

Republican SINN FÉIN Poblachtach

Aitheasc an Uachtarán

103ú Sinn Féin Ard Fheis 2007

Presidential Address to Ard-Fheis 2007 from Ruairí Ó Brádaigh

A Chathaoirligh, a Theachtaí is a cháirde ar fad.

Fearaim Céad Míle Fáilte romhaibh go léir ag an Ard-Fheis seo, an dara ceann is céad de chuid Shinn Féin. You are most welcome to this, the 103rd Ard-Fheis of Sinn Féin. We have just completed another busy year in upholding and promoting the right of the people of Ireland to national independence in the face of a steady campaign to have us accept and normalise British rule in this country.



We began the year with highly successful 50th anniversary commemorations in Limerick and in Monaghan of the deaths for Ireland of Sean Sabhat and Fearghal Ó h-Anluain. We had the spectacle of former comrades pretending that they did not die for Irish freedom, that they gave their lives for what is euphemistically called "equality", that is civil rights under English rule in Ireland.

We ended the year with fitting ceremonies for the Edentubber Martyrs in Wexford and at the place of their deaths for Ireland 50 years ago. At New Year, our members in Limerick produced and sold a booklet in memory of Sabhat and Ó h-Anluain, while at year's end, with help from our members, the staff at Ard-Oifig, brought out a very appropriate Story of the Edentubber Martyrs. The production of such publications is very necessary at this time because of the amount of mis-representation of the high ideals for which our martyrs sacrificed their all. But such is not confined to the case of Republicans of the 1950s.

In September last, a County Secretary of the GAA stood at Liam Lynch's grave and told us that "he believed Lynch would have accepted the (so-called) Good Friday Agreement". This came 85 years subsequent to Liam Lynch being killed in action fighting against the Treaty of Surrender, which sought to maintain Partition and English rule here, and shortly after he stated: "We have declared for an Irish Republic and will not live under any other law".

In keeping with this insidious campaign of mis-representation of the patriot dead, another series of efforts is being made by stealth and fraud to take over Republican

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Memorials throughout the country. The purpose here is to further the misleading interpretation of the cause for which they died.

This latter offensive may be furthered by offers to refurbish memorials, or provide funds to do so, or even to place flagpoles beside them. Such advances can only be exposed and countered at local level and it behoves our members to do so without hesitation. These activities are designed to strike at the very roots of the historic Republican Movement and to overturn its ideology. We need to be on the alert.

Similarly, in the early days of the calendar New Year, British State papers for 1976 were released to the media. These contained falsifications of the positions adopted by the Republican leadership during talks with British representatives in 1974/1976.

Once more and for the record: (1) We never met any British agents other than at the meetings chronicled in the documentation deposited in the Archives at the NUI Galway in June 2005. (These have been available to researchers since December 2005.); (2) A "private" Declaration of Intent by the British Government to disengage from Ireland was never sought. At all times, this Declaration was required to be PUBLIC; (3) At no time was "a future loyalist government in a six-county Ulster" contemplated. A nine-county Ulster within a four-province All-Ireland federation was never departed from. For the British Establishment to keep false records is to provide an untrue and inaccurate analysis from which a final settlement of the historic "Irish Question" cannot be constructed.

During January also and in the run-up to his Ard-Fheis, Gerry Adams sought, publicly this time, a meeting or meetings with "dissident republican leaders". We replied publicly "who is Mr. Adams addressing? Is it the people who have resigned recently from his party ? For our part we are not dissidents".

We continued: "Mr. Adams knows well our core values. He knows that no reconciliation is possible. Republican Sinn Féin's values were once his own, before he and the Provos decided to accept the institutions of British rule in Ireland. The discussions he proposes do not refer to us".

We went on to picket the Provo Ard-Fheis at the end of the month. This was to highlight the fact that the real issue was the acceptance by the Provos of British police, British law and British courts in Ireland. The theme of the picket was the never-changing role of the RIC/RUC/PSNI in Ireland, which is to uphold British rule. Indeed, the latest report at that time from the British Police Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan on collusion between RUC/PSNI and loyalist death squads served only to reinforce this point.

The Ard-Chomhairle's New Year statement 2007 called for clear thinking, leadership and a programme of action. This would provide a focal point of resistance to that section of the Irish people who would never accept English rule in Ireland. Republican

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Sinn Féin represented the only political alternative capable of providing this, coming as it does from a position of solid and unequivocal Irish Republicanism. Other groups and organisations, it said, may attempt to hold this ground but Republican Sinn Féin is the only political organisation to uphold the right of Irish people acting as a unit, to determine their own destiny subsequent to British disengagement from Ireland. We rejected both partitionist states and their respective assemblies.

The task facing us was to present the true Republican alternative to the Irish people, opposing all efforts to normalise British rule here. Thus, participation in the puppet assembly at Stormont, visits by English royal family members and especially their Queen, visits by British airforce, naval or military personnel to the 26-County state, or other events which have the purpose of normalising the British presence in Ireland had to be opposed.

For the past year, we are happy to say, this programme was largely implemented, although hampered greatly by a denial of publicity in the media. On February 24th, for the first time ever, Croke Park, the GAA's national stadium, was handed over for an Ireland-England rugby match. The English national anthem "God Save the Queen" was played and the British flag, the Union Jack, was flown at the grounds where 14 innocent Irish civilians, including a Tipperary football player were shot dead and many others wounded and injured by British Forces.

Republican Sinn Féin held a protest outside the grounds during the match. The leaflet distributed on that occasion said: "We protest at the presence of the English rugby team in Croke Park because they represent a country which continues to occupy the North-Eastern part of Ireland; the events of Bloody Sunday cannot be dismissed as history while England holds six Irish counties; our protest is making a political point and is not anti-rugby"

For a whole week beforehand we were stretched to the limit providing press interviews, radio participation and television appearances. Des Dalton, Josephine Hayden and Ruairí Óg Ó Brádaigh were engaged almost on a full-time basis in this regard. John Horan was very active with the media in Dublin. Des Long was similarly engaged in Limerick and Clare. We were seen to be the body making the stand on this issue.

At the same time, we were rushed into a Stormont Election north of the Border when we found that an oath was no longer required at the nomination of candidates. Six candidates were put forward; in East Derry, West Tyrone, Mid-Ulster, Fermanagh-South Tyrone, Upper Bann and West Belfast. A quarter of a million copies of our election manifesto were delivered through the post to every household in the six constituencies and our opening press conference in Belfast was covered by the media.

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Following that, there was almost total media blackout of Republican Sinn Féin throughout the election. Even our name was suppressed by the Stormont regime's electoral body and a compliant media followed suit. Our candidates were styled as "Independents" taking away our coherent strategy and sense of direction. Although not registered as a "party" at Leinster House for 40 years, the media in the 26-Counties do not class Republican Sinn Féin candidates as "Independents", but treat them as an organised body.

Indeed, on the TG4 television programme Seacht Lá on polling day, March 7th, a commentator (Joe Tiernan) stated that there was a complete block on publicity for Republican Sinn Féin and that there appeared to have been an agreement between the various channels to this effect. The result was, that denied publicity and even their organisation's name, our six candidates were consigned to a welter of 25 Independents, without the distinction of the Republican Sinn Féin title and direction. Of course the harassment by the RUC/PSNI of our election workers continued during the campaign.

Given these circumstances, the outcome was as expected. Expenses were heavy, of course, especially the printing of posters and manifestos together with advertising in local newspapers. In this regard, our own members rallied in style and with another positive development, we are happy to announce that all debts have been cleared. We, at this Ard-Fheis, applaud all of our candidates, their agents and supporters, who fought a first-rate campaign against very great odds.

As the Easter Statement read at all Commemorations, commented: "Supporters should remember that the struggle for Irish National Liberation has never been measured by the number of votes which our movement has been afforded, but by the commitment of the small numbers who have remained steadfast and loyal to the Irish Republic". Incidentally, we did not contest where there was an abstentionist candidate already in the field, and in our Eve of Poll message, we called for support for all abstentionist candidates, that is, for our own six and two others.

The creeping Anglicisation of Ireland continued throughout the year. British warships paid formal visits to Cork and Waterford, but in both cases they were met publicly by Republican Sinn Féin pickets to show they were not welcome. The reception from both passers-by and passing motorists indicated clearly that they too agreed with the picket.

Then in July Gerry Adams sponsored a formal visit to the former No-Go area of Ballymurphy by the head of the British Police in Ireland, Hugh Orde. They shook hands publicly and toured the area, indicating that Ballymurphy, once famous for its resistance to British occupation, was now a place where British forces were in control and were welcome. What an abject political and military surrender !

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Next month, August saw what was once the “jewel in the crown” for Republicans – Crossmaglen in South Armagh – ceremonially handed over to the Brits when leading Provo, Conor Murphy, publicly welcomed Hugh Orde there. For decades “the Boys from Crossmaglen” prevented British occupation forces from travelling there except by helicopter. Yet, on an August evening, the name that was honoured around the world for resistance to imperialism and colonialism was brought low in the most slavish and shameful manner. The Brits reign supreme in Crossmaglen ! The Newry Democrat quoted Republican Sinn Féin in South Armagh as calling for the rejection of the Provisionals.

Encouraged by such surrenders, the British police chief ventured as far afield as Rebel Cork in September. There he was met at the entrance to the hotel venue by a Republican Sinn Féin picket, indicating to him that he was not welcome. “The Boys from the County Cork” upheld a most honourable tradition. The local media were told by a Republican Sinn Féin spokesperson that London and Dublin were attempting to “sell the lie that the national question had been settled”. This could only be achieved with Britain’s withdrawal from Ireland, he said.

Other events that were not publicised beforehand and were sprung on the local people included the unveiling of a plaque in Boyle, Co Roscommon to a British soldier from the area who was presented with the VC by Queen Victoria of England 150 years ago for his part in the Crimean War. A high-ranking officer of the 26-County defence forces did the unveiling in the presence of Colonel John Steed, the British military attaché at their Dublin Embassy and Brigadier-General Browne, described by the local papers as “Chief of Staff of the British Army in Northern Ireland”.

Similar ceremonies arranged without notice and always including both the 26-County state forces and serving British soldiers in uniform have taken place in the 26 Counties in recent years. Among them were a graveside formality in Castlebar, Co Mayo for a British soldier of the 19th century, a memorial at Carrigaline, Co Cork to an official Elizabethan pirate of 400 years ago, and abroad a bicentenary commemoration of the British naval victory at Trafalgar at which units of the 26-County navy took part. Such base grovelling at the feet of an enemy still within our gates would never have taken place while men and women of Dan Keating’s generation, who fought the British to a standstill in 1921, were alive and in their health.

When the organisers of the last abandoned loyalist march through O’Connell Street, Dublin threatened a repeat performance this year, Republican Sinn Féin announced that it would oppose such a demonstration again. Spokespersons for the march told the Irish Times in October that “there was no need” for it because “their concerns were no being adequately addressed politically by the (Dublin) government”. And so it was again abandoned.

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That is not the case where the proposed visit to Dublin by the Queen of England is concerned. The fawning – in a most servile manner – that we witnessed when the heir to the crown of “Great Britain and Northern Ireland” visited Dublin in 1995 is bound to be repeated in nauseating fashion.

For the very good reason that as Irish Republicans we dispute the claim of the English Crown to govern any part of Ireland, we must oppose politically such a visit – the first in 100 years – and organise politically against it. It is simply our duty to do so. There will be no toadying or kowtowing as far as we are concerned. We deny the claim of the crown of England to rule here. That is all. Let us organise.

Since a sum of approximately €11,000 of our funds was seized by the 26-County Special Branch from the hotel safe of the venue of our Ard-Fheis three years ago the question of finance was a worry. The Branch gave no receipt for the money. Eventually they admitted having seized it in a letter to our solicitor, but they claimed it was the property of a so-called “illegal organisation”. That was a blatant lie. It was the proceeds of our annual private members’ draw, as well as some affiliation and membership fees and some profit from an Ard-Fheis function. Well they knew that to be the case.

For three years they held the money. The solicitor demanded its return, as did the national treasurers and secretaries. Then last July– August the Galway Comhairle Ceantair leafleted the Galway Races where Fianna Fáil has a “hospitality tent” each year to collect huge financial subscriptions. The leaflet asked people to demand the return of our 11,000 euro, a mere pittance by Fianna Fáil /PD standards.

On October 17 the Special Branch returned the funds, as they had taken them, in cash. There was no explanation and no interest was paid. The money was used to clear the remaining election debts and the remainder will help to balance the books for this Ard-Fheis. The whole episode illustrates just the lengths to which the Establishment is prepared to go in its attempts to cripple our organisation.

Throughout the three years we could not secure even a sentence about the seizure of the funds in the print media, not to mention radio or television. Yet no sooner had the money been returned than the media approached us for a comment. Similarly, our name and standing as Republican Sinn Féin were denied to us by the media during the Stormont elections. Yet as soon as the counting of votes was over they were back again, referring to us by our proper name and title.

During the year also the report by Patrick McEntee SC into the 1974 Dublin–Monaghan bombings was published and has proved to be a non-event. There is no result because the relevant files at Garda Headquarters and at the 26-County Departments of Justice and Defence are not available. They are either “lost” or “missing”.

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There had been a private informal inquiry by Judge Barron which reported in 2003. Then there was a "Joint-Oireachtas" investigation into both Dublin-Monaghan and other bombings and shootings in the 26 Counties by loyalists with British forces support. As a follow-up came the Mc Entee investigation into (a) the wind-down of garda inquiries after a mere seven and a half weeks; (b) the question of the missing files and (c) the leads not followed up by the Garda, has all ended without conclusion.

The first two inquiries were hindered because of the refusal of the British government to assist. All of this, taken with the Crinion-Wyman scandal in 1972, the Littlejohns affair in 1973-74 and now the Nuala O'Loan revelations, points to a secret and dirty war waged by the British in which civilians were deliberately targeted. A bigger process is needed. An international inquiry with powers of discovery of documents and the ability to compel witnesses to attend and participate is now required to investigate the many such incidents, mainly in the 1970s. Nothing less will suffice.

In June the decision of the British Public Prosecution Service in the Six Counties that no retired or serving members of the British Crown Forces will be prosecuted for the murder of solicitor Pat Finucane clearly illustrates that the nature of British rule in Ireland has not changed. The leopard does not change his spots. Despite the findings of the Stevens Inquiry that there was collusion between loyalist death squads and the British state no prosecutions have been brought against British Crown forces members.

It has also emerged that a gun handed back to RUC informer and UDA member William Stobie by the RUC was used in the murder of a nationalist man in 1991 and in the murders of five nationalists at Seán Graham's bookmakers on Belfast's Ormeau Road in February 1992. British rule by its very nature is based on violence and fear.

Republican Sinn Féin join the Finucane family in calling for a full public inquiry into Pat Finucane's murder; we share their view that the terms of the present inquiry will prevent the truth from being established. The reason for the failure to prosecute is the fear that such proceedings would expose the chain of command right up to the political control which provided direction and funding for such undercover activities. The motivation given by the PPS is that sufficient evidence is not available. This is so because those involved were careful not to keep records of their secret doings.

The O' Loan Report in January bears out what Republican Sinn Féin has been saying for decades. The report admitted that collusion went right to the top of the RUC/PSNI. Three Assistant Chief Constables and a number of Chief Superintendents have been involved. It also conceded that Special Branch officers who ran the licensed assassins are still in the RUC/PSNI. Yet the British supremo, Peter Hain, has dismissed such murder and mayhem as "in the past".

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With regard to the future, it has been officially stated that the M15, with a budget of many millions sterling, will be responsible for intelligence gathering on Republicans and will, presumably, be employing informers. The M15 will not, we have been told, be subject to investigation by the Ombudsman's office. Accordingly, the way is open for a recurrence of collusion, murder and related crimes.

The report dealt with post-Provo and post-loyalist ceasefire killings in one small area of north Belfast. What of the previous 25 years and the rest of the Six Counties? And what of the deaths in a similar fashion of over 1000 innocent nationalists and several hundred unionist civilian non-combatants at the hands of such death squads? There is still a dark murky past to be revealed.

The UVF statement of early May on the scaling down of their activities was given a qualified welcome, "if taken at face value". However, we said, the fact that arms were to be retained and would continue to be available to its leadership remained a threat to the nationalist people. This menace also extended to the unionist community, many of whose members had also been killed by the same UVF while others had suffered greatly at their hands.

A campaign against the nationalist population had been pursued ever since the first civilians – both Unionist and Nationalist – John Patrick Scullion, Peter Ward and Mrs Gould were killed by the UVF in the summer of 1966. These and other deaths of uninvolved people were carried out deliberately and as a matter of policy. The unionist working class would be much better served, we concluded, provided such a campaign was at an end, by active representation in a nine-county Ulster Parliament such as has been proposed by Republican Sinn Féin as part of a new federation of the four provinces.

The UDA, on the other hand, is the largest loyalist armed organisation. It had negotiated, no less, a grant from British direct rule ministers for 1.2 million sterling (€1.7 million) for a loyalist Conflict Transformation Initiative to renovate certain loyalist areas, provided the UDA commenced the decommissioning of its arms. The deal was done in March with a deadline of October. The October date passed without a move by the UDA, and the SDLP minister now responsible Margaret Ritchie, cancelled the grant.

The DUP Finance Minister at Stormont, Peter Robinson reacted strongly to this decision, and Ms Ritchie revealed that she had been pressurised by the Dublin Department of Foreign Affairs, Aras an Uachtaráin in the Phoenix Park and US Special Envoy Paula Dobriansky. The Irish Times Northern News Editor wrote that all this "laid bare potentially destructive tensions at the heart of the Stormont Executive barely five months after it was set up". The same journalist wrote that there were disputes over the Irish Language Bill, the following week's budget and the future of water charges.

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During October also DUP Minister at Stormont Edwin Poots's announced that he would not be introducing legislation to support the Irish Language, or indeed give recognition to it. It is on the record that an Irish Language Act was promised under the St Andrews Agreement, which now seems to count for nothing in Stormont.

One week before Mr Poot's announcement there was a session of belittlement of Gaeilge in Stormont when 44 DUP and UUP members voted to support a motion by David Mc Narry of the UUP casting down on the Irish language. For their information and enlightenment Gaeilge had the first literature north of the Alps after Greece and Rome. It is part of the rich inheritance of all the people of Ireland, including the Unionists and they, together with the rest of us, should be very proud of it.

Thaobh ó dheas den Teorainn bhí céim ar gcúl nuair d'fhógair Mary Hanafin, Aire Oideachais I dTeach Laighean, cinneadh go mbéadh ar na Gaelscoileanna Béarla a mhúineadh do na naíonáin shóisearacha,, rud atá glan in-aghaidh an luath-thumoideachais lán-Ghaeilge.

The all-Irish Gaelscoileanna have been the much-vaunted success story of the restoration of the language. Their practice of early total immersion in Irish in the infant classes is based on good practice and the results of international research into language teaching. Children will learn English very quickly outside the school and have no difficulty absorbing it as results of very many years have shown.

Bhí cruinniú urgnách ag Gaelscoileanna Teo, eagrais comhordaithe na scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge sa Stát, ag ar cáineadh Ms Hanafin go láidir. Ritheadh an rún seo leanas ag an gcruinniú in Áth Luain ar Mhéan-Fomhair 29: "Is bun-phrionsabal luachmhar oideachasúil de chuid na gaelscolaíochta an luath-thumoideachas lán Ghaeilge i ranganna na naíonán; gur ceart é a bhaineann le sainspriorad na gaelscoile, agus go gcuirfidh gaelscoileanna i gcoinne aon iarracht an prionsabal seo a chealú, nó a athrú, nó a mhaolú".

D'fhógair an dara rún an ceart a bheith ag gaelscoileanna "an múnla den luath-thumoideachas is oiriúnaí dá gcúinsí féin a roghnú agus a chur i bhfeidhm". D'fháiltigh an tríú rún roimh moltaí an Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclam agu Measúnachta (CNCM) agus rinne éileamh ar an Aire Oideachas agus Eolaíochta go dtabharfaí feidhm láithreach do mholtaí uile an CNCM i leith na ceiste seo. Glacadh leis na trí rún d'aon ghuth.

The coordinating body of the Gaelscoileanna met and passed resolutions condemning Ms Hanafin's decision, supporting the selection by each Gaelscoil of the mould of early total immersion that best suited its own situation and accepting the recommendations of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment with a demand to the Minister that she implement these recommendations forthwith. Does Ms Hanafin think she is impressing the Stormont unionists and the British Establishment by her stance?

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Despite setbacks such as this, gaelscoileanna was able to announce the opening of eight new all-Irish medium schools this year. These consist of four at primary level, in Leitrim, Galway, Meath and Cork, and four at second level, in Waterford; Gorey, Co Wexford; Buncrana Co Donegal and Arklow, Co Wicklow. May we, at this Ard-Fheis, congratulate them on their great work. Go mbuanaidh Dia sibh.

In the primary schools generally there is a very great need to deliver basic literacy and numeracy. When approximately 20% of children leaving primary schools are not functionally literate, i.e. able to read a bus or a train timetable, there is a great defect in the education system. A lack in numeracy is equally bad. Both of these deficiencies must become priorities.

Meanwhile the European Commission has told the Leinster House government it needs to brush up on its Irish grammar or risk undermining the use of Gaeilge as an official EU language. It pointed to a lack of properly qualified Irish translators and an acute shortage of interpreters. It requests that a detailed official grammar be published as soon as possible and highlights that there is no training course in the 26 Counties in conference interpreting.

In the past year also there have been significant developments in both Scotland and Wales. The Scottish National Party (SNP) has formed a minority government on its own in the Scottish Parliament and published a White Paper in August. This proposes a “national conversation” on how that parliament will grow in influence and authority, culminating in a referendum by 2010 on either independence or deeper devolution.

Similarly in Wales, Plaid Cymru (the Welsh Nationalist Party) made a coalition deal with the Welsh Labour Party to hold a referendum before the next election in 2011 to transform the existing Welsh national assembly into a full-blooded parliament. They will both organise a convention to prepare for such a referendum. During September, a poll undertaken by researchers at Aberystwyth University showed a majority now want a Scottish-style parliament, with lawmaking and tax-varying powers.

The Celtic nations within the so-called United Kingdom appear to be on the march just at the time the Six Counties are being solidified under English rule and the 26 Counties are being anglicised as never before. The Irish people who led the way to national independence in the 20th century are now — in the 21st — at the back of the queue. What a change!

Recent reports show vast extremes of poverty and wealth in the 26 Counties. The Bank of Ireland's Wealth of the Nation estimated that the top 1% of the population holds 20 per cent of the wealth and that the top 5 percent holds 40 per cent. If housing is excluded the situation is even worse: 1 per cent of the population accounts for 34 per cent of the wealth. Nearly one in five people (18.5 per cent) has an income below the poverty line of 11,000 euro for a single adult or less than 25,400

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euro for a household of four. That is income after tax but including all social welfare benefits.

Last December the ESRI published Work Incentives, Poverty and Welfare in Ireland . It cited a Unicef (United Nations Children's Fund) study showing shocking rates of child poverty in Ireland as compared with other rich countries. We came 22nd on a list of 26 countries. We had the highest child care costs in the OECD and had 27th place in social spending and 26th in health spending (RTE Radio One June 23). We ask: Why not introduce tax on profits generated from land rezonings and increase capital gains tax from 20 to 25 per cent? And poverty-proof all budget tax packages to ensure that tax charges do not further widen the gap between those with low income and the better off?

In early August Republican Sinn Féin deplored the decision to downgrade Shannon Airport further by ending the direct Aer Lingus connection to London Heathrow. If access slots must be found for Belfast, let them be taken from another quarter, for example, Dublin. The whole western region is being made to suffer once more in the interests of east coast development. Is Shannon Airport to be compensated by an increased use as a staging base for imperialist wars regardless of the damage being done to industrial and business development?

On May 4 the O/C CIRA POWs in Maghaberry Prison in a statement announced a temporary suspension of their 10- month long protest since June 19, 2006. Meetings had been held by representatives of the protest with various organisations, including the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. Archbishop Seán Brady visited the prison and spoke directly with the O/C of the prisoners on protest. The Church representatives appealed for a suspension of the protest to allow them to enter discussions on the prisoners' behalf. The POWs demanded direct talks between their O/C and the British.

Some changes were implemented. The prisoners demanded more significant change and said they would not "allow the status quo to remain for a further three years". However, there has since been a gradual clawing back on the advances made as a result of the protest in Maghaberry Prison. The future does not look good. This Ard-fheis congratulates the Republican prisoners on their struggle against the British criminalisation policy; it compliments the Republican Prisoners Action Group and the Republican Sinn Féin POW Department on their good work in campaigning in support of the prisoners. The prison protest may be suspended but the campaign for political status goes on. We also compliment the POWs in Portlaoise for their hunger strikes in support of comrades in Maghaberry. The campaign continues.

Other campaigns we have been involved in must likewise be unremitting. These include the Anti-War protests, support for Shell-to Sea, the Tara road route, the co-location of private and public hospitals on public grounds and whatever local issues may be identified in each area. Preparation for the 26-County local elections in 2009

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have already begun and the first convention for the selection of candidates will be held in Galway in two weeks time. Other areas must move immediately after this Ard-Fheis. Above all an Election Fund must be opened promptly and contributions made from all areas.

Next summer we face the prospect of a referendum in the 26 Counties on the revised European Union constitution, which will be called a "Reform Treaty" to facilitate its passage. It is, of course, 90 – 96% the EU constitution which the electorates in France and Holland have already rejected by way of referendum. As in the case of the rejected Nice treaty, it was subjected to just cosmetic change and forced on the people again.

Politically and constitutionally, however, the most important thing the new treaty would do would be to give to the new European Union the constitutional form of a supranational state for the first time, making this new union separate from and superior to its 27 member states. This would make the EU just like the United States of America in that the USA is separate from, and constitutionally superior to, California and New York. Similarly, Germany is separate from and superior to Bavaria and Saxony.

The new-type EU would be enabled to sign international treaties with other states and have its own president and foreign minister – however styled – although the references to symbols e.g. flag, anthem and national day have been removed. The fact is that the powers and the reality are conferred on the new EU in this treaty we are asked to accept. A new voting system based on population will favour large states like Germany, Britain, France and Italy, as against smaller to medium states.

The national veto on about 40 more policy areas is to be removed. The number of commissioners is to be reduced from 27 to 18, that is from one per state, to two-thirds or none every third year. In plain and simple language, the EU is tightening still further its grip on smaller states and it will be to their detriment. With all its so-called diplomatic skills the State has lost one seat in the EU Parliament. Eleven counties of the 26 are lumped together in a mismatch of all four provinces with just three seats. The democratic representative graph is going down as the 26-county State leaves the regional support area and the money goes to eastern Europe.

The outcome would be that the new EU would then possess all the key features of a fully developed state, except the power to impose taxes and to take its constituent member states (including the whole of Ireland in two parts) to war against their will. Of course, the Euro-integrationists hope it will acquire these remaining features in time.

Republican Sinn Féin has always opposed this new imperialism and will once more campaign for a No vote. It is now clearer than ever where all this building of a United States of Europe is leading us – into an oil-grab and "the resource wars of the 21st

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century" (Jacques Delors). Out with, away with, imperialist warfare! Vote No. The recent Irish Times TNS/mrbi opinion poll shows that people are not enamoured at all of the new cosmetic version of the EC constitution.

In the matter of waste management recycling is up from 5% to 35% which is a great improvement. An extension of the brown bin scheme as in Galway and Killarney together with Mechanical Biological Treatment can avoid all need for expensive and polluting incineration. With regard to energy the problem is not only that carbon emissions cause greenhouse warming but also over reliance on imported fossil fuels. Large scale harnessing of wind, especially off-shore wind and of wave power, can make a huge contribution here. The use of solar panels and an extension of the greener home scheme to domestic wind generation would also assist.

On May 9 last yet another Justice Bill was signed into law in the 26 Counties, marking a further erosion of civil rights there. Although alleged to be part of the "war on drugs", such legislation is being used to stop and search our members in the street and to threaten more seizures of our funds. We note the opposition of the Irish Council for Civil Liberties and the view of the Irish Human Rights Commission that the new legislation presents "a danger of injustice".

Another matter to be brought to public attention is the statement by the Dublin Minister for Justice as reported in the Irish Times of October 17. He said; "Of course, anyone who hasn't subscribed to the peace process on this island is a danger and a threat and has to be dealt with". Firstly the name of this island is Ireland. Secondly, he declares people who do not accept English rule in our country to be dangerous and a menace. That is a British imperialist viewpoint and Mr Lenihan should be ashamed of himself. For our part we stand by the 1916 Proclamation. We do not fear the edicts of the successor of Kevin O' Higgins and Gerry Boland.

The Minister went on to say; "We're working very closely with the authorities in Northern Ireland to make sure that that threat is kept to a minimum". We have never doubted that down the years: but Lord Birkenhead put it more succinctly in 1922 when he said that under the Treaty they were "holding Ireland for the Empire with an economy of English lives".

During the past year also a number of our veteran members passed on. Two need to be mentioned here. Seán Lavin, the grand old man of Irish Republicanism in Australia, died there in July at the age of 94. A Dublin man, he was interned without trial at the Curragh in the 1940s. On release he resumed his activities, and when his employment failed in 1967 he had the courage to strike out for Australia with his family at the age of 54. There he took part in all activities, remained loyal and true, and stayed in constant touch with Head Office in Dublin. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam cróga.

Republican SINN FÉIN Poblachtach

Likewise our Patron since 2004, Dan Keating of Kerry, was a model Irish Republican. Over the past 20 years we have had four patrons: Tom Maguire, Michael Flannery, George Harrison and Dan Keating. Dan's record is well known and he was probably the most beloved of all four to date.

He was not a remote figure but was personally well-known to living generations because he was able to attend here at Ard-Fheiseanna, to mix and speak with delegates and visitors. He addressed the Ard-Fheis and gave interviews to the media. Dan believed in the historic Irish nation, one country with a sovereign right to national independence. He accurately described the so-called "peace" process as a "surrender process".

His indomitable spirit pervades this Ard-Fheis today. On that note we conclude with the slogans

Victory to the Irish people!

An Phoblacht Abú!