

Republican SINN FÉIN Poblachtach

Aitheasc an Uachtarán – 2011

106ú Ard-Fheis 2010

REPUBLICAN SINN FÉIN POBLACHTACH

Aitheasc an Uachtarán Des Dalton

Presidential Address

Sunday November 14, 12 noon

A Chathaoirligh, a Theachtaí is a cháirde go léir,

Fearaim céad míle fáilte romhaibh ar fad ag an Ard-Fheis seo.

I am honoured to welcome you all to the 106th Ard-Fheis of Sinn Féin. The past year has been an eventful one since last we met in national conference. It began with agreement being reached in the Six Counties on the devolution of limited powers of British policing to the Stormont regime. This marked one of the final steps in the restructuring of British rule in Ireland.

However the nature and reality of British occupation on the ground has not changed – last month it is reported British soldiers participated in house raids in Derry – but we are glad to note the attitude of Irish Republicans to it has not changed either as evidenced by the increased level of acts of resistance.

Within Maghaberry the POWs engaged in a heroic campaign of resistance to the attempts of the Stormont regime to criminalise them. Meanwhile a war is being waged on working people throughout Ireland and the world in order to prop up the failed and discredited economics which has caused the present collapse.

For Sinn Féin the past year marked a period of transition. Our Patron Ruairí Ó Brádaigh stepped down as President at last year's Ard-Fheis – a position he held with distinction and honour from 1970 with only a break of three years from 1983 to 1986. However Ruairí, we are delighted to report did not retire but continued to make his valued contribution to our national leadership and our Movement to which he has devoted almost 61 years of his

life.

Over the course of the year our movement withstood attack from a small minority of erstwhile comrades. The refusal of our members to be distracted from the primary goals and principles of our Movement is something of which you all should be proud.

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On February 4 it was announced that a Hillsborough Agreement Mark II had been reached between the DUP and the Provisionals for the devolution of limited powers of British policing to the Stormont Executive. This came following a protracted "carnival of reaction" at Hillsborough Castle.

Even media commentators pointed to the inherent fault lines, which exist in the Six-County statelet, Stephen Collins in The Irish Times of January 30 observed: "The Belfast Agreement enshrined a dysfunctional society's sectarian divisions into governmental institutions." While on January 31 Tom McGurk writing in his column in the Sunday Business Post on said: "Stormont may have new seating and the latest technology but, underneath it all, the DUP still stands for what it has always stood for — political supremacy over the nationalist community." This is no more than Republican Sinn Féin pointed out 12 years ago.

In a statement the following day, An tUachtaráin, Sinn Féin Poblachtach, Des Dalton pointed out: "As they don the uniforms and carry the weapons of their one-time enemy, it can be truly said that the 'poachers have become gamekeepers. When the new 'Broy Harriers' take to the streets under Provo direction history can be accurately said to be repeating itself. As British rule reaches into the grass-roots in the Six Counties, British Imperialism in its updated mode seeks to make itself more acceptable. However history teaches us that it will once more be resisted."

On February 6 our Vice-President Geraldine Taylor said that: "The agreement at Hillsborough is just a further indication of the depths that unionised Provisionals will go to uphold British rule in our country. They have now added the administration of British policing and justice to their already full 'portfolio' in administering British rule on Irish people in the Occupied Six Counties." She described it as "the same old British boot but with a willing Provo foot".

During protracted negotiations it was revealed that the three sections of unionism were engaged in discussions with the British Conservative Party about an electoral pact, which came as no surprise. The scaly hand of the Orange order had of course emerged in all of this.

The historical forces of unionism and British imperialism remain at work and the return to some form of majority rule cannot be far around the corner as both the DUP and the British Tories have signalled. Reaching for the "Orange Card" has long been an option of first resort for the British Tories in their quest for political power at Westminster. In his maiden speech to the British House of Lords in the week following the signing of the Treaty of Surrender in 1921 the leader of Unionism Edward Carson lamented his role in the Tory machinations: "What a fool I was. I was only a puppet, and so was Ulster, and so was Ireland, in the political game that was to get the Conservative Party into power."

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Broken into five sections, the document agreed at Hillsborough also contains a range of measures.

Key points include:

- While the Six-County justice minister would have the same status as all other ministers in the power-sharing cabinet, he would have the power to make certain decisions without conferring with the Executive while issues of British 'national security' remain the prerogative of the British government and its intelligence agency MI5.
- A six-member 'working group', was to be appointed by the Stormont First Minister and Deputy First Minister, with the task of formulating a framework for new Orange parade management procedures.
- Its work would place emphasis on local agreements. It is this aspect which caused most fear for many nationalist communities and how the rights of local residents and the Orange Order can be squared
- Significantly there was no commitment to an Irish Language Bill – promised with the St Andrews Agreement in 2006- or education reform or the much-promised Bills of Rights.

This devolution of British policing and justice powers changes nothing. The Stormont Executive will administer the limited devolved responsibilities for British policing and justice as a proxy for the British government.

Political policing continues to be directed as before from London. Under the St Andrews Agreement, amended by the Hillsborough Agreement, "security intelligence" in the Six Occupied Counties remains the responsibility of the MI5 Security Service with the RUC/PSNI in a support role. This is not the devolution of policing and justice powers. London will remain in control.

With an increased budget and a new HQ in Palace Barracks in Hollywood, Co Down MI5 will lead the British war machine in Ireland. MI5 is not accountable to the Stormont Policing Board for security-related matters but it will be available to brief the Board in secret on what it considers "appropriate".

For their part, the Republican youth gave the RUC/PSNI their response on the streets of many towns in the occupied area. At a press conference held in Republican Sinn Féin's Ulster Office on the Falls Road in Belfast on March 4 it was revealed that at least three baton rounds (plastic bullets) were fired by British Crown Forces in the Drumbeg area of Craigavon in County Armagh on February 27.

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The RUC entered the area at around 10pm. They claimed this was in connection with the discovery of a suspicious object – however this was simply a gas cylinder, which had been discovered some 500 yards away at 12 noon.

The British incursion into the area was resisted by nationalist youths, and three baton rounds were fired. Two of these were fired at the ground whilst the RUC fired a third at a Republican, causing him serious injuries to his chest.

Republican Sinn Féin organised a press conference in its Ulster Office on the Falls Road in Belfast on February 19 which was attended by Des Dalton as well as the two Vice-Presidents Geraldine Taylor and Fergal Moore. The assembled journalists from the Irish News, the London Times, the Guardian as well as the Press Association were told of communities such as Lurgan who were under siege from the forces of the British Crown.

The past year has seen an increase in the number of acts of resistance directed against continued British rule in Ireland. In February alone incidents across the Six Counties pointed to a level of intensity, which the 26-County Justice Minister Dermot Ahern (RTÉ Radio 1 This Week February 28) acknowledged was as high as anything over the past 40 years.

The head of MI5 Jonathan Evans in a speech on September 17 acknowledged: "Perhaps we were giving insufficient weight to the pattern of history over the last hundred years which shows that whenever the main body of Irish Republicanism has reached a political accommodation and rejoined constitutional politics, a hardliner rejectionist group would fragment off and continue with the so called "'armed struggle'." Like the French Bourbon kings the English it seems have forgotten nothing but have learned nothing after 800

years of occupation.

A new generation of people who continue to resist British rule on the ground have been dismissed as "disaffected youth without either aspiration or hope" by one commentator. It is nothing new to dismiss young Republicans in such terms.

Over the decades the idealism and belief of each new risen generation has been dismissed in similar terms as a means of denying the legitimacy of the Irish Republican demand for a free Ireland. Such denial does a disservice to the idealism and hope of young Irish people for a New Ireland. We salute this new risen generation.

A survey carried out by Jonathan Tonge — Professor of Politics Studies and Head of the Department of Politics Studies at the University of Liverpool – confirms the fact that there is still a significant section of the Irish people who oppose British rule in Ireland.

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Researchers spoke to 1,002 people across the Six Counties from a range of backgrounds. The face-to-face interviews were carried out in the three weeks after the British general election. It was part of a wider study but included questions about attitudes to Republicans.

Respondents were asked whether they had sympathy for the reasons why Republican groups, such as the Continuity IRA, continued the armed struggle.

8.2% (14% of those identifying themselves as nationalists) said yes. Some 12.9 per cent of nationalists (7.8 per cent of the overall survey) claimed to 'strongly like' or 'like' Republican Sinn Fein while 7.5 per cent of nationalists (4.0 per cent of overall survey) strongly liked or liked 32-County Sovereignty Movement.

Eighteen per cent of nationalist (eleven per cent of overall) respondents believed the RUC/PSNI to be very similar to what was described as "the old RUC". Among those who designated themselves as "nationalist" this was 18%. Prof Tonge writes: "One of the mantras of the peace process is that 'dissident' Republicans have no support. To suggest otherwise risks talking up a disparate, seemingly desperate, band of diehards. It also disturbs the orthodoxy found on my side of the Irish Sea that Northern Ireland lies securely in the box marked 'solved'. Yet the assumption that dissidents have no support has been precisely that – an assumption, untroubled by actual evidence either way. Until now, that is."

Not surprisingly the findings were either largely ignored by the bulk of the media or dismissed by the Stormont political establishment.

Speaking at the launch Dr Martyn Frampton's Legion of the Rearguard: Dissident Irish Republicanism in London on November 2 the former general officer commanding (GOC) of the British army in the Six Counties between 1990 and 1993, General Sir John Wilsey, said that he shared the same conclusion as the author about the situation within the Six Counties: "which is that Irish Republicanism has not yet been satisfied". He went on to say that while most people in what he calls Great Britain "feel that Ireland is at peace and that it is over, those of us who are in touch with what goes on across the water know very well that that is not so". He then poses a number of rhetorical questions: "If I had been in the IRA I would be saying, did we achieve our goal? Did we unite Ireland? Are we closer to a United Ireland now than we were when we first started? And the answer to that is manifestly that we are not."

Speaking first on RTÉ Radio's This Week programme on August 8 and again on August 12 on BBC Radio Ulster British Crown Minister Martin McGuinness claimed he had knowledge of secret talks involving the British government, the 26-County Administration and what were described in the media as "dissident Republicans".

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I repeat now what I stated in Bundoran on August 28, Republican Sinn Féin has not engaged in any such talks. The only basis on which the leaders of Republican Ireland will engage in talks with the British government will be to secure a full British withdrawal from Ireland. We cannot be any clearer. Mr McGuinness we suggest is playing his part in the machinery of British 'black propaganda'.

Many nationalist communities feared part of the price for securing the deal by the Provisionals involved forcing loyalist parades on their communities as it emerged the key unionist demand for an end to the Six-County Parades Commission was won by them in the agreement.

The Provisionals and the DUP restricted membership of the 'working group' set up to review marching legislation to nominees from their own parties.

However the legislation proposed was far more sweeping than merely dealing with Orange/Loyalist marches as set out in the Hillsborough Agreement. As the journalist and political commentator Éamonn McCann pointed out in the Derry Journal "There was no indication in February that the group had been tasked to do anything other than devise a system to replace the procedures of the Parades Commission; no suggestion that it would be engaged in drafting a new, wide-ranging public order act."

The provisions of the Public Assemblies, Parades and Protests Bill (Northern Ireland) (sic) as McCann points out: "appear aimed at least as much at curtailing protests against job losses and cuts in public services as resolving communal disagreements over marches".

The scope of its provisions will affect the rights of every single person to organise themselves collectively as workers, trade unionists, community campaigners and political activists.

Gatherings of 50 or more people would require notice of 37 days to be given, and failure to comply could lead to imprisonment of up to six months. Clause 5 defined "public assembly" as covering any public procession, meeting or protest, apart from funerals and gatherings which "The First and deputy First Ministers specifically order to be excluded".

The legislation is an attempt to control protest and silence dissent within the Six-County state. On September 27 Peter Robinson announced that the proposed bill was being put on hold because of the continued refusal of the Orange Order to endorse the legislation. It is unlikely this is the last we will hear of it.

Another 'marching season' witnessed a number of Orange/loyalist marches forced through nationalist communities by the British colonial police. Republican Sinn Féin stood shoulder to shoulder with those communities. On July 12 members of Republican Sinn Féin took part in the sit down in solidarity with the local residents.

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Upwards of 300 members of the RUC/PSNI surrounded the peaceful protesters who sat down on the main road despite repeated attempts by armed RUC personnel to forcibly remove them.

British Crown Minister Gerry Kelly accompanied by his entourage stayed away from the area, but later gave the impression of having tried to play some kind of mediating role.

Over 100 plastic bullets were fired during subsequent rioting with several people injured by the indiscriminate firing by the RUC. Water cannons were also deployed in an attempt to push the residents back before the loyalists were escorted through by the RUC/PSNI.

In the aftermath the Provisionals engaged in felon-setting of the community and in particular of the Greater Ardoyne Residents Collective. In a statement issued on July 15 following the arrest of two of its members the McKelvey/Steele Cumann of Republican Sinn Féin said: "The question must be asked were their names and details handed in by members of Provisional Sinn Féin who were out taking details at the protest against sectarian marches on

Monday (July 12)?"

It also emerged that the Provisionals and other Stormont parties were calling on the Six-County Housing Executive and Social Services to penalise people who had protested against the forcing of the Orange/loyalist march by cutting their benefits, taking their homes and even threatening that their children could be taken into care.

As Republican Sinn Féin commented: "This is surely an example of Stormont ministers abusing their influence, acting as judge jury and executioner."

The forcing of contentious Orange Parades also led to riots and disturbances in Portadown and other parts of the Six Counties. Ard Chomhairle member John Joe McCusker played a leading role in opposing the forcing of a sectarian march through Newtownbutler.

The Six-County state is fundamentally undemocratic, inherently sectarian and consequently an obstacle to the creation of a New Ireland. The 1998 Stormont Agreement and the St Andrews Agreement of 2006 merely institutionalised sectarianism whilst denying the exercise of real All-Ireland democracy. Since 1921 there have been at least six agreements arising from the enforced partition of Ireland. However none of them have represented a settlement of the historic 'Irish question', merely an attempt to reframe it.

As an alternative ÉIRE NUA offers a framework within which all sections of the Irish people can make the important decisions for their communities, their regions and

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their nation. To the unionists and others in Stormont who complained last month about the prospect of the British government reneging on the commitment to provide £18 billion funding over the next decade (not the first time a British government has reneged on a pledge) we place ÉIRE NUA before them.

Decisions affecting the people of a nine-county Ulster are being made by the people of Ulster within a free and Federal Ireland, not dependent on the whim of a foreign parliament or government. Sammy Wilson's plaintive call "[We] have to simply accept what has been handed down to us," in reference to the British budgets cuts sums up the impotence of the Stormont Assembly. Surely the path charted in ÉIRE NUA is one that will lead to a new dawn of democracy for all of the Irish people.

A delegation from the National Irish Freedom Committee's (NIFC) ÉIRE NUA/Visa Denial Repeal Campaign (VDRC) initiated campaign action on April 20, 2010 with a visit to Washington DC. The NIFC delegation highlighted the continued British occupation and the sectarian nature of the Six-County state while also presenting the Irish federal peace proposals as a viable alternative to this failed British arrangement.

On Easter Sunday (April 4) the Republican prisoners in Maghaberry took direct action against the attempts of the British government and its colonial regime at Stormont to criminalise Ireland's struggle for freedom. For two days they held the canteen at Maghaberry prison in a defiant stand, which gave the lie to those who claim there are no political prisoners in Ireland.

In a statement the POWs set out the conditions which necessitated their protest: "Over the past number of years, we the Republican Prisoners in Maghaberry have experienced a continual decline in conditions and a steady increase in oppressive tactics being adopted against ourselves, our families and visitors."

The statement continued: "In recent times continuous lockdowns and loss of recreation are becoming more and more common. Searches have also been conducted on our families by the RUC. These lockdowns result in us being locked down in our cells for days at a time with no food, hot water and exercise, showers or contact with our families.

"We, the POWs, have also witnessed the attitude of the screws becoming more aggressive with up to five assaults being carried out on Republican prisoners in the last 18 months, all of which resulted in Republicans being charged with assault in an attempt by a corrupt prison regime to cover up what is happening.

"The accumulative effect of these grievances and a lack of any other form of redress, lead us to concede the only way to stop these assaults and degrading treatment is protest."

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The Republican prisoners have also been punished for wearing Easter Lilies – to commemorate the 1916 Rising and all those who have died for Irish freedom– while the British poppy is freely worn and sold in the prison each year.

The Republican prisoners endured 23-hour lockdown, denial of access to adequate medical care, nourishing food, running water etc. The sanitary conditions within the wing were in clear breach of the most basic human rights.

The five demands of the POWs were:

- Right to free association
- End to controlled movement
- Right to full-time education
- Adequate medical facilities
- An end to strip searching.

The regime at Maghaberry was intended to criminalise the POWs and their families.

Their actions resounded throughout Republican Ireland and over the following four months, protests and pickets were organised all over Ireland and internationally.

Republican activists took to the streets to breakdown the wall of silence, which Stormont, Leinster House and Westminster attempted to erect around Maghaberry.

On April 24 the President of Republican Sinn Féin visited Maghaberry and met with the OC of the Republican prisoners. To coincide with the visit a protest and rally was held outside the prison. On June 27 another visit by Des Dalton took place this time accompanied by our Patron Ruairí Ó Brádaigh. During the visit the OC said that the spirit and morale of the men was strong and they were determined to continue until their right to political status had been secured. Meeting such men is both humbling and inspiring.

Despite assurances given to our Ulster Office in Belfast by the Northern Ireland Prison Service in advance of the visit that the Duty Governor would meet both Des Dalton and Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, the meeting did not take place.

As they left, the car in which the Patron and President were travelling was stopped at a checkpoint — obviously erected by the British colonial police specifically for that purpose. The occupants of the car had their names taken and were asked to get out of the car while it was searched.

On May 29 Republicans marched in Belfast to highlight the POW protest. In keeping with long-held principle no permission was sought from the British state for this march. Irish Republicans have never sought permission from either partitionist state

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to march in any part of Ireland – and never will. A similar march was held on August 9.

The Republican prisoners in Portlaoise prison held a 48-hour fast from April 30 to May 2 in solidarity with their comrades.

On June 11 the Six-County prisoner ombudsman Pauline McCabe called for a review of lockdowns and strip searches at Maghaberry Jail.

In a wide-ranging report, she made 16 recommendations. Amongst these were:

- A review of the separated prisoner regime should be included in the overall prison review
- An independent prison review should be carried out into full body searches.

She also said prisoners in Roe House had effectively served their punishments for an Easter protest and should be released from the 23-hour lockdown.

The prison protest ended on August 12 when the Republican prisoners secured an agreement which addressed key demands, such as strip-searching and free association.

Among those involved in the negotiations, which secured the agreement, were the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, the mediation group Creggan Enterprises from Derry and the Dialogue Advisory Group, based in Amsterdam.

We would also like to commend the mediators who facilitated this settlement for the diligence, integrity and commitment shown by them over the past number of weeks.

The agreement if fully implemented will provide the platform for the attainment of full political status.

All those who joined in the campaign, including the families, in support of the prisoners are to be commended while the leadership and calm adherence to principle of the Republican prisoners in the face of the vile and inhumane conditions in Maghaberry must be acknowledged and saluted. In a statement following the end of the protest Sinn Féin pointed out: "By their actions the Republican prisoners delivered a message, which reverberated, throughout the world that British rule in Ireland will never be normal or acceptable."

We salute the men in Maghaberry for their struggle and call now for the full implementation of the agreement secured by the Republican prisoners.

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We also extend greetings to the Republican prisoners in Portlaoise who held the line for the Republican Movement despite attempt to isolate, intimidate and finally criminalise them.

Comhghairdeas leis na príosúnaigh phoblachtach!

On Tuesday, June 15 the Saville Report on the Bloody Sunday murders by British paratroopers in Derry on January 30, 1972 was finally released, 12 years after the inquiry began.

The report found that all those shot dead or injured on Bloody Sunday in the Bogside in January 1972 were innocent. Critically however it absolved the British State of all responsibility laying the blame solely on the soldiers of 1st Parachute Regiment and their commanding officer Derek Wilford.

Republican Sinn Féin said in a statement that this was a cop-out by the Saville Inquiry: "It fails on the crucial question of the responsibility of the British State for the murders. The belated acknowledgement of the innocence of those murdered and injured on Bloody Sunday is welcome for the families of the victims but the Inquiry fails the critical test of identifying and admitting the responsibility of the British State for the murder of unarmed Irish people on the streets of their own city.

"This is a cop-out and ignores the chain of command both political and military, which pitted assault troops such as the British Army's parachute regiment against a peaceful anti-internment march. In August of the previous year over three days the same notorious British Army regiment murdered 11 people in Belfast.

"The British government's apology for the murders of 'Bloody Sunday' is meaningless while it continues to occupy Ireland."

Bernadette Devlin McAliskey –who was on the platform in Derry on the day of Bloody Sunday in 1972 — described the events on the day as: "Fundamental to the nature of the British state in Ireland."

Bloody Sunday is the true face of British rule in Ireland and the true face of imperialism as experienced today at the hands of the same army by the people of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Three times in the 20th century the forces of British occupation have visited a 'Bloody Sunday' on the Irish people. While British rule remains in Ireland the possibility of yet another will always exist.

Both here in Ireland and abroad the dark forces of international capital intend to use the world economic collapse to claw back any social or political advance made by working people over the past 100 years or more.

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The global markets of which we hear so much are imperialism in a modern guise, formulating and setting national economic policy with no consideration of the social, political or environmental consequences for humanity.

On September 30 the true cost of the bank bailout was unveiled at €50 billion. On October 26 the 26-County Finance Minister Brian Lenihan announced cuts of €15 billion in public spending over the next four years. The social cost of bailing out the banks, the euro and the EU will be paid by this and future generations. The economist David McWilliams writing in the Sunday Business Post on September 19 pointed out: "We simply do not have enough cash to pay for the banks and keep the welfare state going at the same time."

In the Six Counties cuts of up to £5 billion in services and supports for the most vulnerable are set to take place over the next four years. Trade unions warn this will mean a loss of 40 to 50,000 jobs. The Provisionals may speak out of both sides of their mouths but the reality is that they will implement whatever budget is handed down to them by the British government at Westminster and agreed by the DUP in Stormont.

The lies told by those who forced the Lisbon Treaty on the people of the 26 Counties in the second referendum are coming home to roost now. The supposedly sacrosanct Treaty will now be amended to suit the agenda of the two big states of France and Germany. The rights of individual nations and with them of the individual citizen are subservient to the needs of the EU super state.

The very definition of a free nation is one which controls its resources and decides its relationship with the rest of the world. A sovereign nation frames and implements policy based on the needs and welfare of its citizens.

The truth of the arguments of those who called for a NO vote in both Lisbon referenda was borne out by the comments in February of this year by US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton when she said that the Lisbon Treaty provided a platform for deeper ties between the EU and NATO. She said the EU's energy policy in particular would benefit from closer coordination with NATO when she spoke at the French military academy in Paris on January 29.

This was followed up in February by German foreign minister Guido Westerwelle called for the EU to proceed with plans for a European army under the Lisbon Treaty. As Republican Sinn Féin argued in both referenda held in the 26 Counties in 2008 and 2009 the purpose of the Lisbon Treaty was to bring the EU project to its logical next step in the construction of an undemocratic and militarised superstate.

Hillary Clinton's comments regarding "energy security" were significant. It would appear the ground is being prepared for NATO to act as the military arm of the EU in order to fight the resource wars — forecast by the then President of the EU

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Commission Jacques Delors in 1992 — over what have been identified as the key resources of water, food and energy.

The Political Editor of the Sunday Business Post (October 24) Pat Leahy sets out the reality of the EU in the present context: “Any four-year economic plan contains a fair degree of guesswork and supposition. Brussels knows this, of course, and it also knows the danger that too much austerity will dangerously deflate the economy. But, and this is a vital point to grasp, the European priority is Europe, not Ireland.” In other words the effect of the slash and burn economics on this and future generations of Irish people is of no consequence when set against the survival of the euro. Of course the media cheerleaders of Lisbon remain silent on this “new” reality, which is only now hitting home.

A new generation of “wild geese” will be forced to emigrate – emigration, historically the safety valve of the establishment has increased by 33% year-on-year with 100,000 people being forecast to emigrate by 2012 – while the elite who profited most from the so-called Celtic Tiger economy are cosseted from the effects of its collapse.

Tomas Ó Curráoin, Republican Sinn Féin member of Galway County Council, speaking about the new wave of emigration said on February 17: “People may recall the father of the current finance minister, Brian Lenihan snr, tell us ‘We can't all live on a small island.’ If this state cannot support the people living in the State then perhaps it is the State and not the citizens that is the problem and perhaps it is now time to change the political infrastructure of this island to one that benefits all of the inhabitants of the island.

“The current political system is the continuation of British imperialism and is certainly not the one that the men and women of 1916 fought and died for. We in Republican Sinn Féin have an alternative to the present system which does not include the exportation of our youth for the benefits of other countries; these alternatives are called ÉIRE NUA and SAOL NUA.” Maith thú a Thomáis.

The commentator and broadcaster Vincent Browne warned in the Sunday Business Post on September 26 of the kind of politics which has been constructed: “We have built a system whereby the sovereignty of the people is subcontracted to a political class which, in turn, subcontracts it to a governing elite.”

In our social and economic programme SAOL NUA Republican Sinn Féin identifies essential elements of the Democratic Socialist system which are required in building the New Ireland; banking and all key industries must be brought under democratic or social control and the further development of community banking such as Credit Unions. It should be noted with concern the comments on October 5 of the 26-County Financial Regulator Matthew Elderfield when he said he would be targetting Credit Unions with the same rules used against the discredited banking

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system. Social control of capital is essential to ensure capital serves people rather than people being the slaves of capital. By doing so you ensure balanced development and equitable distribution of wealth.

As is says in SAOL NUA: "Money must be regarded, not as a commodity, but as an accounting system in which all participate." Taxes should be progressive and redistributive, levied on wealth, legacies, waste and pollution. They should encourage the fair distribution and conservation of scarce resources especially energy. A comprehensive National Health Service and an education system which overturns the 'Murder Machine' which Pearse wrote about almost 90 years ago and is still largely with us today, is required.

We must have new indicators of what constitutes economic success to replace the discredited indices of GNP and GDP. They merely record economic activity in terms of transaction and movement of money, commodities etc. They take no account of the voluntary sector, those who work in the home etc all of whom make a valuable contribution to the local and domestic economy. 'Quality of Life' is a far more valid index of human development and progress. Recording adult and infant mortality, literacy, access to health services, nutrition etc.

The UN Human Development Report mission statement is clear on what distinguishes meaningful human development: "The goal is human freedom. And in pursuing capabilities and realising rights, this freedom is vital. People must be free to exercise their choices and to participate in decision-making that affects their lives."

Of course in any economy natural resources are vital and public ownership essential for the common good. We salute the continued resistance of people such as Maura Harrington and Pat 'The Chief' O'Donnell and the Shell-to-Sea group who have been steadfast in their opposition to Shell's destruction of their community and the bleeding dry of Ireland's much-needed natural resources, aided and abetted by the Dublin Administration.

They have not bowed to the bullyboy tactics of Shell and the 26-County police. Frontline, a human rights report on the Corrib gas dispute published in May, is a damning indictment of human rights abuses that have been suffered by those activists and a damning indictment of Shell, the 26-County police and the 26-County Dept of Energy. There is €420 billion worth of natural gas of the coast of Ireland — all of which has been given for free to Royal Dutch Shell, Statoil, Exxon Mobil while the Dublin administration are threatening the Irish people with the IMF.

We salute the people of Erris, Mayo and all of those who oppose the blatant capitalist theft of resources, which rightfully belong to the Irish people. As our paper SAOIRSE declared in October: "No less than breaking the visible political and

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military chains of imperialism our struggle must be about breaking its economic chains also."

Le bliain anuas foilsíodh dréacht de phlean fiche bliain chun seasamh na Gaeilge a dhéanamh níos láidre. Cé go bhfuil roinnt gníomhaíochtaí a d'fhéadfadh a bheith ionmholta sa dréacht–straitéis, measaimid nach bhfuil aon téagar ann chun aghaidh a thabhairt ar an dá áit go bhfuil meath ag tarlúint go leanúnach, is é sin an titim i líon na gcainteoirí dúchais sa Ghaeltacht agus an laghdú i gcumas pháistí i nGailge sna gnáthscoileanna.

The 20–year plan to aid the Irish language proposed by the Dublin Administration is seriously flawed in that the strategy is based on the discredited vague aim of bilingualism that was brought in to replace the long–held national aim of the restoration of Irish to its rightful place as the primary language of the nation. In the immediate term, the plan does not adequately address the needs of the young native speaker in our Gaeltacht areas.

These young native speakers are under severe pressure from English from all sides. Young parents in the Gaeltacht need all our support in being able to raise their children in an all–Irish atmosphere. As we proposed in ÉIRE NUA nearly 40 years ago, our Gaeltacht people deserve the right to make the local decisions they need to make, especially now that their very existence is threatened.

While we support the Gaelscoileanna, the continuing downgrading of Irish in English–medium schools has to be resisted. It is the right of every Irish pupil, in all schools, to instruction of the highest quality in our native language, all the way, up to and including the Leaving Certificate Exam.

The struggle for a free Ireland cannot be separated from the international struggle against imperialism. Irish Republicans have consistently stretched out the hand of solidarity with peoples engaged in the work of national liberation just as we have welcomed the extension of similar solidarity to us. We take this opportunity to do so again and in particular to the people of Palestine and Gaza.

The state of Israel has waged a war on an entire people whilst denying them access to adequate supplies of fresh water or medicines.

On May 31 this year Israeli forces attacked the Gaza Freedom Flotilla, which had been organised by the Free Gaza Movement and the Turkish Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief in which nine activists were murdered in defiance of international law. We applaud the courage of these activists and the Irish activist on the MV Rachel Corrie for their courage in breaking this illegal blockade on the people of Gaza.

The work of our International Relations Bureau is critical in ensuring that the political situation in Ireland from a Republican perspective is explained on the world stage

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while also developing that network of solidarity, which is essential to all anti-imperialists.

In December last our Ard-Rúnaí Josephine Hayden addressed an international conference on the issue of political prisoners in London while this year Fergal Moore will be attending a similar conference in Vienna. In February the International Relations Bureau launched an updated website.

During the year we experienced some difficulties, which had their roots in the elections at our Ard-Fheis of 2004. One of our Vice-Presidents from Limerick, who had held the position for 14 years, lost by a small margin. He did not stand for election to An Ard-Chomhairle and later refused an offer of cooption to that body. Early in the New Year the entire Cumann in Limerick city resigned.

They remained outside the organisation for a year-and-a-half when they all applied individually to the Ard Chomhairle for re-admission. They were visited by national officers and undertook never to quit the organisation in future or to refuse to sell our paper SAOIRSE.

At successive Ard-Fheiseanna from 2006 to 2009 resolutions they supported in favour of a broad front, the naming of Cumann after people who were members of a semi-constitutional organisation and the setting up of a Cumann in Portlaoise Prison – were all defeated openly on a show of hands.

At the 2009 Ard-Fheis also the Vice-President from 1990 to 2004 was a candidate for the position of President and Vice-President. The result in the election of President was 32% to 68% against him. He also failed in the contest for Vice-President but was elected to An Ard Chomhairle.

Some months later, on April 30, a statement appeared on a new Limerick website entitled limerickrepublicans.com. It said: "Limerick Republicans formerly aligned to RSF have taken a decision after consulting with the membership over several months to dissolve the existing organisation in the city." It was a repeat of the 2005 resignations.

A further statement from the same source said they had formed a new grouping called "LIRO-Limerick Independent Republican Organisation".

Then we received information from several sources that they had applied to the 32-County Sovereignty Movement with a proposal to form a merger with them. This was refused.

Then they altered their course and changed their name to "RSF – Real Sinn Féin". In a newspaper interview, a spokesperson demanded that we hand over our offices in Dublin and Belfast and control of our monthly paper SAOIRSE to them. These demands were angrily rejected by us immediately.

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By October they had changed their name again, this time they stole our honoured title Republican Sinn Féin. The name they threw away in April they now embraced six months later. Now they claimed to be the Republican Movement of history and said we consisted of only a small number of individuals.

Well, let this Ard-Fheis be an answer to them. We have not changed our name several times over six months. We remain what we were for more than a century, through 1916 and the First (all-Ireland) Dáil of 1919–1922 – the historic Republican Movement and we yield to no one in that regard.

We have endured the insults and slights leaked to the tabloid press covertly for the first half of the past year and the open fabrications and untruths of the second half. We will go forward to rebuild our movement, strengthened in our resolve following on a malicious experience.

Over the course of the coming decade we will commemorate the centenary of 1916 as well as the anniversaries of the other landmark events in Irish revolutionary history.

Speaking in UCD on May 20, the head of the 26-County administration, Brian Cowen accused Irish Republicans of seeking to “hijack” the centenary of the 1916 Rising. It is an accusation that does not stand up; Republicans cannot hijack something they have never abandoned.

Each year Irish Republicans both in Ireland and abroad have commemorated 1916 without fail. The 26-County State on the other hand has alternated between ignoring the anniversary and banning commemoration of it.

1916 commemorations throughout the 26 Counties were banned by the Dublin administration in 1937. In 1976 Republicans were prosecuted – including Fiona Plunkett, sister of Joseph Mary Plunkett — and some jailed for their participation in a banned commemoration at the GPO. Each year Republicans face the prospect of prosecution for distributing Easter Lilies.

For forty years the 26-County Administration ignored the anniversary of 1916 but since 2006 it has opportunistically seized on it in order to sell the big lie that history has come to an end and British rule in Ireland is now accepted. 1916 remains unfinished business while Britain holds any part of Ireland.

The message of 1916 could not be clearer; “Ireland unfree shall never be at peace”.

The coming year is likely to see a visit to the 26-County state by the Queen of England. On June 23 our Vice-President Fergal Moore put our position on the public record once again: “British rule in Ireland can never be normal nor will Ireland be pacified while partition and British rule remain. Republican Sinn Féin will

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vigorously oppose any visit to Ireland by the Queen of England and calls on all Republicans to do likewise."

Irish Republicans will actively oppose such a visit and by doing so send a clear message to the world that British occupation and partition is neither normal nor acceptable. The visit by the head of the British State – who holds the style and title of 'Queen of Great Britain and Northern Ireland' – to any part of Ireland will be resisted by Republican-minded people throughout Ireland.

We will also be giving serious consideration to contesting the Údarás na Gaeltachta elections next year. Of course the imposition of a political test oath in the Six-County local elections means that people will be robbed of the opportunity to vote for candidates standing on a platform of unequivocal Irish Republicanism.

We turn from the old year and look to the coming year as one, which presents us with many challenges. However as a unified and principled Republican organisation we are more than capable of meeting those challenges and in doing so into opportunities for growth. Armed with the title deeds of Irish Republicanism and taking our stand on the rock of the All-Ireland Republic from which flows the political, social and economic freedom of Ireland our steps must be ever onward!

Go raibh míle maith agaibh ar fad. Beannacht dílis Dé oraibh go léir.

Victory to the Irish People! An Phoblacht Abú!