

Introduction by Gerry Adams MP

A Chara,

As we approach the new millennium, we need to consider what we expect as a nation. Are we to accept the continuation of division in our society, between north and south, east and west, young and old, wealthy and poor, men and women ?

Or should we not, instead, embrace a vision for the future which puts people first and seeks an end to the divisions which diminish us as a nation ?

Our vision is of a future in which people are united, in which there are no borders and no limits on progress towards a just society based on equality, respect for difference and the protection of the weak and vulnerable.

Our vision is of a future where communities are empowered to take greater control over developments which effect their lives.

Our vision is of a future in which people, whatever their social or economic status, feel that they are part of a Nation which accords them opportunity, dignity and the right to participate in the processes of power which effect their lives.

It is a republican vision. Sinn Féin is a party committed to real social, economic and political change.

Play your part in creating change and in strengthening the nationalist position in peace negotiations by voting Sinn Féin No. 1 on June 6th.

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Gerry Adams MP

A New Opportunity for Peace

This general election could be the last of the twentieth century. It will be a historic election in many ways as it will set the pattern for government in this state as it enters the next century. For Sinn Féin the priority is the establishment of a just and lasting peace.

The conflict in the north and the continuing divisions in our country have had a profound effect on the political, social and economic life of the 26 Counties. The prize of peace has dividends for all of the Irish people.

A new opportunity for peace exists. The election of two Sinn Féin MP's, Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness and the results of the council elections in the north have strengthened Sinn Féin's hand in pursuing our strategy for peace and will have an impact far beyond the constituencies they represent. 40% of northern nationalists have endorsed Sinn Féin's peace strategy and our commitment to achieving peace.

This election provides a further opportunity to strengthen the voice of nationalist Ireland by endorsing Sinn Féin's analysis and electing Sinn Féin TD's.

The great hope and expectation of August 1994 was dashed by 18 months of stalling by a British government which put the short term survival of the Conservative government before peace. John Major sold out the peace process to buy unionist support at Westminster.

The status quo in the north, illustrated by the events at Drumcree cannot continue.

There is an alternative. There can be a peace settlement worked out through real negotiations which address the issues of concern to all parties.

There is a new government in Britain. That Labour government, with its clear majority holds the hope that the peace process can be rebuilt on an inclusive basis.

The new Irish government will also have a vital role to play in making this opportunity for peace a reality, avoiding the mistakes of the last number of years.

Having Sinn Féin representatives in Leinster House will ensure that Sinn Féin will be part of those negotiations. We seek your support in our efforts to end conflict for good and to go into the next century with a Ireland united and at peace.

Vote for Sinn Féin is a vote

For a new opportunity for peace

For inclusive peace talks

For a lasting peace settlement

For national self determination for the Irish people

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Irish Political Prisoners

International experience shows that it is imperative that the issue of political prisoners be addressed during the process of conflict resolution. There are currently 380 Irish Republican Prisoners Of War being held in jails in Ireland, Britain and the United States. 73 of these are serving life sentences while 80 are serving sentences of 20 years or over.

The treatment of Irish political prisoners in English jails seriously deteriorated following the IRA cessation of August 1994. Of the 28 Irish political prisoners in England, five are into their 22nd year of imprisonment and 14 are being held in solitary confinement in Special Secure Units (SSU's). Those held in SSU's are subjected to an inhumane regime of 23 hour lock up, constant cell searches and are subjected to closed visits.

All 41 Republican prisoners in Portlaoise jail are currently engaged in a "non co-operation protest" following the decision of the government to deny access to compassionate parole to a republican prisoner, serving a forty year sentence, following the death of his mother. There are four Republican Prisoners serving forty year sentences in Portlaoise. One of these men has served over sixteen years while the other three have served almost thirteen years.

Immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners held as a result of the British/Irish

conflict

All interested parties to oppose the British Government's treatment of Irish Political prisoners. Britain has been guilty of gross violations of Human Rights in relation to prisoners

Immediate transfer of all Irish Political prisoners from British and American jails back to Ireland

Equality of treatment for compassionate parole for all Republican prisoners in Portlaoise jail

Implementation of a release programme for the Forty Year Men held in Portlaoise

No extradition of Irish citizens charged with political offences to British jails

Neutrality

Sinn Féin is committed to the maintenance of positive neutrality and an independent foreign policy. Neutrality is as valid today as it has been in the past, as this generation of Irish people have invested it with new meaning, relevant to the challenging international situation that they face.

Being in favour of neutrality does not mean being anti-Europe. Ireland should aim to promote European and International security through a policy of disarmament and demilitarisation. Sinn Féin therefore opposes the militarisation of the EU and the participation by Ireland in NATO, the Western European Union or the Partnership for Peace.

Military neutrality allows Ireland to maintain closer relationships with people of the third world and to work with them for a more equal distribution of the world's resources.

Sinn Féin opposes the creation of an EU army 'to fight the resource wars of the 21st century'. Involvement in an EU army would compromise the valuable peace keeping role played by the Irish army serving abroad under the auspices of the United Nations.

Empowering Communities - the fight against Drugs

The drugs crisis is now one of the major challenges facing Irish society. Radical action is necessary to fight the spread of drugs addiction, overdoses, anti-social crime, associated high rates of imprisonment and an increase in HIV and AIDS related illnesses and deaths. The scale of the drugs problem today is a direct result of the failure to introduce the measures necessary to tackle the problem.

Sinn Féin has a track record of campaigning against drug abuse. In October 1996 Sinn Féin launched a comprehensive set of recommendations to tackle the drugs problem. Although some of these proposals were implemented by the government much more needs to be done.

Immediate treatment for addicts. Nobody should have to wait for treatment. Locally based treatment facilities established in consultation with the community are essential.

Community drug teams, involving local GPs, social workers, voluntary and community agencies should be established in areas affected by the problem.

A co-ordinated approach by all the relevant state agencies is needed to target the major drug dealers and seize their assets

Local communities have a central role to play in tackling the drugs problem

Local authorities should evict drug dealers and local people must be given a greater say in how their estates are managed

An end to Garda harassment of anti-drug activists. The Gardaí must be made accountable to the community. Changes in Garda management practices are necessary to facilitate this

We recommend the establishment of a national forum with statutory funding to draw up a comprehensive response to the drugs crisis

Crime

With both urban and rural areas experiencing increases in crime it has become a major social and political issue. There are no instant solutions, no easy options. There are many different types of crime, and different types of crime have different potential solutions. Crime will decrease when there is a co-ordinated response - social and economic, as well as law enforcement - to deal with the many causes of crime.

Government must invest in preventative programmes aimed at removing the causes of crime. Locking more people up in "get tough" jail regimes is not by itself a solution. Community facilities, training and jobs are vital elements in tackling crime.

Sinn Féin supports:

Police strategies to tackle crime lords and anti-social gangs

Upgrading the court system to ensure speedy but fair trials

Prisons to focus on rehabilitation and training to help prevent re-offending

Effective post-release monitoring and support measures

Non-custodial sentences, e.g. community service and/or restitution to the victim, where appropriate

The Economy A Future for Everyone

Putting People First

Sinn Féin's overall objectives for economic policy in Ireland are to provide sustainable and dignified livelihoods for all its citizens; to develop economic resources, human and material, to their fullest; and to create an economic base which reflects the social and cultural values of all the Irish people and which fulfils their material needs and aspirations.

While wealth is undoubtedly being created in this state, the reality of the Celtic Tiger is that ordinary people and whole communities both urban and rural still endure entrenched

unemployment, poverty, multi-faceted disadvantage, social exclusion and endemic inequalities. We have also faced the consequences of the litany of financial scandals that taints both public and private sector business.

Eliminating Inequality

Increasingly we have seen the acceptance of the growing economic division and the development of a low wage economy of 'yellow pack' jobs and temporary employment schemes. This is not the inevitable shape of the Irish economy.

A minimum wage should be introduced at a level advocated by the trade union movement

It is a lack of political will not a lack of funds that has prevented the government from ensuring that everyone has a decent standard of living

The current levels of social welfare need to be increased. Current long-term social welfare payments force families to live below subsistence level

Imaginative ways of ensuring all people have access to employment and a reasonable income and replacing existing employment schemes with access to real jobs at the 'going rate', as advocated by the Conference of Religious in Ireland, should be implemented

The low paid should be removed from the tax net

Reform of the tax system to ensure that the present inequitable burden carried by PAYE workers is removed

To assist local development the 10% cut in Forbairt's funding should be reversed and more economic resources directed to local and community led enterprise

An All-Ireland Economy

It is now widely accepted that an all Ireland Economy would bring considerable benefits. The Irish state is now advocating the bypassing of the political structures in the north and south to create an 'island economy' based on co-operation in the areas of trade, economic planning and infrastructural development. A more thorough economic integration would bring greater benefits.

Sinn Féin advocates:

The creation of an all-Ireland economy

The transformation of the economy of the six counties into a productive and developed peacetime economy in harmony with plans for an all-Ireland economy

The elimination of the economic distortions created by partition particularly in the border counties

A commitment to investment in social infrastructure

The absolute necessity of viewing economic development in the wider context of social, political, cultural and environmental priorities

Full parity of esteem and equality of treatment for all sections of the community

Local Democracy

Local partnerships can allow genuine community involvement and participation in economic and social policy. Their strength lies in the origins as a community led initiative. The aim of policy in this area should be to strengthen the partnerships and extend their role.

The resources available to partnerships must be seen to be truly additional and should not displace existing public expenditure

Resources must be clearly targeted to the most disadvantaged areas and to the most marginalised social groups

Partnership development projects should be considered for similar access to tax concessions that have been made available to private developers

The record of community enterprise initiatives throughout Ireland clearly demonstrates that local enterprise has an essential contribution to make to the development of the economy

Water Charges

The decision to abolish urban water charges and to introduce a subsidy for the provision of domestic water supply for water schemes is welcome. Service charges are an inequitable method of raising tax as they are in no way related to the ability to pay.

Since the inception of this form of double taxation Sinn Féin has consistently opposed these charges at Council and community level and have worked with many groups seeking their abolition. The Federation Of Group Water Schemes, the Federation of Dublin Anti-Water Charges and the many community groups who campaigned against water rates deserve the real tributes and congratulations for the removal of this tax. Sinn Féin re-iterates our support for equality of treatment of all citizens, whether urban or rural resident.

The crisis over service charges is a symptom of the political vacuum that exists in local government. The refusal of central government to regulate for effective, representative and empowered local government is the real problem that needs to be tackled.

Sinn Féin calls for:

An amnesty for nonpayers and tax exemptions given to those who have already paid this form of double tax

Enhancing the role of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in relation to water quality

Rural Regeneration

Economic and social problems are not confined to urban areas. Rural areas throughout Ireland have a long history of political and economic marginalisation. While unemployment is rife, there is also substantial underemployment, low incomes, high emigration and poor access to health and social services.

Sinn Féin believes that the objective for rural areas should be a healthy and diverse economic and social environment where quality of life is enhanced by equality of opportunity.

An integrated strategy for rural development is required in terms of partnerships between government, development agencies, private business and, in particular, local communities so that full participation and accountability takes place.

Agricultural diversification into small industry and processing of quality foods targeted at niche markets needs to take place. This will help to ensure that farming continues to play an important part in the rural economics

There must be an improved transport infrastructure to increase access to rural areas

Sustainable and environmentally friendly tourism should be developed that meets the needs and wishes of local communities

A rural investment bank, offering low-interest loans and technical advice to small farmers and local areas starting community enterprises, should be developed.

Agriculture

Irish farmers, their families and the rural communities they make up have found themselves in an impossible position in the Ireland of the 1990s. The years of CAP funding have created gross inequities where 80% of the benefits have gone to 20% of the farmers. Now thousands of farmers have found themselves either in debt or working holdings which have been deemed economically unviable. Teagasc the agricultural advisory body in the 26 Counties has estimated that up to 5,000 people will leave farming every year in the 1990s. Furthermore despite the fact that EU funds now account for approximately 50% of average farm income, there is no concern in government at our dependency on the EU or on its effects on the Irish economy.

Agricultural policy must be directed towards keeping the maximum number of active farmers in rural Ireland

Low interest loans to be made available to assist small farmers

Aggressive overseas marketing to overcome the BSE scare

All farmers convicted of Angel Dust use in beef production or of using BSE infected animals to maximise herd depopulation compensation to be banned from livestock production

Cases of farm families in financial difficulties to be resolved by negotiation not by eviction

Fisheries

The history of Irish fisheries is not a story of success. It is rather a story of a struggle for survival against political ineptness and indifference and international exploitation of Irish coastal communities and the resources they depend upon. Ireland possesses 16% of EU fishing waters yet has just .3% of the EU tonnage and 2.5% of the EU fleet.

Sinn Féin proposes:

An end to overfishing or illegal fishing by other EU countries

The effective policing of flagships ie non nationals posing as Irish and fishing our quota

Rejection of attempts to create a non commercial three mile fishing zone

Irish Fishing Industry to be allocated quotas which reflect it's potential for development

Investment should be made to upgrade harbour facilities

Increased funding for the modernisation of the Irish fishing fleet

A coherent policy to protect the "Continental Shelf", Ireland's main fish spawning ground

An early and fundamental reform of the Common Fisheries Policy ahead of the planned review in 2002

Forestry

Forests occupy almost 8% of the land area of this state with planting rates now approaching 30,000 hectares per annum. While 80% of the forest estate remains in public ownership there has been a massive increase in private ownership in recent years much of which has been poorly regulated.

Much tree planting at present is being carried out in an unbalanced fashion with too much emphasis on conifer plantation and not enough on deciduous hardwood trees which are native to Ireland. Conifer trees now comprise over 80% of planting in this state.

There needs to be proper management of forestry as blanket forestry is threatening rural communities. The level of forestry has already reached saturation point in some areas leading to depopulation.

Properly controlled forestry development can be achieved by -

Supporting public ownership and control of forestry

Maximising the involvement and employment of local communities in the developing forestry industry which will help to reverse depopulation of the countryside

Adopting a balanced approach to forestry with incentives to plant native broad-leaved trees wherever appropriate

Encouraging small industries which produce recycled paper products

Environment

For too long environmental issues have been divorced from the social realities of everyday life. Sinn Féin is committed to correcting that imbalance. We cannot hope to eradicate our consume-and-throw-society overnight but we can begin by making changes at home and in the workplace. The aim must be to create less pollution, use energy wisely, reuse and recycle waste and establish integrated transport systems. Sinn Féin will campaign for a better environment by:

Opposing the building of a national incinerator

Continuing to support local communities in the campaign against nuclear dumping in the Irish sea.

Calling for the closure of Sellafield

Supporting incentives to minimise the production of waste and encourage recycling

Supporting the use of an eco tax to deter companies from over packaging their products

Reducing the use of non bio-degradable plastic

Encouraging the development of organic farming and ban genetically engineered food

Making the control of water pollution in coastal water and in rivers a priority

Women

Although women now have formal legal equality in most areas of public life they are a long way from having real equality. A minority of married women work outside the home. Employed women earn less than men and their employment choices are more restricted and there is little recognition of the valuable work women do in the home.

Only 12% of TDs are women and women are grossly under represented in most other areas of public life.

The physical and sexual abuse of women is increasing in Irish society.

To achieve real equality for women Sinn Féin is advocating;

Measures to achieve equality of representation both in political life and in appointments to all public bodies. Women must be involved in making the laws that affect their lives

The setting of time scales to achieve equality of outcome in employment structures, education and training

As child care has been identified as the biggest difficulty faced by women wanting to work or participate in public life, the provision of child care facilities and subsidies for childcare must be a priority

Area partnerships, as new structures, should be set up with the aim of ensuring gender equality

Youth

With over 40% of the population under 25 years of age the 26 Counties has the youngest population in the EU. According to recent figures, almost 62,000 people between 18 and 25 years of age are signing on the live register. While unemployment rates have decreased over the past three years Youth Unemployment is still running at twice the rate of unemployment for those over 25.

Real jobs and quality education and training should be provided for young people. They should not be forced into dead end schemes to massage the unemployment figures

Sinn Féin will oppose any diminishing of a young persons social welfare entitlements

Funding for youth services and recreation facilities should be increased

Given the decline in the turn out of young voters in recent years, Sinn Féin supports the holding of elections on a weekend to facilitate the participation of students

Education

Primary and secondary schools remain disgracefully underfunded. 81% of primary schools have to raise their own funds for basic needs like heating and teaching materials. This creates an unequal situation as schools in disadvantaged areas cannot raise this extra funding.

Sinn Féin proposes:

Priority funding of pre-schools in disadvantaged areas

The full funding of all primary and secondary schools

Funding for Irish language schools

A change in funding priorities so that a larger percentage of the education budget goes to primary schools

Decreases in class sizes

Introduction of a realistic maintenance subsidy for third level students

Increased grants for young people from disadvantaged areas to go on to third level

Irish Language

Teilifís na Gaeilge despite its detractors, has proved that Irish is a living and vibrant language. It's success is thanks to the work of thousands of Gaeilgeoirí and enthusiasts who demanded their rights and are beginning to see the fruits of their labours.

To build on these gains Sinn Féin proposes:

Immediate recognition and funding for Irish language schools

An all-Irish university

A bill of rights ensuring equality of treatment for Gaeilgeoirí

All TV and radio stations to transmit not less than 12.5% of programmes through Irish