



# Manifesto

May 1999

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## Contents:

### *Introductory letter*

- *From Gerry Adams MP*
- *Advancing Local Democracy*
- *Shaping the Future*
- *Local Government Structures*
- *Local Government Finance*
- *Corruption*
- *Housing*
- *Transport*
- *Rural Development*
- *Health*
- *Drugs*



- *Environment*
  - *Childcare*
  - *Minorities  
and Racism*
  - *Women*
  - *Irish  
Language*
  - *Education  
and Young  
People*
- 

## SINN FÉIN PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST



### **A Chara,**

For many years now the establishment parties have shown a complete disregard for local government in this state. This was most clearly demonstrated by the reticence of successive governments to call these elections.

Sinn Féin is a republican party, which in its simplest terms means government of the people by the people. By any definition of the term, the lack of power afforded to local government authorities throughout the 26 Counties is a denial of that right. The entire structure of local government is crying out for reform.

Sinn Féin advocates a decentralised system affording a direct role to local people and community and special interest groups. For local authorities to have more power, they must have the power to control their own finances. Unlike all of the other parties we want social justice, we want economic wealth shared across all spectrums of society. We believe in building democracy from ground up.

My pledge to voters in this local government election is that by electing a Sinn Féin councillor you are making a positive difference. A vote for Sinn Féin is a vote for people power over centralised bureaucracy. A vote for Sinn Féin is a vote for a radical alternative to the cronyism and corruption that characterises the current structures.

*Is mise,  
Gerry Adams MP*

## **Advancing Local Democracy**

Sinn Féin is calling for a root and branch reform of the current system so that we can see the people of Ireland in control of local government.

Sinn Féin will end:

- Corruption in local government. We support stringent codes of conduct and ethics for councillors.
- The process of concentrating power and resources in central government. The rights of local government must be enshrined in the Constitution.
- Top-down decision-making. Critical decisions about planning and policy must come from the ground up. We want real people power.
- Inadequate waste management policies. Sinn Féin will give local government the power to introduce proper waste-management strategies. We must reduce, reuse, recycle.
- Inadequate planning procedures currently dominated by vested interests and profiteers. Sinn Féin will create democratic people-led planning that caters for all the needs of local communities.

Sinn Féin wants to give councils the power and resources to:

- Tackle the housing crisis at a local level by building homes, setting laws on rent control, halting profiteering by property developers.
- Develop and run local enterprises that create jobs or provide vital social services to communities.

- Put local government in control of health, education and social services. Communities are best placed to decide what they need
- Abolish unelected quangos. There are more people appointed to these bodies in the 26 Counties than there are elected representatives. Sinn Féin will bring democracy to these bodies.
- Give people power over the purse strings. Local government in Ireland controls only 10 percent of public spending. Other European Union states average 30 to 40 percent.

## Shaping the Future

Since the last local government elections we have seen many developments on the road to a lasting peace settlement, in all of which Sinn Féin have been central. We saw the evolving of the Irish peace process, two IRA cessations, negotiations in 1998 leading to the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. An Agreement which was endorsed by the overwhelming majority of the people of Ireland.

Sinn Féin committed ourselves to the full implementation of the Agreement and have participated in the process in good faith. We have honoured all of our commitments. However, the last year has been one of missed opportunities and broken promises. We have seen an absence of political progress, the ongoing siege of the residents of the Garvaghy Road by the Orange Order and hundreds of attacks on the nationalist community by loyalist death squads.

The failure to establish the Executive and the all Ireland Ministerial Council is as a result of the refusal of the British government and the unionists to implement all aspects of the Good Friday Agreement.

While much has been achieved in the last five years a lot more hard work is required. The Good Friday Agreement needs to be implemented. Equality and Justice must become a reality. Sinn Féin has shown our willingness to take difficult and hard decisions and to lead from the front. We are committed to the transformation of Irish society and are working to develop agreement among the people of Ireland. We are

confident that we can make this happen Sinn Féin is working for:

- The full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement
- A lasting peace settlement
- Irish unity and independence

## **Local Government Structures**

In the 26 Counties, there has been a continuing erosion of local government structures and power since partition. The situation currently existing in the 26 Counties makes a mockery of local government. Political appointees control agencies like the Health Boards and development bodies. Government agencies with budgets of hundreds of millions of pounds take decisions and implement policies that affect us all hugely. At the same time, elected councillors sit on authorities whose powers and spending power are dwarfed by the power of unelected quangos.

Sinn Féin supports three formal elected tiers for local government in the 26 Counties:

- Regional Councils - To play a coordinating role with regard to planning, the environment, and local economic development in consultation with the sub authorities in their area and with the general public. Such councils are a vital part of local government because they would take on many of the roles played by central government in formulating and applying economic and social policies.
- County Councils - To have their existing powers widened. They should be able to play a major role in economic activities both in terms of rural and industrial development. County Councils could play a role in job creation by assessing and responding to local communities' needs for social and other amenities. Both County and District councils should be responsible for the provision of education, health and social services, as well as housing, roads, water supply, and sewerage.

- District Councils - To integrate towns and their natural hinterlands into one local government. It would take into account the reality of increased urbanisation and should mean that there would be no area of Ireland not covered by a District Council.

## Local Government Finance

Central to the erosion of the power of local government has been its ability to raise finance. The state has the lowest local government expenditure as a percentage of total expenditure in the European Union. The European Union average is between 30 percent and 40 percent, while in the 26 Counties, it is 10 percent.

Sinn Féin is calling for:

- The 26 Counties to move into line with the EU average on local government expenditure.
- Local authorities to be given the power to raise funding for the provision of local services and the long-term development of local economies and communities.
- Local authorities to have greater autonomy in determining and controlling expenditure.
- Local authorities to have a greater proportion of public expenditure under their control.
- The abolition of unjust service charges. Such charges are an inequitable form of double taxation. Our councillors will continue to oppose them in whatever form they take. There should also be an amnesty for those who have refused to pay.

## Corruption

There has been substantial coverage and speculation in recent months on the abuse of local government's functions in regulating planning and development decisions. Huge profits can be made from selectively

rezoning land designated for uses other than residential and industrial development. Sinn Féin councillors have highlighted abuse of the planning regulations for decades.

Sinn Féin is calling for:

- A ground-up approach to planning, involving councillors, the general public, and community and special interest groups in the process from its inception.
- Local government structures and institutions representative of the people and communities in order to end illicit control of the planning procedures by greedy property speculators.

## Housing

Over the last number of years, a housing crisis has developed throughout the 26 Counties. In the late 1990s, we have seen spiraling prices in the private sector, waiting lists for local authority housing increasing daily, soaring rents in private rented accommodation and a massive increase in homelessness. Not only are the government failing to tackle this crisis but their policies, including those contained in the Bacon Report, are actually making the situation worse.

Sinn Féin is calling for:

- Local authorities' to draw up integrated plans, co-ordinating their work with other councils.
- Funding for a major new Social Housing Programme by local authorities as the primary response to the housing crisis.
- Community involvement in planning of new housing.
- Proper maintenance and security on all local authority housing to ensure tenant safety and a well-kept housing stock to meet future needs.
- High quality and properly planned schemes including clusters of public housing in villages and small towns.
- New Housing Act to outlaw 'gazzumping' (the increase in a house

price between the payment of the deposit and the completion of the sale) and control prices.

- Penalties for property speculators.
- More emergency accommodation for the homeless.
- Rent control and stricter laws and effective enforcement to impose proper standards in private rented accommodation.
- Assistance for the establishment of Student Housing Associations.

## Transport

Hundreds of thousands of people in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and other towns waste over an hour every working day sitting in traffic burning fossil fuels, in the process creating needless pollution of our environment and generating stress and anxiety for these unfortunate commuters.

Tens of thousands of people travel in Dublin on a public bus system that receives the lowest amount of public funding in Europe. Only 6 percent of Bus Atha Cliath's costs are met from the public purse, compared to 50 percent for the bus services in Helsinki and Athens.

The concentration in recent years on national road and motorway construction has contributed to the neglect of non-national roads. This must end. The rail service has suffered years of neglect and the current poor level of service on many routes reflects that neglect.

Sinn Féin is calling for:

- A major strategic investment programme in the state's bus and rail services;
- A proper system of bus corridors and bicycle lanes in our cities and major investment in quality buses;
- New emphasis and major funding to improve our non-national roads network;
- A comprehensive rail strategy to upgrade the Dublin-Galway, - Westport, -Sligo, -Waterford, and -Wexford lines.

## Rural Development

Across Ireland, rural communities are disappearing. It is a cumulative process. Families are leaving the land and moving to cities and urban centres because their holdings are deemed uncommercial. As families leave farming, the rural villages they were part of become increasingly run down, with local businesses closing and more families moving into urban centres. This process has been repeated year in year out throughout the 1990s.

Sinn Féin is calling for:

- The formulation of a strategy on rural development, to be built up and developed by the communities directly affected by rural under development.

Sinn Fein believes that the core objectives of any rural development programme should be:

- Creating a co-ordinated programme that links agriculture, enterprise, environment, culture, health, and education and social services strategies into a comprehensive integrated rural development project, keeping the maximum amount of people on the land and preserving the social fabric of rural life.
- Creating the conditions where rural communities themselves can rebuild their local economies.
- Ensuring that everyone has a dignified standard of living, access to proper education, housing and health resources.

Sinn Féin are calling for:

- A national conference to formulate a strategy to promote rural development in Ireland. Such a conference would have to be organised on a ground-up participatory basis and not be solely representative of the vested interests that dominate agri-business and rural policies today.

## Health

One of the worst inequalities in Irish society today is our two-tier health system. Private medical care targeted at the better off in our society is thriving. At the same time, and despite the current upturn in the Irish economy, the public health system is lagging behind. This means that medical card patients may have to wait months or even years for vital tests or operations. In the 26 Counties, there are 34,000 people on hospital waiting lists and as many as 25 percent of operations in some hospitals have been cancelled because of bed shortages.

Sinn Féin is calling for:

- A major increase in government health spending to eliminate waiting lists.
- An Irish National Health Service with free care and medication for all who need it.
- Recognition in government that ill-health is linked to poverty and radical action to eliminate poverty and disadvantage.
- Financial support for the 50,000 carers through the replacement of the Carers' Allowance with a much-expanded scheme of payment recognising the value of carers' work.

## Drugs

Today there are very few towns or villages that have escaped the effects of the drug scourge. Unless we tackle the growing drug culture in our society by addressing the social and economic inequalities in Ireland, drugs will continue to be a fact of life in our society and we will condemn future generations to the consequences of drug abuse. While drugs will never completely disappear, together we can stem the spiraling levels of drug abuse and with a co-ordinated approach begin to row back the tide. We can reclaim our communities for the people.

## Sinn Féin is calling for:

- The establishment of community drug teams involving local GPs, social workers, voluntary and community agencies in areas already affected by the problem.
- The 'Drug Prevention Programme' (Primary schools) and the 'On Your Own Two Feet' Programme (Secondary schools) to be implemented in all schools.
- Investment in proper training and education.
- The provision of drugs counselors for schools located in those areas most affected by heroin abuse.
- Greater recognition and strengthening of community involvement in tackling this issue.
- The launch of a public education campaign, properly targeted to highlight the dangers and reality of drug addiction.
- The allocating of greater power to local communities in the management of their own estates, particularly in relation to housing allocations with an appeal structure built in.
- Local drugs task forces must be truly representative of communities and community groups must be given equal status and funding with the statutory and voluntary groups at decision-making level of these task forces.
- All local authorities to follow the courageous example of those corporations who have faced up to known drug dealers and refused to house them.
- Additional detox beds and facilities are urgently needed. Emergency funding should be set aside to supply the demand for places in the centres which provide this vital service.
- Locally-based community health workers need to be properly resourced.
- The immediate development and introduction of long-term rehabilitation programmes which equip young people for a purposeful life after drug addiction.

## Environment

The aim of environmental policy at a local level must be to create less pollution, use energy wisely and to reduce, reuse and recycle waste. Throughout Ireland, it is local communities that have led campaigns for a safe environment to live in. In addressing the problems of environmental pollution and waste management, Sinn Féin is committed to ensuring that local government and local communities work together.

Sinn Féin is calling for:

- Support for initiatives to minimise the production of waste and encourage recycling.
- Local community involvement in the discussion, planning and running of waste management projects.
- Use of composting schemes for the collection of green kitchen and garden waste.
- The introduction of kerbside recycling collections.
- A ban on the production and sale of genetically modified foods.
- Opposition to the use of incinerators.
- Communities to be consulted on the siting of telecommunications masts.

## Childcare

The 1916 Proclamation calls on us to treat all of the children of the nation equally - children whose parents are part of the work force of Ireland must be placed in a safe and caring environment. The women of Ireland must be allowed their right to work, equal to the rights of men. This can only happen when government fulfils its obligations to put in place fair and adequate, quality child-care facilities.

Sinn Féin advocates:

- The development of an all-Ireland strategy, with responsibility resting in one governmental department to implement quality, standardised, state-funded child care in the long term.
- Immediate reform of the tax system to facilitate affordable child

- care, staffed by trained, trustworthy carers.
- Relief for employers who provide place-of-work crèches or vouchers/subsidies.
- Tax allowances on childcarers' income.
- Greater relief/allowances on the child-care expenses of working parents.
- Increased Children's Allowances.

## **Minorities and Racism**

Sinn Féin recognises that we live in a multicultural Ireland, which enriches all of us. We are opposed to racism, discrimination, and intolerance of any kind. As a progressive party, we actively promote inclusion and combat prejudice and injustice. As we enter a new millennium, we need to recognise that the influence of other cultures and heritages are positive and enhance us all.

Sinn Féin is calling for:

- An open-door policy for immigrants and asylum-seekers, particularly political refugees.
- The right for asylum-seekers to work and participate fully in Irish society.
- An end to racially-motivated harassment and attacks.
- The development of multicultural community-based education programmes to combat prejudice and promote tolerance and inclusion.
- An end to discrimination against members of our Travelling Community.
- Local authorities to deliver on their commitments in the provision of fully-serviced halting sites.
- Government-led initiatives to combat anti-gay and lesbian discrimination.
- School-based programmes aimed at combating bigotry and intolerance of all kinds.

## Women

There should be recognition and support both for those women who want to stay in the home and those who want to participate in the work force.

Although the position of women in the 26 Counties has improved, the balance between men and women in terms of equality of employment, income, home ownership, and status is still heavily tipped in favour of men. Changes have to be made to allow women to play a full part in all aspects of the life of their communities, the work force and in the decision-making process of government.

Sinn Féin is calling for:

- Measures to achieve equality of representation both in political life and in appointments to all public bodies, including local authorities.
- The setting of timescales to achieve equality of outcome in employment structures, education, and training.
- Family-friendly policies in the workplace to facilitate women returning to work and women in the workplace.
- Adequate and permanent funding for women's organisations and community-based women-only training programs with flexible hours and adequate child-care facilities.
- Women-friendly health-care services, to include freely available screening for breast cancer and smear testing for cervical cancer.
- Support for education initiatives recognising that combat sexism and sex stereotyping in our society.
- Support from local authorities for organisations working to eradicate violence against women.

## Irish Language

The Irish language community must enjoy parity of esteem with English speakers. The Irish language should be afforded official status reflected in appropriate legislation, including the right to allow Irish speakers to deal with all levels of government and local government administration in our own language.

Sinn Féin is calling for:

- The active promotion by local authorities of the Irish language as a positive and integral aspect of our culture.
- The provision by local authorities of an Irish and bilingual version of all publications, official documents and forms.
- The proper preservation and signposting of Irish place and the naming of new housing developments to reflect local or national heritage.
- The regeneration of Gaeltacht areas.
- Increased funding for Irish-language schools.

## **Education and Young People**

With over 40% of the population under 25 years of age the 26 Counties has the youngest population in the European Union. Sinn Féin believes that education and training is a fundamental right to all our people as a process of life-long learning.

Sinn Féin is calling for:

- Adequate financial and political support for community education programmes.
- A role for communities in the provision and design of local education and training resources.
- A reduction of class sizes at primary and secondary level.
- Adequate resources in terms of materials, facilities, and equipment, particularly for schools in economically disadvantaged areas.
- Continued priority funding of schools in economically

- disadvantaged areas, both in urban and rural areas.
- Increased support for Irish-language schools.
  - Funding for youth services and recreation facilities

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[Contents Page for this Issue](#)

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Reply to: [An Phoblacht/Republican News](#)