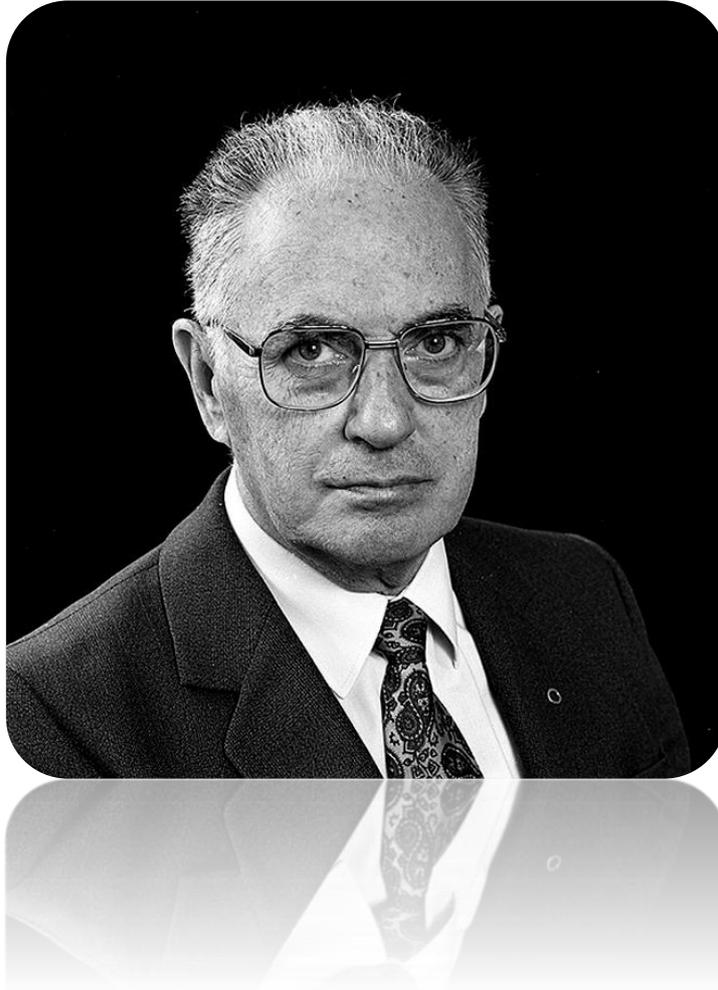


Republican SINN FÉIN Poblachtach

Aitheasc an Uachtarán



94ú Sinn Féin Ard Fheis 1998

AITHEASC AN UACHTARÁIN, RUAIRÍ Ó BRÁDAIGH

don 94ú Ard-Fheis de Shinn Féin i nDroichead Átha, Co Lú

7-8 Samhain 1998, Dé Domhnaigh 2pm

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS, RUAIRÍ Ó BRÁDAIGH,

to the 94th Ard-Fheis of Sinn Féin, in Drogheda, Co Louth

November 7-8, 1998, Sunday 2pm

A Chathaoirligh, a theachtaí, is a cháirde ar fad,

Fearaim fíor-chaoín fáilte romhaibh go léir ag an Ard-Fheis seo, an 94ú ceann de chuid Sinn Féin. You are all most welcome to this, the 94th Ard-Fheis of Sinn Féin.

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The past year began, a chomrádaithe is a cháirde, with Republican Sinn Féin standing out starkly as the only political organisation in this country which would not accept English rule – under whatever guise – in any part of Ireland. The year has ended with the implementation of threats by the Dublin Administration to “break” us (their word); in this way they hope to bury our objective of a free and independent Ireland for all time.

Such menacing language is nothing new to Republicans. We have been down this road before, many times. Internment camps, military tribunals, special courts and special laws are among the array of instruments of coercion that have been used against us in the past. But they have all failed, whether they have been employed by Stormont, by Leinster House or by Westminster itself.

We all knew full well that the current process would lead to a new sell-out and that came in due recurrent season on April 10 last when the present Agreement was signed at Stormont. Republican Sinn Féin had stated when the Framework Documents were issued in 1995 that what Irish People were facing was a repeat of Sunningdale with the Provos on board this time.

Indeed, the British Prime Minister Edward Heath at the time of the Sunningdale Agreement in 1973 is reported as saying (Irish Times, October 20) that “the Good Friday Agreement was modelled on Sunningdale”. He continued: “We know the people who were working out the new agreement went back over the whole of Sunningdale and more or less copied it”.

But the Stormont Deal was actually less than Sunningdale. The 1973 Agreement provided for an evolving Council of Ireland while the 1998 accord contains the possibility of merely cross-border bodies which would be responsible to the New Stormont and cannot grow and develop without the permission of that Unionist-dominated assembly.

Further, the 26-County State has paid more for the Stormont Agreement than it did for Sunningdale. Articles 2 and 3 of the 1937 Constitution were not given away in 1973; in 1998 they were and the Nationalist people of the Six Occupied Counties were reduced – in the eyes of the 26-County State – to the level in rights of people with one Irish grandparent living as far away as Australia or New Zealand. The “damned good bargain” of the Boundary Agreement which cemented Partition in place in 1925 has now been restored. By such backward steps are the seeds of future conflict sown.

The Provisionals in their new role as a fully constitutional party cannot justify their rejection of Sunningdale and their acceptance now of less. The sacrifices endured between 1973 and 1998 cannot be validated by them on that basis.

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The Stormont Agreement was railroaded through nationalist Ireland; people were stampeded on the basis that the alternative was war, and the Agreement was not assessed on its merits or demerits. Fianna Fáil posters and badges said "Vote Yes for Peace" while David Trimble stated that the alternative was another "thirty years of misery"

UDA/UDP spokesperson Davy Adams said at their party conference that rejection would mean "violence on a scale never witnessed before". On the weekend before polling church congregations were told from the altar to vote "Yes" and "Yes" for "peace in Ireland and unity in Europe".

Clearly Lloyd George's threat in 1921 of "immediate and terrible war" was repeated throughout the land. As Liam Mellows said at that time, "this is the fear of the people, not the will of the people". This point was underlined by the fact that fifteen uninvolved nationalists were killed last year (1997) and already twelve this year up to May 22nd.

Nationalists on both sides of the Border were promised the alluring prospect of peace after 30 years of sacrifice and suffering. There were no party political broadcasts allowed on RTE radio or television during the campaign and RTE current affairs programmes were largely bereft of spokespersons from Republican Sinn Féin – the only All-Ireland political organisation which actually campaigned on the ground for a "NO" vote.

Intimidation was the order of the day. Mr. Ahern in Boston stated his intention to "firmly crush" those who do not accept the New Stormont and "No" campaign workers on the ground were harassed by police under the Public Order Act. But history will record the efforts of those who opposed the sell-out of Ireland's national rights.

The day of the results in the several referenda, May 23, was the exact bicentenary by date of the 1798 Rising and we answered commentators like Mr. Charles Flanagan, Fine Gael's shadow Minister for Justice, who said that Irish Republicanism had run its 200-year course and was at an end.

The euphoria would pass, we said, and as the New Stormont fails to deliver and non-sectarian Republicanism would come into its own again as the last hope for Liberty, Equality and Fraternity with the "breaking of the connection with England". Republican Sinn Féin would work and prepare for that day and be ready once more to give the lead.

Those people who resisted the media-driven stampede of a nation and voted "No" were congratulated. The stand taken by workers and voters for "No" would be borne out in the future. A point not to be lost sight of is the low turn-out of voters in the 26 Counties at 56% of the electorate, despite media and other exhortations.

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The 38% “No” vote to the Amsterdam Treaty was very commendable and showed growing support for the idea that European Union integration has already gone far enough and that neutrality must be safeguarded. It was the highest “No” vote yet in the various EEC referenda since 1972.. Public awareness and debate on these issues are of vital importance to our people and we deplore the holding of two referenda in the 26 Counties on the same day.

We stated then, and we repeat today, that regardless of the outcome in two geographical fragments of Ireland, Republican Sinn Féin will continue to campaign for British disengagement from Ireland, and for a new four-province federation with maximum devolution to local level as the best guarantee of a permanent peace in our country.

An entirely artificial means has been devised through a New Stormont to administer, under British rule, an artificial area carved out of Ireland. It cannot endure, no more than did the Sunningdale Agreement nor the original Stormont.

The New Stormont is a step backwards – away from a free and independent Ireland. It was and is seen by us as a barrier administration between the Irish people and the British government which thereby disclaims responsibility for the situation in the Six Occupied Counties.

It would be a self-perpetuating power bloc dispensing patronage to its supporters. Republican Sinn Féin was not going to assist British rule here by helping the new arrangement to strike roots. For all of these reasons we carried out a Boycott Stormont campaign in the lead up to elections on June 25. Like its predecessors, it will have to be taken out of the way on the road to a free and independent Ireland. Already after six months the entire arrangement is slipping as target dates have not been met.

With the signing of the April 10 Agreement we entered a totally new era of political humbug and a coordinated George Orwell type operation to persuade the vast majority of ordinary Irish people either that their traditional ideals and national aspirations are so much horror from the past, or – even more sinister – that the path outlined by John Hume and David Trimble is in fact what we were all seeking to achieve over all those years of conflict, denial and political discrimination.

It is not necessary as President of Republican Sinn Féin to deal at length with these spins. You are after all the only political organisation which is proud of the continuity it holds with the First (All-Ireland) Dáil, the men and women of 1916 and back along to Wolfe Tone and 1798. We do not believe that there is a need to revise the issues, the political and strategic revolutionary ideas which caused us to part company from the Officials – later the Workers’ Party/Democratic Left – in 1969.

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But it is necessary, perhaps, to remind the general public about some of the simple facts as we approach next January 21 – the 80th anniversary. We in any case will have no shame or reluctance in our unswerving dedication to the First (All-Ireland) Dáil. It was the first ever democratically elected national assembly of all the Irish people – open to all, where all were treated equally and which utterly rejected, as did all previous Irish Republican movements, the very idea that the British government, Crown or Imperial forces had any right to rule in Ireland.

As Cathal Brugha, the first Ceann Comhairle put it, “Tá deire le ráiméis. Tá deire le ré na cainte —“For him the only possible agenda there could be in talks with London (then the centre of the largest empire the world had known) was the issue of British disengagement from Ireland in accordance of the wishes of the vast majority.

For a whole generation now, oft quoted superficial propagandists, like John Hume and Garret Fitzgerald and others who persist in drawing their own line between what they say is “constitutional” and “illegal” politics, have ignored our basic 1919–20 arguments altogether.

Then as soon as Mr. Hume and company got their sham Agreement last Easter, they all suddenly discovered the “legitimacy” of the Republican Sinn Féin argument – except of course Mr. Adams and his associates who used to sing off the same hymn-sheet as ourselves so relatively recently that they have had to sing dumb.

This silence on their part was because the ghosts of Bobby Sands elected representative for Fermanagh–South Tyrone, Ciarán Doherty, TD for Cavan–Monaghan and all those other brave men and women who sacrificed all to ensure political success for the Republican Movement, still haunt them from the recent past.

What is more, their relatives are still around – in Bundoran every August and in other places – to remind us that whatever else, we know what they believed in, we know that All-Ireland Republican sovereignty means what it says, and Bobby Sands and his comrades did not die for a few cross-border bodies traded against the definition of the nation contained in the 1937 Constitution.

In addition the Provos got grudging permission to use the Irish language, our own language which was a European cultural gem a thousand years before the English Crown forces set foot in Ireland. Worse still the allegedly great “national advance” simply means you can use your own language in the partition horror chamber of Stormont – provided you bring along your own English translation of course! The contrast with the first meeting of the All-Ireland Dáil which was predominantly in Irish could hardly be more clear!

It is necessary to place some emphasis on this Hume news speak because of his pernicious non-transferable speech which is never challenged or debated either by

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the intellectual pygmies in Leinster House or the old Stickie comrades in Montrose and the Irish Times who seem to accept that whatever Hume says "is our policy too"!

It is rather like "Whatever is good enough for Mick Collins is good enough for us", a scenario that led to such tragic results in the Republican Movement in 1922. Why can't people say what they mean and mean what they say? Why re-write and re-draft historical facts, even events of our lifetime just because John Hume and David Trimble have been offered a Nobel Peace Prize?

This has been done with all the political balancing that saw that Prize go to Yasser Arafat along with Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres 1994, not to mention Henry Kissinger and all those other Pax Americana types around the world. Could we not be reminded that Betty Williams and Máiréad Corrigan shared that same Peace Prize in 1977 – and what was the result?

Any sensible person would, if allowed, ask why if they deserved their Prize then, is it necessary to make another award 21 years later? In our view the awarding of Nobel Peace Prizes should be delayed until the British government has disengaged finally from Ireland and a permanent peace has been established.

Unlike the Leinster House politicians we will not sell out to the John Hume school of so-called "national self-determination" in two parts and under threat of war. Mo Mowlam and Patrick Mayhew, successive British Secretaries for the Six Counties made it abundantly clear that the "vote in the North", as they put it, would be decisive. The Unionist Veto was clearly in operation. The concurrent vote in the 26 Counties was merely an additional frill for national and international consumption.

In the immediate aftermath of the first World War which was fought, we were told, for the freedom of small nations and the self-determination of peoples the Irish people in a single All-Ireland election self-determined their own status before the world. They had choices with Republican Sinn Féin, Home Rule and Unionist candidates standing and they gave 72 seats out of 101 territorial constituencies to Sinn Féin for an All-Ireland Republic.

England's response was the Black-and Tan terror and the division of the unit of franchise by Partition. The Treaty of Surrender was then imposed by threat of "war within three days". From that basic injustice has come the great conflict of our time. The Stormont Agreement simply updates and strengthens English rule here by including nationalist representatives in Executive positions. They sit in the old Stormont parliament chamber which has been refurbished after the fire there – just like British rule itself!

While we reject the overweening nationalism of the great powers which has so often developed into imperialism, we support the nationalism of oppressed peoples. We are gratified that there are many more emerging nations on the map of Europe

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since the Berlin Wall came down almost a decade ago and that a total of 185 peoples are now represented at the United Nations.

We rejoice that attempts are being made to bring General Pinochet of Chile before international justice for breaches of human rights and the mass murder of his own citizens with covert CIA backing. We note also the statement of the leader of the Basque separatist party Herri Batasuna – now renamed Euskal Herritarok – reported in the Irish Times of October 1 last.

Arnaldo Artégi said that "as long as the conflict persists ETA will exist and the conflict will end when the national rights of this (Basque) country are recognised". The entire 23-member Ard-Chomhairle of Herri Batasuna was jailed for seven years last December because they showed a video on Television outlining ETA's peace terms to the Spanish government.

Republican Sinn Féin did not rush over to the Basque country to advocate a version of the Stormont Agreement for that brave people as did some former comrades. No, our members demonstrated in solidarity with the Basque prisoners outside Dublin's GPO with leaflets, posters and pickets.

How often have we listened to their representatives speak at their Ard-Fheiseanna and how many times have we read out here messages of solidarity from them with our struggle. It was the very least we could do.

While the captive nations of the former Soviet bloc are being encouraged to assert themselves – as happened in the case of the defeated Powers after WW1 – the oppressed peoples of western Europe are being stamped on. On July 15 this year the Basque nationalist newspaper EGIN was suppressed by the Spanish state and the Egin Irratia radio station silenced. Eleven members of editorial staffs were arrested and Amnesty International protested.

It also emerged during the year that an unofficial death squad misnamed GAL (Grupos Anti-terroristas de Liberación) was being run by the Spanish Minister for the Interior and his deputy from 1983 to 1987 Both of them together with ten of their most senior security officers received ten years in jail for conducting a "dirty war" against ETA in the part of the Basque country ruled by the French state. GAL killed 27 people, nine of whom were totally uninvolved, and carried out kidnappings and torture.

The purpose of this was to "persuade" the French authorities to take a tough line against ETA members living in the French state. The Irish Times report carried on August 1 last says: "To find a parallel in Ireland, you would have to imagine British-backed death squads carrying out dozens of shootings and bombings in Drogheda and Dundalk". But the Dublin and Monaghan bombings, and those in Dundalk and Clones and Belturbet and other places were not figments of someone's imagination! Dozens of totally innocent people did die.

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We note the absence of an international outcry at these revelations about a Madrid government no longer in power. Those in power simply look elsewhere. For our own part we support the claims of the smaller nations in Europe trying to emerge from the shadow of bigger states nearby just as we back parallel struggles against colonialism and imperialism around the world. We do not fob them off as mere "national minorities" as do allegedly nationalist MEP's from Ireland.

On the international scene also we have seen further denials of the freedom to express political ideas on the North American continent. Last year Vice-President Des Long was denied entry to the United States while your President was refused admission to Canada.

This year Bernadette, sister of Bobby Sands was excluded from the US as soon as it became clear that her simple loyalty to the concept of 32-County democratic sovereignty was something which could no longer be discussed, let alone honoured and worked for – because Adams and Ahern, Blair and Mowlam., Hume and Trimble, and even Bono no longer approved.

An elected councillor from Co. Tyrone who is associated with her politically was also discriminated against in like manner. Of course, for 25 years now the President of Republican Sinn Féin is not allowed to be heard expressing his political views in the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave other than by radio or television link-up. Successive US Administrations who have bowed to London and Dublin's wishes have seen to that.

On May 16 last in Paris tens of thousands of industrial and agricultural workers, small farmers, unemployed, youth and pensioners demonstrated against the Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties and the EU single currency, the Euro. They were opposing privatisation measures, lay-offs, deregulation, dismantling of the public services and the destruction of agriculture.

They supported the idea of a "Free Union of Free and Sovereign Nations and Peoples of Europe". James Connolly formulated it as a Europe made up of a "Free Federation of Free Peoples". Republican Sinn Féin had no difficulty in signing up to the Appeal launched on that day by a European Committee formed by labour activists of different organisations coming from 22 countries of Europe.

The fight continues against the undoing of the whole system of collective contracts and bargaining, labour laws and social protection systems in the interests of total freedom for multinational companies to transfer their capital without control or restriction, to endanger national sovereignty and to close down any firm at a moments notice. The Seagate experience in Clonmel is a case in point as is the closure of the Co. Donegal operations of the Fruit of the Loom company transferred to Morocco because of lower wages there for workers.

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The interests of ordinary people are not served by the speculators and the financial market. Even the International Labour Organisation based in Geneva which set minimum standards against exploitation of workers is under attack. Further events and protests with which we will be associated will be organised in Paris in January next to coincide with the planned introduction of the Euro.

Meanwhile in the Third World the situation of foreign indebtedness is strangling national economies and, because of the social consequences, is increasing the suffering of millions of people. In Latin America about 30% of the region's earnings go to service this foreign debt yet the amount owed is steadily increasing.

It is humanely and mathematically unpayable and is used as the permanent justification for the maintenance of neo-liberal economic policies in Third World countries. Regions which supplied the riches that made for the economic development of the colonial powers now face unequal trading relations.

They get an ever diminishing price for their raw materials while they pay an ever increasing price for the industrial goods they have to buy from the First World. Add to this high interest rates often described as usury. These debts must be cancelled; they have been paid over and over again. The international moneylenders are no better than their much smaller counterparts nearer home.

Here in Ireland the Combat Poverty Agency and the Conference of Religious in Ireland (CORI) have emphasised again and again the growing disparities in Irish life and the failures at official levels to tackle these. The CPA annual report in early September said that "up to one third of the population is at risk of poverty, while 9 to 15 per cent live in persistent poverty".

The United Nations Human Development Report for 1998 published on September 9 stated that "Ireland has the highest proportion of people living in poverty in the industrialised world outside the US". The United States was worst with 16.5% in "human poverty", Ireland next at 15.2% followed by Britain at 15%. Top of the list was Sweden with a rating of 6.8%.

"Human poverty" is an aggregate arrived at from the figures for life expectancy after 60, illiteracy, poverty and long-term unemployment. While Ireland is a highly desirable country in which to live, the Report points to glaring inequalities in the distribution of wealth within the 26-County State.

In particular it finds that Irish women are worse off relative to men than in any other Western country. They are also less likely to be in positions of power in business or politics. Ireland also has the highest level of functional illiteracy in the 17 industrialised states surveyed and the second highest level of long-term unemployment.

All of this is in the land of the Celtic Tiger, so-called, where corruption in high places is rife, endless Tribunals of Inquiry are held and the banking system has colluded in

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the non-payment of nigh £100 million in DIRT tax. Two tax amnesties to benefit the rich have taken place in 1988 and 1993 and the taxpayer has bailed out an AIB insurance scheme to the tune of several hundred million which was never repaid to the public purse.

With the economy over-heating and house prices sky-rocketing we have the highest level of inflation in the EU. It is set to continue rising just when the 26-County State has given away the most effective tool to correct this situation, the sovereign power to raise and lower interest rates and to set exchange rates.

That will be gone by the New Year, given to the single EU currency. What suits the economies of Germany and France does not necessarily suit us and we will be left with only the powers of taxation and/or the cutting of wages and salaries to exercise control. All the while 40% of the world economy – Asia, Latin America and Russia – is in trouble. We have seen how the position in South-East Asia and Russia has resulted in the closure of the Krups factory in Limerick, operating here since 1964, with the loss of 500 jobs.

With regard to the Irish language eight specific promises were made in the Stormont Agreement for its promotion yet not one mention of them was made in the “Northern Ireland” Bill introduced by the British government in July. Conradh na Gaeilge protested about this omission from a Bill which purported to incorporate the Agreement into British law.

Equally human rights and equality provisions in the Agreement which were lauded as “the most significant nationalist gain” did not match the pledges made in the April 10 Deal. The Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ) said it reacted with “profound disappointment” while the Unison public services trade union said the proposed law was “a betrayal of commitments made” in the Agreement.

Ach tá cearta náisiúnta na muintire maidir leis an nGaeilge taobh amuigh ar fad d'aon chomhaontú. Bhí na Sasanaigh sásta, is cosúil, roint a ghéilleadh don Ghaeilge an fhad a caitheadh léi mar theanga mhionlaigh eile – dála lucht na Sírise i bPort an Dúnáin mar a dúradh!

Anois agus bean le Gaeilge mhaith, státseirbhíseach, ceaptha mar rúnaí ag David Trimble b'éidir go bhfuil an lá tagtha ó dheas anois nuair is fearr and t-seirbhís phraiticiúil Ghaeilge a bhéas le fáil ó oifig David Trimble ná ó oifigí and státchórais sna 26 Chontae, fiú amháin ón riarachán atá faoi stiúradh chlann de Valera cois Life?

Ní léir fós céard é and leagan amach a bhéas ar thoghachán an Udaráis Ghaeltachta an bhliain seo chugainn ach tá rún ag Sinn Féin Poblachtach páirt a ghlacadh ann. Déanfar scrúdú géar ar iompar na n-eagras seo go léir – agus na

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comhairlí chontae san áireamh – maidir le h-usáid agus cothromaiócht don Ghaeilge le ocht mbliain anuas.

We welcome the news that Telefís na Gaeilge is to be provided throughout the Six Counties, but of course there was nothing to prevent the broadcasting of programmes in Irish on a 32-County basis a generation ago – if those in charge were serious then in what they call cultural exchange or cross-border bodies.

With the advent of the Digital TV system in the next few years T na G's role as an alternative public service broadcaster in an alternative language and its vulnerability due to the small base for potential audience must be recognised. All Irish people in any part of Ireland have a right to access their full cultural heritage and a reasonable amount of programming in our national language, even during prime viewing hours.

Is geal linn go bfuil ag éirí le Telefís na Gaeilge slua féachana níos mó a mhealladh an geimhreadh seo ná mar a thárla bliain go h-am seo. Is olc ar fad linn an feachtas gránna atá ar siúl le tamall ag na daoine céanna a bhí in-aghaidh T na G ón tús, agus a dúirt ansin “nach raibh aon mhaith léi” – go dtí gur ghoid an dream tráchtála atá i mbun TV3 cuid mhór den fhoireann chumasach a bhí curtha le chéile ag T na G le cúpla bliain anuas.

Ní bhíonn saoi gan locht, agus tá lochtanna ar T na G ar ndóigh. Ach 'sí an bhunlíne, mar a dhearfá, go bhfuil an naoineán ann, go bhfuil sí ag fás agus ag forbairt de réir na n-acfuinn airgid a chuireadh ar fáil dí agus gur cheart seans a thúirt dí, ar aon nós, cur le líon na gclár dúchais baile a bhainfeadh le nuacht agus cúrsaí na linne.

This year is the bicentenary of the 1798 Rising and Republican Sinn Féin was to the fore in honouring the events and ideals, the men and women of that time. From the Bridge of Toome in Antrim to the Armagh-Louth Border, to Vinegar Hill in Wexford, to the “cornfields of Meath” at Clonard due tribute was paid.

At the Croppy's Acre in Dublin and from Killala in Mayo to Collooney in Sligo, through Roscommon and Leitrim to Ballinamuck, Granard and Ballinalee and even to Wilson's Hospital in Westmeath the French and Irish flags were carried by our members At Burtonport on the west coast of Donegal Napper Tandy's gallant attempt and the frustration of his political extradition were remembered.

The lecture, illustrated with colour slides, entitled “General Humbert and the Republic of Connacht” was given in New York and many parts of Ireland by Seán O Brádaigh. Pikes were carried in Dublin and at Bodenstown – surely a stirring and a memorable occasion. In New York also and in Maidstone in England United Irish leaders were honoured. This programme of commemorative events by Republican Sinn Féin must now be completed in the remainder of 1998.

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While lipservice was paid by Leinster House politicians to the ideals of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity and the bringing together of Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter – when forced to remember 1798 – Republican Sinn Féin went further. Even our bicentenary badge bore the immortal words of the Father of Irish Republicanism himself, Theobald Wolfe Tone when he said “Break the Connection with England”

In a T na G commemorative programme 1798 agus ó Shoin a Trinity College Dublin academic noted that officially there was no mention of Tone's objective of “breaking the connection”. In point of fact Republican Sinn Féin would say that the connection with England was strengthened in this bicentenary year of 1798 by the Stormont Agreement. For our part we opposed the sell-out of Tone's aims and objects by every means in our power.

This year also the concept of “regionalisation” has become a buzz-word forced on the 26-County State by EU regional funding considerations. Regionalism has long been a part of Republican Sinn Féin policy – from as far back as the launch of EIRE NUA in 1971.

Fifteen regional boards, including one for all Gaeltacht districts, were envisaged within the four autonomous provinces. These consisted of four each in Ulster, Munster and Leinster with two in Connacht.

Some of these, e.g. the Mid-West and the Midlands regions, coincide with the proposed 26-County State lay-out, but it took Partition, the single most criminal political act perpetrated on us by the English Establishment, to give us the contradiction of a proposed region stretching from Donegal on the west coast to Louth on the east.

The 26-County State has grudgingly accepted a crude form of “regionalisation” but only in order to maximise money from Brussels. A rational regional policy would reflect not only the need for social and economic balance and the crucial Republican concept of equal access to media and higher education on a geographic basis but also seek to build a forward-looking planning mechanism.

At the very least a nine-county Ulster approach would eliminate the situation where EU, US and International Fund monies are being distributed on both sides of the artificial Border, thus creating vested interest lobby groups who will seek to maintain that Border in order to ensure the flow of bribes. A forward-looking administration would insist that such funds go only to All-Ireland or even all-Ulster projects. This would create a basic All-Ireland economic structure that could be built upon instead of reinforcing an unjust boundary-line through the heart of Ulster.

This “regionalisation” debate has produced a mean-minded approach by some big city fat-cats who fail to see that urban pressures including housing extortion and rural

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depopulation are two ends of the same stick, i.e. failure to have a balanced planning and equitable distribution of resources and infrastructure.

These are some of the problems that will have to be faced by Republican Sinn Féin in our approach to next year's local elections in the 26-Counties. The crisis in house prices and public housing waiting lists, hospital waiting lists, rezoning that makes multi-millionaires overnight, urban poverty blackspots, rural deprivation areas, traffic congestion, all go back to lack of proper planning and distribution of resources.

Candidates known for their honesty, integrity and commitment to the community first and after that as much ability as is available need to be put forward as early as possible. Corruption in high places and mis-spending of EU funds have contributed greatly to our problems. The plight of young couples starting out in life together and facing no possibility of ever owning their own homes with the alternative of paying exorbitant rents for their lifetime surely demands our sympathy and attention.

Speculators and owners of land who do nothing to earn it make a massive fortune as the community expands and housing is required need to be dealt with. This is not in reference to land owners who give sites to their children or small farmers who sell a few sites to maintain themselves.

Our local government policy on housing for many years advocates among other measures "the elimination of speculation in building land through its compulsory purchase with compensation by the relevant local authority". This power already exists in relation to road-making and the price is related to the agricultural value of the land. In the matter of diminishing EU funds, even at this late stage resources need to be applied increasingly to research, development, science and engineering for long-term growth.

Across the Atlantic there are signs of movement among the Irish-American community. The day before the Stormont Agreement was signed half-page advertisements appeared in Irish daily papers from eight Irish-American organisations including the AOH (a separate and distinct body from Irish society of that name), the Irish American Unity Conference and the Political Education Committee. In effect it asked people in Ireland to vote "No" and said "a just peace will only come when Ireland is free from British control".

Similarly the historic Clan na Gael organisation has divided on the question of accepting the New Stormont and British rule. The Irish in Britain Representation Group in a press-release on April 13 rejected the Stormont Deal "as fundamentally flawed". Its central purpose was "to boost British rule and prolong it into the 21st century".

Just two weeks ago in his latest turn around Dr. Conor Cruise O' Brien admitted after more than 25 years that the sovereign British government holds the key to the conflict in the Six Counties and that All-Ireland dialogue should follow action by them.

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Republican Sinn Féin has been saying this since 1969 but Dr. O' Brien censored and opposed this viewpoint down the years. We are glad that he has at last publicly acknowledged that the way to break the logjam in the Six Counties is through movement by the British government.

In the first three months of 1998 and the lead-up to the Stormont Agreement twelve uninvolved nationalists were killed at random by British-backed loyalist death squads. The screw was being turned on the nationalist population. In yet another Drumcree crisis, 141 nationalist families were driven from their homes – burnt out in many cases – and the three young Quinn children killed in Ballymoney on July 12.

Ethnic cleansing was rampant in East and South-West Antrim and a gable wall on the Glenfield estate in Carrickfergus bore the ominous slogan: "Taig Free Zone"! The nationalist population in the area from Larne to Belfast has been reduced from 45,000 to 5,000 in the past two decades. Then, as if to drive the message home, on October 31, the day the target date for a New Stormont Executive slipped past, Brian Service was assassinated in North Belfast. The nationalist population was not adhering to the timetable for "keeping the Union safe". The threat of war still hangs over them.

Of course, at the time of the Stormont Deal David Trimble and the UUP got a "letter of comfort" from Prime Minister Blair promising additional concessions to the Unionist viewpoint. Further, it was stated that political status for prisoners of war would be withdrawn after April 10 and that any person sentenced for a political offence after that date would be criminalised. Apparently the British have learned nothing from the hunger strike led by Billy McKee in 1972 or the epic H-Block struggle.

We take this opportunity to express our solidarity with all Irish political prisoners who stand by the All-Ireland Republic. In particular we send greetings to the Republican prisoners in Portlaoise and to Josephine Hayden suffering appalling conditions and poor health in C-Wing of Limerick jail. The prison governor admitted publicly last year that conditions there "are the worst we have"; Josephine was hospitalised last March for the third time within a year for a heart complaint. We demand full political status for her now pending her release.

Within days of the horrific bomb explosion in Omagh in August the Dublin and London governments seized their opportunity to bring in further repressive measures. These were passed within 16 hours in Westminster and 13.5 hours in Leinster House. According to an Irish Independent report on August 10 – five days before Omagh – the Dublin administration fully intended to remove the right to silence anyway.

On August 18 Mr. Ahern issued his threat against Republican Sinn Féin publicly and on September 14 gave us a seven-day ultimatum through an emissary. Apparently we were to join the New Stormont process or else — On September 21 there were fifteen arrests, the new legislation was used but no charges were brought.

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Every week since then arrests and interrogations of our members take place, especially of those engaged in publicity work, paper-selling, leafleting, postering and issuing statements. Harassment and attempted intimidation by the 26-County Special Branch seems to know no bounds but all incidents have been logged and civil liberties bodies notified.

The official Barra O Briain report of 20 years ago into the "Heavy Gang" experience of the 1970's has, of course, never been implemented. No more than the British government, the 26-County administration does not appear to have learned any lessons either as there has been at least one case of physical abuse. Despite constant documentation by us of such incidents the media have so far turned a blind eye. Are those who oppose the Stormont Agreement politically fair game then and without protection? We shall continue to expose any abuses as they occur.

Mr, Adams has said recently that he and his associates have "downfaced" those of the nationalist viewpoint who oppose the Stormont Deal and called on Mr Trimble to do so among Unionists. We know Adams's followers visited 80 homes inside an hour and a half on September 1 and made threats while in some cases the Special Branch looked on.

But when it came to Republican Sinn Féin the "downfacing" became physical. The Chairperson of Comhairle Uladh, Michael Donnelly of Derry city had his home invaded by a gang of Provisional thugs wielding iron bars, his family attacked and beaten and he himself suffered a broken leg with permanent injury.

That was on June 28, three days after the Stormont elections and Republican Sinn Féin was blamed by the assailants for the loss of a seat in Derry by the Provos. We will not be driven underground by the Special Branch south of the Border or by the Provos north of it, nor indeed by a combination of them. We demand and will continue to assert freedom to hold opinions, freedom to express them and to engage in political activity – whether that suits those who uphold British rule in Ireland or not.

It is contended by some of those who back the Stormont Agreement that a growing nationalist population in the Six Counties will eventually outvote the unionists. We do not subscribe to that theory but even if it did eventuate loyalist fears would be raised and they would respond in the way they always have – by killing uninvolved nationalists.

The situation must be faced up to now, rather than after 30, 40 or 50 more years of assassination and mayhem. If the question is not confronted now we will experience a holding operation which updates and strengthens British rule here. Succeeding generations of Irish people will be sentenced to endless conflict and trouble.

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Republican Sinn Féin opposes the new Stormont because it will NOT be a stepping-stone to a free and independent Ireland but rather an obstacle on the road there which must be removed. It is a step backwards and away from a free Ireland. The cross-border bodies cannot grow and develop because they will be accountable to Stormont with its Unionist majority. It will be part of a Council of the "British" Isles which will bring even the 26 Counties into line for a new and federated United Kingdom.

This is an agreement, not a settlement and as the 1916 Proclamation says "the right of the Irish people to the ownership of Ireland" can never be "extinguished except by the destruction of the Irish people". We believe in the historic Irish nation whose homeland is the island of Ireland. What arrangements we make among ourselves, in the absence of British rule, to live together is strictly our own business.

But regardless of betrayals and sell-outs made under threat of continuing warfare, the Irish nation will endure. It has been well said by Terence MacSwiney that "we did not survive the centuries to be conquered now".

For its part Republican Sinn Féin will adhere to its ideals, to its aims and objectives. We have faced persecution before and have always emerged renewed. If we are put down now we will rise up stronger in our national faith and with even greater inspiration to move forward. "It is not those who can inflict the most, but those who can suffer the most who will conquer —" (MacSwiney) Survive – bend yourself to your tasks – and we shall triumph, in the end.

Victory to the All-Ireland Republic!

An Phoblacht Abú !