

Republican SINN FÉIN Poblachtach

Aitheasc an Uachtarán



96ú Sinn Féin Ard Fheis 2000

Presidential Address to Ard-Fheis from Ruairí Ó Brádaigh

A Chathaoirligh, a Theachtaí, is a Cháirde ar fad,

Fearaim céad míle fáilte romhaibh go léir ag an Ard-Fheis seo, an 96ú de chuid Shinn Féin. You are all most welcome to this, the 96th Ard-Fheis of Sinn Féin.

Since last we met in national convention there has been further growth and development in our organisation, especially at ground level. Cumainn which were faltering have been reorganised with new members and have become vibrant again. Entirely new cumainn have been established and are represented at this Ard-Fheis for the first time.

Political education literature has been developed and seminars have been held. Five booklets are now available to members. It is vital that such work be intensified and extended to all areas. Without education and political activity we will not be able to hold our new members.

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The very first activity engaged in following the 1999 Ard-Fheis was the contest of the Údárás na Gaeltachta elections in the Galway constituency. With Tomás O Curraoin as Na Forbacha as our candidate we welcomed the increase in membership of an t-Údárás with representation for every Gaeltacht area.

But we sought a lower level still in representation: that is a district council to be elected in each Gaeltacht area with all such bodies making up a separate Gaeltacht Region in a new Federal Ireland of the four provinces. That was the scheme that Republican Sinn Féin proposed in the ÉIRE NUA policy which we launched as far back as 1971, years before any Údárás was set in place.

Self-government for the Gaeltacht on a democratic basis is our aim. We campaigned for every additional power to be given to the Údárás so that the people of the Gaeltacht would have control of their own destiny – something they never had. Our manifesto listed planning, agriculture, housing, fisheries, education and infrastructure (roads, etc.) among the powers necessary to the Údárás to ensure féin-riail do mhuintir na Gaeltachta.

Financial assistance was prompt especially from the list of supporters of Feis na Poblachta. Adjoining counties to Galway contributed not only funds but also personnel, transport and other material assistance. Enthusiasm was high even in the adverse weather conditions of a winter campaign.

In the outcome, Tomás Ó Curraoin with 789 votes just missed the last seat. Another 30 votes would have secured it for Republican Sinn Féin. Fuair sé 6.7% de na vótaí bailí sa chéad chomhaireamh, méadú de 60% ar an 4.2% a fuair sé san toghachán roimhe sin don Údárás.

I dtoghlach níos lú – gan Mhuigheó agus an Mhí – agus laghdú ó 45% go 32% sa mhéid a chaith vótaí, choinnigh iarrthóir Shinn Féin Poblachtach a vóta ó 1994 i nGaillimh, agus chuir leis. Le breis cabhrach ag an leibhéal áitiúil – agus tuille airgid – bheadh linn go seoigh. Ach beidh lá eile ag an gCurraoineach!

Tá coinne againn don bhliain 2005. The year 2005 will be our next Údárás outing. More finance will mean greater use of the post to deliver our manifesto and a much higher level of transfers from independent and similar candidates which can make all the difference.

Similarly with regard to the next local elections it is necessary to commence preparations NOW. With the objective of at least one candidate in each county, electoral areas to be contested need to be chosen and candidates selected. Such areas should be concentrated on and worked through in the coming months. Progress reports will be required before the next Ard-Fheis.

The past year has been an inglorious one for the Provisional Movement. As their members followed their compromised leadership down the road of counter-

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revolution, they took their places last November in a New Stormont Executive and commenced to administer British rule in the Six Occupied Counties.

By February the British Government had suspended Stormont and its Executive, showing clearly who held the whip hand in Ireland – not Leinster House, not Stormont, but Westminster itself. It acted to save Mr. Trimble's leadership at an impending meeting of the Ulster Unionist Council called because the Provisionals had not delivered on their undertaking to surrender arms voluntarily.

By May the Provos had conceded on this question and the British government restored Stormont and its Executive. During June they exposed arms dumps to the international inspectors who would in turn report to the British government.

Such an action – unprecedented in Irish history – is stigmatised in IRA general orders as “an act of treachery” for which the penalty is “death”.(Ref. The Long War by Brendan O'Brien). Those who had shot people in the past for exposing dumps had now done the very same thing themselves.

Speaking to the media on May 27 after the UUC had again endorsed his leadership – in that case by a mere 53% – Mr Trimble spoke of the need for the Provos to be “brought to heel” and “house trained”, referring to his Executive colleagues as dogs.

As in the case of his triumphalist dance through Portadown with Mr. Paisley some years ago after taking part in an enforced Orange march through the Garvaghy Road, Trimble was appealing to the worst sectarian instincts of Unionists in an attempt to placate and win over elements opposed to the Stormont Agreement.

In July we had the strange spectacle of Crown Minister Martin Mc Guinness being driven to Stewartstown, Co. Tyrone in his Stormont ministerial car to be pictured on television condemning an attack on the local British forces barracks.

Many people were surprised at this deliberate performance by a former comrade, but Republican Sinn Féin members and supporters were not. They knew it was the logical outcome of the course of action embarked on by the Provos in 1986 when they took the first formal step towards accepting the status quo in Ireland.

But worse was to come. On October 13 they wilfully and in cold blood assassinated Joseph O'Connor in broad daylight in the Ballymurphy area of Belfast. Joseph O'Connor was actively opposed to the Stormont Agreement and our Patron, George Harrison of New York fittingly described his killing as “a deed of infamy”.

Immediately Republican Sinn Féin called on those responsible “to declare themselves and to spell out to the people what their motives were”. We had no hesitation in condemning the killing and pointed out the dangers that lay ahead. We expressed sympathy to his family and friends.

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But there was absolute silence from those quarters which are usually so vocal. I refer to the SDLP, the British government, the churches, the Dublin administration and its Opposition. It would appear that any action against life or property by those who support the New Stormont is excused while those who oppose continued English rule here are to be condemned and vilified at every opportunity. Clearly a double standard is being operated in political commentary.

The Republican Writers Group which consists mainly of former long-term Republican prisoners is opposed to the Stormont Agreement but rejects any further use of force against British rule. This Group was asked as experienced people to conduct an investigation into the death of Joseph O'Connor.

Their findings, signed by ex-prisoners Anthony McIntyre and Tommy Gorman were published in the Belfast Irish News on October 17. They said: "We state publicly that it is our unshakeable belief that the Provisional IRA carried out this assassination".

They went on : "This murder is a state killing, perpetrated by a movement which is deeply entrenched in the apparatus of government at Stormont. When a branch of the executive has at its disposal a private militia capable and willing to politically assassinate republicans in nationalist communities we are left with Brown-shirtism".

They concluded: "The state murder of republicans in order to secure political cleansing and impose conformity is not what our war was waged for. It is a most dishonourable outcome to an honourable struggle".

There was an immediate reaction: senior Provisionals called to the homes of McIntyre and Gorman that evening. Carrie Twomey who administered the "Alternative Republican Bulletin Board" on the Internet was also confronted in a manner in which she "feared for her life" (her words) and the Bulletin Board was closed down as a result.

The Provisional IRA in a statement denied the killing and two days later flooded the Ballymurphy area with their members who engaged in intimidating patrols. They picketed aggressively the homes of McIntyre and Gorman. Ten days later the pickets were renewed in what can only be regarded as an attempt to "cleanse the area politically and impose conformity" in support of the New Stormont.

All of this is part of a pattern. On December 19 last, the day the Portuguese government returned the last European colonial outpost in Asia, i.e. Macau, to China, the Sunday Tribune reported that Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness had been allocated offices as British M Ps at Westminster.

At a time when the last direct colonialism in Asia was ended, these two people were moving towards cementing in position the British colonial presence in Ireland. When Cumann na nGaedheal/Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil and the Workers' Party entered or

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accepted the partitionist assemblies at Leinster House and Stormont, they had the decency to cease calling themselves Sinn Féin.

Sinn Féin was founded 95 years ago to withdraw the Irish representation from the British parliament and to convene a Constituent Assembly to act as the supreme authority for all Ireland. Now that they are halfway towards accepting seats in that British parliament, which is totally contrary to basic Sinn Féin ideology from its inception, we at this Ard-Fheis call on them to cease forthwith to use the historic name of Sinn Féin. They no longer are Republicans.

January last saw the belated return to his family of the earthly remains of Tom Williams who died on the scaffold in Belfast Jail in 1942. In his last letter to the IRA Chief-of-Staff of the time Tom sent the following message to his comrades in Óglaigh na h-Éireann: "To carry on, no matter what odds are against you, to carry on no matter what torments are inflicted".

Significantly, he also said that the GHQ Staff would see to it that unlike 1921 "no farcical so-called Treaty shall in anyway be signed by a bunch of weak-kneed and (weak) willed Irishmen". But of course it has happened again – in 1998. Those who administer British rule through Stormont shamed themselves at his family funeral by pretending to do him honour.

Republican Sinn Féin laid a wreath on his grave in Milltown Cemetery, Belfast in a simple ceremony. We salute the imperishable memory of Tom Williams. Similarly, in a statement of November 1 the National Graves Association welcomed the announcement that 80 years after their execution the remains of Kevin Barry and his nine comrades would be released from Mountjoy Jail early next year.

We are glad to note that ten graves have been reserved for them in the NGA Republican Plot in Glasnevin Cemetery, Dublin in the shadow of the large Celtic Cross dedicated to their memory in 1996. The bodies of those executed in Mountjoy by the Free State in 1922–23 were handed over to their relatives in 1924, while the Republican martyrs of 1940–44 were removed with dignity and honour in 1948.

It has been a long wait since 1920 for the men executed by the British in Mountjoy to be given a fitting resting-place alongside their predecessors, their comrades and their successors. Their relatives and the Irish people will now be free to pay respect and do them the honour which is their due.

February 26 was a special occasion when our offices in Belfast at 229 Falls Road were officially declared open to the public and the media on a full-time basis. This constituted a very significant step forward in the continuing growth and expansion of Republican Sinn Féin throughout Ireland, but particularly in Ulster and the Occupied Six Counties.

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The ceremony itself was inspiring as all present realised that we were establishing a focal point in the heart of West Belfast which would be a rallying post for true Republicans and other interested people in Ulster.

This presence on the Falls Road has boosted morale and has complemented the sterling work of An Ard-Oifig, our Head Office in Dublin in offering the Republican analysis and our alternative to the Stormont Agreement, i.e. the ÉIRE NUA proposals, to an ever-widening support base.

Much of the necessary renovations and refurbishment of the premises was accomplished on a voluntary basis but the cost of materials and of purchase has had to be addressed.

With the final clearance of the debt on Head Office in recent months – which work took a good five years – the way is now open to tackle the question of the substantial liability due on our Belfast Office. This matter is a test of our sincerity as Republicans as progress to the national objective cannot be made without a public presence in the Northern capital. There is work to be done in this regard.

With the raiding of our Falls Road premises by the British forces during October the stamp of authenticity as Republicans was bestowed on our endeavours there. This gratuitous assault on our political offices was part of an attempt to shore up the tottering position of David Trimble as he faced yet another coup against him from within his own party.

By clamping down hard on legitimate political expression of opposition to the Stormont Agreement and the promotion of the Republican alternative to it, EIRE NUA, the British occupation regime hoped to rescue Trimble and placate the hardline unionist opposition to him.

Freedom of political expression was denied in other ways too. Yet another member of our Ard-Chomhairle, Michael McManus of Fermanagh, was denied entry to the United States when he sought to attend and speak at the annual Michael Flannery Testimonial Dinner in New York on January 29. A week earlier former hunger-striker Marian Price was likewise refused a visa. She also sought to speak at the same dinner organised by the Irish Freedom Committee/Cumann na Saoirse.

The influential Irish-American newspaper the Irish Echo, in an editorial on December 22 last called for a visa for Marian Price to allow Americans to hear her case. The editorial said: "This newspaper has always stood for the right of people from all sides of the argument in the North to be given a hearing in the U.S. The case of Price is no different from that of (Gerry) Adams when he was being denied entry".

Six years ago the Irish Echo also spoke up editorially in support of the Republican Sinn Féin President when he was last refused a visa to go to the United States. Vice-President Des Long was turned back at Shannon some years ago on the grounds

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that he was simply “not suitable”. No sentence of imprisonment was recorded against him – it was simply a question of his political views which he refused to change.

In the 26 Counties as well freedom to campaign politically has come under pressure. Head-Office has been raided many times and our meetings are watched and beset by the political police. Following a concerted campaign of misrepresentation of Republican Sinn Féin's position in certain sections of the media in recent times – largely alleging that we are in alliance with other political bodies with which we have no connection – 26-County Special Branch harassment has grown in intensity.

Members of the Ard-Chomhairle leaving the August monthly meeting were accosted on the street and interrogated. The Ard-Chomhairle minute book and correspondence were seized from an Ard-Rúnaí. So much for the claim that we as an organisation have the liberty to campaign politically. The facts on the ground give the lie to such claims.

A moving event in Derry city during October was the unveiling of a memorial cross to Seán Keenan (1914–1993) who was our Honorary Vice-President for life. Without a permit to march from the British government the parade of several hundred people moved from the Gaelic Park to St. Columb's Well to honour a Derryman who had spent 15 years of his life in English prisons without ever standing in a court.

The memorial stands in a prominent position under Derry's Walls and facing Free Derry Corner in the Bogside, the scene of so much memorable activity from 1969 to the late 1980s. As was said at its unveiling it will remain there as an eternal reproach to all who would postpone for a day, a month or a year the final dawning of Irish freedom.

The first Feis na Poblachta of the new millennium was held in September. Agus é mar aidhm ag an bhFeis na mór-cheisteanna náisiúnta a phlé trí n-ár dteanga féin, bhí léachtanna ann faoin Ghaeltacht faoi láthair agus sa todhchaí, faoi Fhadhb na Dramhaíola agus an feachtas in-aghaidh an loisceoir brúscair i gCúige Chonnacht agus faoi na Tíortha Ceilteacha agus Éire sa 21ú aois.

Scoth léachtanna a bhí ionta agus plé dá réir ina ndiaidh. Ach ba mhór an trua cuid mhaith de Ghaeilgeoirí aithnideacha na Gluaiseachta a bheith as láthair. Chuireadh crothnú ionta agus tá súil in-áirde againn go leigheasfar an scéal an bhliain seo chugainn, le Cúnamh Dé.

The discovery and development of the Corrib natural gas field off the coast of Co. Mayo is surely a welcome advance. However, we are once more faced with the reality that in 1992 (during the term of office of Ray Burke of Fianna Fáil) the tax on multinational companies exploiting our oil and gas was reduced from 36% to 25%. At

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the same time royalties per barrel extracted were abolished altogether and there was a complete tax write-off of development costs.

Onshore support employment will be based mainly at Ayr in Scotland. The SIPTU spokesperson on oil and gas, Pádraic Campbell described this on RTE radio on January 13 last as "the best deal in the whole world for the multi-nationals". It has been said that nothing can be done about this now, but the politicians never seem to learn. It is worth recalling that the rights to huge blocks offshore were sold to the multi-nationals for the derisory sum of £500 at the time of exploration off the south coast of Ireland.

Royalties should be re-introduced, taxation restored to 36% and an adequate Irish share of onshore facilities and employment insisted on. Besides it is planned that the main pipeline from Mayo should go south and link up at Craughwell, Co. Galway with a new Ring Main from Limerick and thence direct to Dublin. Areas in North Connacht and Co. Donegal would be by-passed.

Failing the re-negotiation of the deal, the SIPTU spokesperson said that the natural gas off the west coast should remain where it is until it can be exploited to the benefit of its owners – the Irish people. Many Republicans would agree with this view. And would not Dáil Chonnacht, if it were in operation under ÉIRE NUA, block such a sell-out in the interests of its people?

Similarly our rich fishing grounds are being depleted more and more by the powerful fleets of the European continent as the disastrous terms accepted at accession by the 26-County state to the EEC (as it was then) in 1972 bite even deeper.

The so-called Irish Box off our shores is becoming more and more of a joke – except for Irish people dependant on this rich natural resource. The Leinster House politicians have assisted the European powers and the multi-national companies in despoiling us of these and other resources as is done so unjustly with Third World countries.

The growth of the much-lauded "Tiger" economy in the 26 Counties has brought about a roaring inflationary situation which in turn puts pressures on incomes policy. Prices will continue to rise as the means to deal with inflation – control of interest rates and exchange rates – have been given away by joining the Euro as the EU tightens its grip. Only by keeping down wages or by taxation measures can the situation now be controlled.

It is noteworthy that the British, the Danes, the Swedes and the Greeks, all EU members, have so far declined to join the Euro. Indeed a columnist in the Sunday Business Post of October 1 noted: "The voters in Denmark (who rejected the Euro) and the rioters in Prague have arguably set the key political agenda for the next ten years by asking the crucial geo-political question". The rioters in Prague were demonstrating against the renegeing by the International Monetary Fund and World

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Bank on promises to cancel in part Third World Debt by placing conditions on its implementation.

The columnist asked: "Is it possible for a country to preserve its own political and economic identity and still play an active role in the process of globalisation? And if these two aspirations are found to be mutually exclusive, what next?" The 26-County state is torn between a US-style market economy (low tax and low wages) and an EU welfare economy (high tax and high wages) and has got itself into a situation of having little room to manoeuvre.

Another aspect of full EU membership is the progressive slicing away of neutrality. From the Boer War a hundred years ago through the Great War 1914-1918 this was firm Republican policy. It has been under attack since Seán Lemass said in 1962 that his administration was prepared to pay the price of partaking in "EEC Defence" in order to join the exclusive European club.

Troops were sent to the NATO-led Sfor force in Bosnia in 1997, to the Kfor in Kosovo and the 26-County state joined the NATO-led Partnership for Peace in 1999 without consulting the people, although Fianna Fáil was bound by its election manifesto to do so. Now they are about to contribute a mechanised infantry battalion, which will cost the taxpayer £100 million to equip, to the European Rapid Reaction Force.

The real "partnership for peace" is the United Nations which is badly in need of reform and is starved of funding by the United States which owes it billions of dollars. The UN is being usurped by NATO which represents the economic interests of the US, Britain, Germany and France. It was aptly described as "The White Race in Arms" (Martin Walker, *The Guardian*, October 27, 1998) as it projects a military alliance stretching from Los Angeles on the Pacific right around to Vladivostock on Russia's Pacific coast.

We are glad to announce that Republican Sinn Féin has been affiliated to the Peace and Neutrality Alliance and there has been a limited participation by our members in its activities. We wish to see greater involvement in PANA activities and we do not trust the politicians – in view of their record to date – when they promise a referendum before neutrality is finally abandoned. At best the people will be asked to rubber-stamp a decision already implemented.

But there is also the social cost of the current organisation of society, e.g. adequate housing beyond the reach of many people, with house-prices and rents spiralling and 45,000 on the social housing waiting list and almost 8,000 homeless adults. To this may be added the fact of 17% of teenagers being illiterate – the highest rate in the EU; problems in public transport with gridlock in our streets, in childcare and in the two-tiered health service, with crime, drug-trafficking and suicide as never before.

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Meanwhile semi-state companies built up over the decades, often at considerable sacrifice, are being sold off – privatised at enormous profit to their managements and their new directors. Side by side with this, according to the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) 20% of all households are earning below half the average household income. This is known as “relative poverty” and is based on figures compiled by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI).

Ireland is at a crossroads in terms of the conflicting requirements of economic growth and handing on a clean and healthy environment to our children and our grandchildren. The emphasis in SAOL NUA A New Way of Life (our social and economic programme) is on sustainability, which means that nothing we do to provide for this generation should hurt the prospects of future generations to provide for themselves. One example of this conflict is waste management.

The only sustainable answer to the growing amounts of waste produced North and South is to reduce, re-cycle and re-use, and only to dispose of what cannot be re-cycled. Incineration, or “thermal treatment” is not a sustainable answer to the waste problem but it is the declared intention of the 26-County Environment Minister Noel Dempsey to force on the Irish people up to seven of these dioxin-spewing “cancer factories”, against the wishes of local councils.

This is to be done via the multi-national companies waiting in the wings (many of whom have shameful and corrupt environmental records), and the Public-Private Partnerships, which will mortgage our futures and our environment to get a “quick-fix” to the problem.

Republicans stand by the local democratic process, which has decided, in every case of a planned incineration site outside Dublin, to reject this outdated and dangerous technology, and to aim instead for the target of “zero-waste” within the next 10-15 years, through waste minimisation, home composting and maximum recycling.

Republicans are active on the ground in many areas in defending the environment, and in campaigning for the recycling infrastructure, for economic instruments (green taxes) on wasteful packaging and for processes necessary to implement a sustainable solution to the waste problem

With Galway city and county as a pilot area battle was joined, the people organised resulting in 100% success in the city and county councils. Now alternative policies of recycling etc. must be worked out and implemented as has been done in Canada and parts of Europe.

Speakers went from Galway to Roscommon, Mayo and Louth. In Longford, Republican Sinn Féin Councillor Seán Lynch led the successful campaign on the Co. Council. It is noteworthy that the Provo councillors in Leitrim and Cavan supported

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incineration – not in their own but in other counties – but following the success in Galway the Provo organisation did a complete about-turn, with its eye on next year's general election in the 26-Counties no doubt.

A cháirde, the lines are drawn. We are on the side of the people and of future generations. We have SAOL NUA since 1993 and before that we had the "Quality of Life" policy document since 1973. Against us are the multinational companies seeking the people's money via the politicians to pollute our environment and our food-chain. People-power through organisation and mobilisation is the answer.

Similarly, during the past year we brought our ÉIRE NUA – A New Democracy up to date as our alternative to the Stormont Agreement. It was last updated by us in 1990. The year 2000 edition was launched at a press conference in our Belfast office on the eve of the internment anniversary in August. It was declared to be good in parts by a columnist in the Irish News and when we replied to his charges every word of our answer was carried by that paper.

But Bertie Ahern damned it with faint praise when he presumed to speak at Wolfe Tone's grave in October. The Irish Times which carried Mr. Ahern's remarks has five weeks later failed to give a single word of Republican Sinn Féin's reply by way of a letter to the Editor the following evening. So much for putting your policy before the people and engaging in public debate.

A comprehensive review of the usefulness of cross-border bodies since 1950 and including those operating under the Stormont Agreement of 1998 was put before the AGM of Comhairle Uladh (our Ulster Executive) last December and carried in full in the London Independent of December 15. The case was made that these committees had "no significant functions" (Trimble's words), were accountable to Stormont and could not grow and develop into an All-Ireland government.

This analysis has surely been borne out by David Trimble's action as First Minister of Stormont in recent weeks when he stopped the cross-border bodies dead in their tracks by preventing the Provo Ministers of the Crown from participating in them. Actions speak louder than words and these committees have been exposed as powerless showpieces cleverly designed by the British to raise false hopes and mislead nationalists away from the national objective.

They are the straws nationalists have been encouraged to clutch at, like the Boundary Commission and Council of Ireland of the Treaty of Surrender in 1921. Both were abolished in 1925 when England's alternative to the 32-County Republic had been firmly fastened around the Irish people's necks.

In 1950-51 the Foyle Fisheries Commission, the CIE-NIR joint-railway board and the Erne joint-scheme of drainage and electricity generation were put forward as the alternative to the anti-partition campaign of the time. "Working together" on these

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bodies of no consequence would deliver a free and united Ireland, the people were told. Now and in the last several years the old discredited arguments of the early Twenties and the early Fifties are resurrected to deceive and sidetrack another generation.

Further, it fell to the lot of Dr. Martin Mansergh, northern adviser to three Fianna Fáil heads of government including Mr. Ahern to let the cat out of the bag on this question. At a conference on European cross-border cooperation in Queen's University Belfast he said – as reported in the Sunday Tribune of October 1:

“There is no evidence, let alone inevitability, from international experience that limited cross-border cooperation necessarily leads to unification”.

He went on : “In an Irish context democratic decisions by the people, and nothing else, will determine the constitutional status of Northern Ireland which will not be changed over the heads of the people of Northern Ireland without their agreement and participation”.

There is no advance on 1921 here, Mr Ahern's northern adviser states. The Unionist Veto reigns supreme in a local area specifically carved out of Ireland to give that very result.

Dr. Mansergh concluded: “Left to itself it (North-South cooperation) will develop, I suspect, along the lines of a compromise between two schools of thought to be found particularly both in the business and more middle-of-the-road sections of political opinion”.

Can we now have an end to make-believe and wishful thinking on the matter of cross-border bodies? Is it not past time we faced up to the hard realities of the situation and stopped clutching at straws?

The Ostpolitik of West German Chancellor Willy Brandt did not secure a united Germany. It was the collapse of Soviet power behind the East German puppet state that delivered it. Similarly when British power is removed as a prop from behind the Six-County puppet state we shall see fundamental change in Ireland – and not beforehand.

In the concurrent referendums held in two geographical fragments of Ireland 2.5 years ago, the alternative to acceptance of the Stormont Agreement was stated – over and over again – to be a return to “another thirty years of war”. And successive British Secretaries for the Six Counties told us the result there would be “decisive”; in other words the Unionist Veto ruled the roost.

This was an Agreement under duress, like the Treaty of 1921, and as such is not binding no more than was the political surrender of 80 years ago. It cannot dissolve the Irish Nation or limit it to 26 Counties. For our part, we in Republican Sinn Féin

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believe in the historic Irish nation whose homeland is the island of Ireland and we give that nation our allegiance. We pledge that we shall continue to assert that allegiance.

We are no revolted colony, as Thomas Davis maintained, but a distinct and historic people. "Imprescriptable" was the word he used to describe us as a people i.e. with a status inalienable or not liable to be lost by the lapse of time.

These days as a Bill to remodel the colonial paramilitary police force in Ireland, the RUC, goes through the British houses of parliament, we hear much about symbols, names, badges and structures, not to mention the sectarian make-up of the force.

What is relevant is that the British parliament is designing the "new look" of their militarised police here. Regardless of the outcome of such proceedings, what we will have is a force recruited, trained, motivated, armed and paid by the British government. Its basic function before all else will be to enforce English rule in Ireland. As such it will be a British police force here and no young Irish person who gives his or her allegiance to Ireland should have anything to do with it.

The GAA should not admit its personnel to membership of the Association which would enable them to spy for their masters on patriotic Irishmen and women. In the matter of sectarian make-up it is important to remember that the old RIC was 80% Roman Catholic, yet it was the backbone of British rule here until it was overwhelmed in the early 1920s.

Under ÉIRE NUA we visualise powerful local district councils and strong administrative regional boards under a nine-county Ulster Parliament with Foreign Affairs, National Defence and over-all financing reserved to the Federal parliament. It is proposed that the police service be administered at district council level with certain specialist functions to be carried out by the regions.

It has been mooted that control of the "new look" RUC may be returned to Stormont with the former Republican Ministers of the Crown having a more direct part in their management. David Trimble has gone on record as saying that "we will clean up society" in that event. It was the Unionists' "cleaning up of society" in the late 1960s and early 1970s that caused the fall of the original Stormont, it is worth reminding him.

Further, the Provisionals' "restorative justice" scheme in cooperation with the RUC and the loyalists does not augur well for nationalists under the new "Broy Harriers", as Republicans in the 26 Counties found out through the dearly-bought lessons of the 1930s and 1940s

Last July we were happy to welcome the release from prison on completion of sentence of Josephine Hayden from Limerick Jail and Martin McGrath, Donegal, Seán Moore, Monaghan and Robbie McGilloway, Derry, from Portlaoise. These

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prisoners had served their sentences in full; they had not been released on British licence – under threat of return to prison at any time at the whim of the British government.

We would be less than human if we were not glad at the delivery of many others from the jails, but the prisoners named can hold their heads high and look the world in the eye. They are not beholden to anyone.

Josephine Hayden, in particular, was an inspiration to us all as she held out staunchly for political status, which was denied to her, to the very end. She was the only woman political prisoner in the 26 Counties during her time in jail. As the mother of a family and dogged by ill-health she fought the good fight right to the day of her release.

The other prisoners had spent four months refusing fresh-air exercise in Limerick in order to secure political treatment. They won through and were transferred to Portlaoise Prison. Céad míle fáilte romhaibh ar fad abhaile. About half a dozen Republican prisoners remain in Portlaoise – on remand and serving sentences of up to eight and ten years.

North of the Border in Maghaberry Prison, Co. Antrim there are six more Republican prisoners, all of whom are refused political status because they were jailed subsequent to the Stormont Agreement.

Under the hidden agenda of that Agreement, the political status gained by Billy McKee and his comrades on hunger strike in Belfast Jail in 1972, and won back once more after it had been removed by the British government in 1976, was withdrawn again for new prisoners.

It was, of course, the strip-strike followed by the no-wash protest and the prolonged hunger strike in 1981, resulting in the supreme sacrifice by Bobby Sands and his nine comrades, which recovered political status on the second occasion – this time at enormous price.

At the end of June several Republican prisoners were sentenced in Belfast to terms of imprisonment, Tommy Crossan and Brendan Burns receiving ten years each. Immediately they were required to do penal labour within the prison as well as associate with ordinary prisoners and loyalists.

During his year and a half on remand Tommy Crossan had been grievously assaulted necessitating stitches to his head and was scalded by boiling water deliberately thrown over him. Apart altogether from the demands for political status, the personal security of these prisoners requires separation from loyalists and ordinary prisoners. Tommy Crossan's wife and young children have been totally supportive of him and they too have been threatened by loyalists.

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Beginning then on June 30, Tommy Crossan refused to do prison work and was placed in total solitary confinement, 23 hours per day in his cell and one hour in solitary exercise. Outside, a publicity campaign of postering, leafletting, issuing statements, writing slogans and picketing began. This extended from Belfast to the Six Counties, the 26 Counties and even to England and United States. Radio Free Éireann in New York was particularly helpful in this regard.

It was, however, the “white line” picket in the middle of the roadway on the Falls Road, outside the Republican Sinn Féin office, which proved most successful. Organised every Saturday from 1 to 2 p.m. it gathered support, not only from true Republicans but also from non-supporters of our Movement who stated clearly that the prisoners were not criminals and were entitled to political status. Tommy Crossan’s struggle was mobilising support across the political spectrum in the nationalist community.

After ten weeks of solitary confinement the prison regime backed down. They first threatened that Crossan would lose all remission and serve the entire 10 year sentence in solitary in a basement cell. When he would not withdraw his demands, the prison agreed to substitute an education course for penal labour, which is always acceptable, but three months remission of sentence was already lost.

In addition his jailers heaped other humiliations on him: strip-searching and rigorous cell searches with confiscation of some cell furniture. Since the wearing of convict uniform does not now arise and with education substituted for prison labour, four basic demands still remain along with restoration of remission.

These are: (1) The separation of Republicans from ordinary prisoners and loyalists; (2) recognition as a group; (3) The right to their own spokesperson and (4) a prison wing or space of their own. Ex-prisoners and nationally-minded people generally are called on to support these basic demands.

In particular there is an onus on the Provisionals’ Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness to explain their views on this issue. Both are former political prisoners themselves. If they continue to remain silent while Republican prisoners endure an ongoing campaign of harassment and denial of rights for seeking political status then they can only be judged to approve of this vindictive treatment. The time to speak out is now.

With the number of Republican prisoners increasing, north and south of the Border, it is necessary to make an all-out appeal for funds for CABHAIR. No Republican worthy of the name can excuse himself/herself from this vital work for the support of the prisoners’ dependants. All areas and personnel, at home in Ireland and in exile, must respond.

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To sum up, Pádraic Pearse has said that when all seems to have gone off-course “some good man redeems us with a noble deed”. Such a person has been Tommy Crossan in the years 1999 and 2000. We congratulate him.

It would be remiss not to mention the current valiant Intifada taking place between the Palestinian people and the Israeli occupation forces. Since September more than 200 people, 90% of them unarmed Palestinian civilians including many teenage children, have died. To go back no further than 1967 in this conflict, the United Nations in its Resolution no 242 has demanded that the Israeli government quit the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

This they have refused to do and on the contrary have planted these occupied territories with Israeli settlers from many parts of the world. We would warn the Palestinians that the United States Administration is not an honest broker in their freedom-struggle. It is an ally of Israel.

We know that as in the case of Ireland, it speaks of “Ireland” and “Northern Ireland” when referring to the 26-County and Six-County statelets and refers to the current struggle for Irish national independence as “decades of sectarian violence”. Any solution based on such an analysis is bound to be seriously flawed. The reality again is that official and corporate America is a long-time ally of the British government, and as such, supports its restructuring of English rule here.

The architects of the Stormont Agreement of 1998 miscalculated the strength of the basic Republican position and misrepresented the Unionist attitude as a broad consensus in favour of that Agreement. Built on sand rather than on rock, it continues to wobble from crisis to crisis, with the Provos now being required to yield further on arms surrender and on a restructured British police force in Ireland.

A further treacherous exposure of arms dumps to agents of the enemy took place again last month, bearing out the comment of Billy Hutchinson of the PUP/UVF on RTE's Prime Time of May 6 last when he said: “David Trimble is the only Unionist leader who has delivered the Provisionals”.

In the 26 Counties the Provos want to extend their voluntary political and military surrender of the national objective of British disengagement from Ireland by joining a coalition administration in Leinster House. They would then be in a position officially to lay the lash of coercion on the backs of their former comrades. Mr. Ahern has stated the price: “they must resolve their relationship with the (Provisional) IRA as Fianna Fáil did in the 1920s”. In other words, their party militia must first be disbanded. Other 26-County party leaders have spoken in similar terms.

For Republican Sinn Féin, next year – 2001 – is the 20th anniversary of the heroic seven-months hunger strike of 1981 when Bobby Sands and his nine comrades made the supreme sacrifice following on their slow agony. We must demonstrate next year

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through commemorative ceremonies in every Irish county and make clear to our exiles and the peoples of the world that our hunger strike martyrs did not die for a reformed British rule but for the untrammelled freedom of the people of all Ireland.

With our new Code of Conduct for all members as citizens of the 32-County Republic we must strengthen our organisation and go forward with our political education, with our hunger strike commemorations and with our preparations for the next local council and Údárás elections.

We have at our backs more than 200 years experience of the basis for and progress of the Republican Movement. We know that any deviation from that course in the direction of the status quo inevitably leads to disaster. We have seen this, time after time.

By learning from the mistakes of the past we can advance from here with self-respect and honour – and the respect of the Irish people – to assert what has been handed down to us in unbroken succession from those who went before us, even in our own time.

We must not betray the enormous sacrifices already made, but work to realise them in the everyday lives of our people. Anything less would be unworthy of those we honour, and of ourselves.

Victory to the All-Ireland Republic!

An Phoblacht Abú!