangerous – we opposed the plant planned for Carnsore Point in Wexford in the late 1970s – and will oppose any attempt to propose nuclear power as a part of our future energy supply.

Ireland has enough wind energy potential – both onshore and offshore – to power 100% of our energy needs, and when wave, tidal and solar power become commercial we will be able to export power to Britain and the European continent.

Republicans have always proposed the maximum usage of our National resources, and support the exploitation of our fossil fuels, such as the Corrib Gas field – but only if the benefits of these resources will accrue to the Irish people – and only if this exploitation does no damage to our valuable environment. The planning permission recently given by An Bórd Pleanála to Enterprise Oil should be opposed on both counts – the wrong price, and the wrong place. A sea-based gas terminal, and a proper royalty and tax package for the Irish people is what is needed.

Meanwhile a new EU constitution is being introduced which was described last June by the Belgian prime minister, Guy Verhofstadt as " the capstone of a European federal state". It represents the consolidation of the various treaties which have been pushed through in the course of the past twenty years or so. It states quite clearly its basis: "The (EU) constitution, and the law adopted by the union's institutions in exercising competences conferred on it, shall have primacy over the law of member-states".

In other words the nation-states taking part in the EU are becoming so many provinces or regions of a federal United States of Europe. The proposed constitution provides for a high-profile President and a Minister for Foreign Affairs. How long will it be before there is an EU Minister for Defence, or more accurately a Minister for War, as the security articles contained in the constitution could well lead to the final loss of neutrality? Already the 26-County State is tied into the NATO-led Partnership For Peace and the EU Rapid Reaction Force authorised to act up to 2500 miles outside the borders of the EU.

Referendums on this proposed constitution will have to be held in ten of the 25 EU member states. In keeping with our inheritance and the democratic legacy of the French Revolution – the right of nations and peoples to self-determination – we must oppose this further tightening of the EU grip by the political elites of the former imperial powers in the interests of European-based trans-national capital.

Europe must be founded on co-operation not domination. We need a Europe of equals not one with a constitution which takes precedence over the constitutions of nation-states. And we must reject "the resource wars of the 21st century" which have

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already commenced with great loss of civilian life. All that means voting "No" to this proposed EU constitution.

Republican Sinn Féin last March welcomed the EU's support for the ending of Turkish occupation and re-unification of Cyprus prior to any poll being taken on EU accession in that country.

However we described the EU stance on Cyprus as hypocritical in view of the fact that the EU has ignored the partition and British occupation of Ireland since both the 26-County State and Britain joined the EEC in 1973. Britain is an outstanding example of a member of the EU which claims sovereignty over and maintains a military presence in the territory of another member.

During the month of March last a very valuable review of the organisation, or a "think in ", was engaged in over an entire week-end. The attendance of about 40 consisted of Ard-Chomhairle members and key-members from various parts of the country. The method adopted was a SWOT analysis: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. The Strengths and Weaknesses are within the organisation itself; the Opportunities and Threats are external factors in the environment.

This was hard work as the extent to which Republican Sinn Féin can cope with its environment was thought through. A realistic assessment was made and the information gleaned was used in order to decide how to move forward in a strategic plan. Operational plans would be needed to implement this and regular assessment of progress made with revisions of the scheme where necessary.

The strengths were felt to lie in our core values, the organisation itself, the membership, the monthly newspaper SAOIRSE, the website, our policy documents, the offices in Dublin and Belfast, the commemorations, especially at Easter, the funerals expressing gratitude and honour to those who have given long service to the All-Ireland Republic, and educational meetings and the like. These are considerable strengths but the use we make of them may sometimes be inadequate.

Weaknesses listed were mainly personnel problems, e.g. members stretched too far, failure to attract new members, small Cumainn, internal meetings being irregular, members spending too much time in their own circles instead of being outward looking and influencing the public, problems with the leadership and head office and here An Ard-Chomhairle criticised itself.

Opportunities included the failure of the Stormont process, corruption in public life, rising expectations especially regarding health services and the environment, e.g. opposition to incineration, trade union representation, cost of housing, access to research data, e.g. CORI and ICTU, our own website, third level institutions, social issues, British royal visits and anti-war demos, factory closures, exposing exploitation

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at home and abroad. There is a lack of good honest leadership and there is commercial exploitation of young people.

The Threats are powerful: the two partition states and their draconian legislation, all-out anti-Republican propaganda, the compliant anti-national media, the whole range of anti-national forces, revisionism, acceptance of the Unionist Veto, the attempted removal of British responsibility from the national question, apathy and indifference, the culture of greed and the Omagh factor. The threats by those who accept English rule here as permanent are considerable indeed.

The Way Forward is to bring Strengths to bear on Opportunities. This involves SAOIRSE, leaflets and access to local papers and radio on local issues, anti-war and trade union work, advertising our website address, inviting friends and associates to commemorations with literature always available, circulating policy documents to third-level students, making the economic points from SAOL NUA, keeping core values to the forefront and linking the local to the national, seminars for new members and later open to the public, underlining losses to the Irish people from the Agreement and pushing the ÉIRE NUA alternative, Cumann meetings and networking, the leadership to emphasise commitment and motivation.

A list of proposed solutions to weaknesses was made (eight in number) and nine ways of how to minimise the threats. The conclusion states that Republican Sinn Féin has set itself a task of massive proportions. To enable the work to be done, the overriding compelling imperative is to find plenty of good quality workers. Recruitment, training and development of members is a priority.

The period since the reorganisation of 1986, it says, can be divided into two phases: 1986–1998 and 1998 to date. Because so many people put their faith in the Stormont Agreement and were prepared to give it a chance, the second phase has probably been more difficult. Recent developments would suggest that that phase is coming to an end, with imminent collapse of the deal, or at least the disenchantment of many Republican-minded people.

It is suggested that all members get a copy of this Report of the Review Exercise of last March. It is essential reading for Republican activists and copies can be made available for a nominal figure. All participants were agreed that the exercise was the most important week-end's work since 1986.

A chárde, the way ahead is clear to all attending here today. The task is to convey that assessment to others. Those who have accepted English rule in Ireland are prepared to destroy all their remaining arms – a deed without precedent in Irish history – and to disband themselves at the behest of the British government.

Already they are being recruited to the British forces as the new Broy Harriers. David Trimble, leader of the official Unionists, has stated that they should be admitted to

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the RUC/PNSI. No doubt he and his kind together with the Brits have unfinished work for them – to crush the remaining resistance to English rule here.

Before they commence their impossible task it is well to draw their and the Irish people's attention to a revealing letter in the Irish Times of May 21 last. The architect of the "Sticky" road, as it has been called, makes the situation absolutely clear to all who want to see. Dr Roy Johnston writes of the attempt he, Cathal Goulding and others made in the 1960s "to politicise the republican movement", that is, of course, to constitutionalise it.

"With the August 1969 armed pogroms", he continues, "our politicisation project was, for a time, bypassed. I welcome its re-emergence, under the leadership of Gerry Adams, and hope he succeeds where we failed".

But those who protected the British Army and the RUC from the righteous anger of the people on the streets of Ardoyne last July 12 will fail again and the dynamic of Irish national liberation will assert itself and press forward to final victory.

An Phoblacht Abú!

Victory to the Irish people!