

Republican SINN FÉIN Poblachtach

Aitheasc an Uachtarán

105ú Ard-Fheis 2009

Outgoing Presidential Address from Ruairí Ó Brádaigh



A Chathaoirleach, a Theachtaí is a chárde go léir.

Fearaim Céad Míle Fáilte romhaibh ar fad ag an Árd-Fheis seo. You are all most welcome indeed to this, the 105th Ard-Fheis of Sinn Féin. The past year has been an active one; it began with the exposure to the real aims of Unionists and of the British Conservative Party, reckoned to return to power in Westminster next year.

Before Ian Paisley retired in 2008 after a ceremonial year as First Minister, he stated that he only signed up to power-sharing for a single four-year term of the Stormont Assembly.

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At the DUP conference in November last year the leader Peter Robinson declared that the ending of power-sharing in Stormont and the imposition of majority Unionist rule was “unfinished business”.

Then on February 28 this year, Owen Paterson MP, British Tory Party Shadow Secretary of State for the Six Counties, spoke out on BBC Radio Ulster’s Inside Politics programme. The Conservative Party’s spokesperson said, “We would like to move towards voluntary coalition”.

This would be a “more normal democratic arrangement”. The key point is that the Six-County state is neither normal nor democratic. It is a gerrymandered artificially-created statelet, the very existence of which is a denial of All-Ireland democracy.

The Tory spokesperson was in the Six Counties to formalise a link-up with the Ulster Unionist Party. The UUP leader, Reg Empey – a minister in the Stormont Executive – said he agreed with Paterson. “The current system was necessary to get everyone on board and get ‘government’ established. As we mature we ought to be able to evolve the structures...”, he said. In plain language these were stepping stones back to the old Stormont.

The British Conservative Party is likely to win the next election, due by May 2010, in England. Both Unionist parties in the Occupied area agree with the Tories that what is wanted is a return to the “majority-rule” Stormont. This does not bode well for the Nationalist people in the Six Counties.

Then on December 19 last the Irish language newspaper Lá Nua published its last edition. The only daily paper ever in Irish fell a victim to the Provisional’s appeasement of the DUP when its subsidy was cut off with the consent of those former Republicans.

Dúirt Conchúr Ó Liatháin – a bhíodh ina eagarthóir ar Lá Nua – go mbíodh an páipéar go cáinteach in-aghaidh na Sealadach de bhrígh nar comhlíonadar a gcuid gealtanas i leith na Gaeilge.

Tá sé ar eolas le fada nach raibh na Sealadaigh sásta glacadh le cáineadh ar bith taobh istigh den phobal Náisiúnach. Sampla den dearcadh díoltasach seo abea gearradh siar ar thacaíocht airgid do Lá Nua, rud a chuir deire leis an bpáipéar.

Taispeánann an chríoch a chuireadh le Lá Nua agus an teip ar Acht le Gaeilge a gealladh le fada cé comh mór is a ghéill na Sealadaigh do chlár oibre an DUP.

Cruthaíonn an dá gníomh seo go bhfuil siad sásta an Ghaeilge féin a íobairt mar luach ar fhanacht taobh istigh de Choiste Feidhmiúcháin Stormont. Bhí Lá Nua ann ón mbliain 1984. Is cuma cé’n dearcadh a bhí ag an bpáipéar i leith cúrsaí reatha agus cúrsaí an t-saoil i gcoitinne, ní raibh sé ag déanamh bolscaireachta do dhream polaitiúil ar bith.

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Bhí ceathrar ball den Ghluaiseacht Sealadach ar an gcoiste a rinne an t-airgead a roinnt. Nuair a tháinig cás “Lá Nua” ós coir an choiste, shuí an ceathrar “ar a lámha” is níor oscail siad a mbéil.

Ba mhór an náire agus an scannal dóibh a leithéid a dhéanamh – lámh a chur i mbás Lá Nua. Ní maithfear dóibh an peaca náisiúnta sin.

In a matter of days subsequent to last Christmas, Republican Sinn Féin spoke out against the Israeli attacks on the population of Gaza. These attacks, the statement said, were “the culmination of the internment of 1.5 million people by Israel” for a year and a half coupled with the rationing of essential services such as water, electricity and medical supplies.

Such action was contrary to international law, for example, the Geneva Convention of 1949 on the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. These crimes were connived at by US and British governments and the EU and aided by the total inaction of many of the international community of states.

Irish Republicans once again supported the right of the Palestinian people to national freedom and sovereignty in a viable Palestinian state. We viewed this as an essential first step in the process of bringing about a just and lasting settlement in the entire Middle East region.

We called for support of the protests at the Israeli and US embassies in Dublin. Our monthly picket in O'Connell St., Dublin in aid of political status for Republican prisoners was suspended so that our members and supporters could join the protest for the people of Gaza on January 10 at the Central Bank.

Similarly, Republican Sinn Féin sent greetings “to the valiant people of Cuba” on the 50th anniversary of the success of their revolution. “Despite all the tyrannical efforts to encircle you and isolate you”, the message said, “you have survived and won the admiration and applause of freedom-loving peoples throughout the world. Your achievements during that time in education, in medicine and in health services are the envy of many countries. You have also maintained Cuban sovereignty against all outside threats”.

January 2009 was also the 90th anniversary of the setting up of the First (All-Ireland) Dáil. The difference between the Black and Tan War and earlier periods of struggle was that in 1919–21 the liberation movement took over the machinery of government.

In other words, having won the overwhelming support of the Irish people, Sinn Féin proceeded to organise an alternative Irish government. This was to be a headline for other national liberation movements throughout the world.

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Faithful Republicans today would agree with Dorothy Macardle in her book, *The Irish Republic*. She wrote: "For Irish Republicans what had been done on that day (January 21, 1919) was an act as grave as was the Declaration of Independence in the United States for the American people – an act from which the nation could not withdraw".

Republican Sinn Féin commemorated the First Dáil fittingly in the centre of Dublin. Similarly, Fianna Éireann commemorated the centenary of its founding in 1909 by Countess Markievicz and Bulmer Hobson.

A parade marched from St Stephen's Green to 34 Lower Camden Street, Dublin – the location of the hall where the scout movement was constituted as an Irish national alternative to the British Baden-Powell scouts.

Meanwhile the process of normalising English rule in Ireland proceeds in the teeth of organised opposition. The playing of Gaelic football matches between 26-County police/army teams and teams representing British forces, British royal visits, so-called courtesy visits by British naval vessels to 26-County ports, the erection of memorials to British soldiers are all part of this process.

Such events are highly publicised, especially after the occasion while opposition by Republican Sinn Féin and others is blacked out. A gratuitous insult to the people of Ireland and the unity of Ireland was the decision of the Tyrone Co Board GAA, to bring the senior and minor football All-Ireland trophies, the Sam Maguire and Tommy Markham cups into Stormont on February 6.

To do so was to hijack two symbols of the essential unity of the Irish nation in order to lend credibility to a prop of British rule here and of the partition of Ireland.

But Ireland is a word that must not be mentioned in the course of the sellout. It is now "politically correct" to call the 26 Counties Ireland, while the Six Occupied Counties must be called "Northern Ireland", another place entirely which belongs to England. So a British Act of Parliament in 1920 said when it named it.

The two parts when taken together, we are told make up "the island" with nothing in common except geography. And so we have "All-Island Schools choral competition". How long will it be until the GAA sponsors the "All-Island" football and hurling finals"?

Shame on those who would deny what we are, because a British Act of Parliament says so! And don't think that such renegeing on principle impresses the Unionists. They have no respect for persons who deny what they are supposed to believe in.

Interviewed on BBC Radio One "Andrew Marr Show" on March 9 last year, Mr Paisley said: "I did smash them (the Provos) because I took away their main plank.

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Their main plank was that they would not recognise the British government (in Ireland)".

He went on: "Now they are in part of the British government. They can't be true Republicans when they now accept the right of Britain to govern this country and take part in that government".

For more than 20 years Republican Sinn Féin has been warning that the lessons of Irish history have been that as long as the English government and British occupation troops remain in Ireland there will be Irish people to oppose their presence here.

In the first week of March, Hugh Orde, the head of the RUC/PSNI, announced that undercover British troops were being brought back into this country. Some days later casualties were inflicted on the British occupation forces. Republican Sinn Féin noted that "while everyone regretted loss of life, the hard realities of the situation in Ireland must be faced".

Harassment and repression of people in several areas and particularly in Lurgan, North Armagh followed. The RUC/PSNI continually exerted pressure on the weaker members of the community in their attempts to turn them into informers.

At the end of April a young man on bail on a charge of hijacking revoked the bail himself and went voluntarily into Maghaberry Jail where he feels the British police would no longer be able to pressurise him.

The President of Republican Sinn Féin went into Lurgan at Easter and spoke at the Annual 1916 Commemoration there. The event was highly successful and showed that the people were not cowed by the tactics of the British. Two weeks earlier, the RUC/PSNI hijacked the website of the local Thomas Harte Cumann and used it to attempt to gather information on visitors to the site who would leave contact details. An Ard Oifig immediately advised people to avoid the site and regard it as an intelligence gathering tool of the British.

In a statement to the media on May 8 the Thomas Harte Cumann listed tactics being employed by RUC/PSNI. It continued: "the British propaganda machine is in full flow as it attempts to demonise those who oppose them. Republicans are accused of everything from drugs to running brothels".

The Lurgan statement went on: "No member of Republican Sinn Féin is or has been engaged in any of these activities and the editor of the Irish News who is from Lurgan is well aware of this. Our aim has always been to free our country from British rule and to build a better country for us all. Our policy is ÉIRE NUA, a New Ireland of 32 Counties where we can all live in peace.

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“No part of our beliefs allows anyone belonging to the Republican Movement to engage in the activities the British and their supporters suggest”. The statement concluded: “The Republican people of North Armagh stand firm behind the POWs and the Republican Movement”.

And the process of denigration continues. A new head of the RUC/PSNI arrived from England at the end of September. The Irish News of September 30 reported Chief Constable Matt Baggott speaking to the media in Dublin where he held a two-hour meeting with the head of the 26-County police.

He said that he would treat dissident (sic) Republican groups as criminal gangs. “It’s a huge mistake, I think, to see terrorism as isolated from criminality. I think it’s very helpful to see it as a criminal enterprise”.

Of course, once the British propaganda line is dictated it will be avidly repeated on every available occasion by the 26-County establishment, politicians, police, crime reporters, etc. It was stated on RTÉ television talk-show, for instance, during April that, “the Continuity IRA” provided ceremonial honours at the funeral of a Limerick gang member who met a violent end. On inquiry in Limerick this was found to be a blatant lie. The alleged “honours” must have been invisible.

In March last one of the fearless leaders of the “Shell to Sea” campaign, Maura Harrington, was imprisoned for 28 days in Mountjoy jail in connection with protest activities. Later on she served another two weeks and now she is appealing a further four months sentence and two three month sentences.

All of this is a shameful indictment of the political culture of the 26-County state. She has been jailed because her fearless defence of the Irish people’s right to the ownership of their own natural resources, while those who have robbed and profited at the expense of the people escape with impunity and in many cases are rewarded from public monies.

Maura Harrington’s imprisonment illustrates all that is wrong with modern Ireland and the political and economic system which underpins it. The 26-County state and its institutions have once more closed ranks to punish a woman whose alleged crime is to adhere faithfully to the 1916 Proclamation’s declaration of “the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland”.

The direction of the judge in her case that she “undergo psychiatric assessment” is reminiscent of the methods employed by totalitarian regimes the world over to suppress political dissent. Republican Sinn Féin extends our solidarity to Maura Harrington and the Shell to Sea campaign and we pledge our continued and active support.

We supported the Waterford Crystal workers in February with their ongoing sit in. They led the way, sending out a clear message throughout Ireland and

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internationally that workers were not prepared simply to roll over and allow their livelihoods to be taken away.

We called in April for unity of purpose among people. Workers must not allow themselves to be divided, public sector against private sector, employed versus unemployed or old versus young. Solidarity of workers was essential, we said in September, if the ongoing attacks on their rights, pay and conditions were to be resisted.

The Dublin Port Dockers at Marine Terminals, the Coca Cola workers and Green Isle workers were but the latest examples, following on the Thomas Cooke workers in August, where the recession was being used to create an environment in which to roll back the hard fought gains secured over the last 100 years of Trade Union struggle.

Indeed this year of 2009 marks the centenary of the foundation of the ITGWU now named SIPTU, the largest trade union in Ireland. Republican Sinn Féin was proud to have its Vice-President, Des Dalton, present as a delegate at the SIPTU centenary national conference in Tralee, Co Kerry during October. We are also pleased to note that he delivered an address to that historic conference.

In June Republican Sinn Féin contested the local council elections in the 26 counties. We put forward nine candidates over seven counties. Much energy and our limited resources were expended in promoting the Republican ideal especially over the months leading up to the election.

The Ard-Chomhairle congratulates all who took part in support of our candidates. Scenes of great jubilation took place in Galway at the victory of Tomás Ó Curraoin when he took the sixth seat out of seven for the Conamara area on Galway Co Council.

The accumulation of 2,050 votes from a huge constituency reaching from Lough Corrib west to the Atlantic did not come easily. They were gathered by hard work on the ground over a prolonged period of time. Tomás had contested the Co Council four times and Udarás Na Gaeltachta on three occasions – steadily increasing his vote each time.

The economic recession affected him and he was able to work full-time for the last year. Over the years he rejected all blandishments and approaches to stand as an Independent, saying he would never have been a candidate except that he wanted to advance the Republican Movement.

His outstanding success proves that Republican Sinn Féin candidates are electable – it can be done – but it requires hard work over time.

Comhgháirdeachas ó chroí, a Thomáis

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Chruthaigh tú thar barr, mar aduirt na póstaerí ar an mbealach siar ar bhóthar Chois-Fharraigne. He had help from Mayo, Roscommon and Westmeath – areas that did not contest themselves.

Where we did contest we had good candidates and good issues. Our weakness was in organisation and in many cases being late in the field. We must use the lessons learned for the next 26-County local elections in 2014 and – provided no obstacles are put in our way – in the 2011 Six County local elections. But we must also take a longer term view, developing and expanding Republican Sinn Féin over the next five to ten years.

With this in mind it is important that we recognise that local elections are a key tool in developing our movement. It is by campaigning at a local level, identifying ourselves with issues that matter to people in their everyday lives, be it employment, housing, the environment, health or education, that we make Republican Sinn Féin relevant to the Irish people.

Doing so is the most practical and effective way to build a mass movement of people capable of ending English rule in Ireland which is, of course, our ultimate objective. In several areas there was a complete black-out on our candidates by the media, both newspapers and local radio. We must work to overcome this, as a priority.

In this connection the most complete censorship of our point of view was in the autumn, in the matter of the Lisbon referendum. With the exception of two news reports in the Irish Times and one on Raideo na Gaeltachta we got no coverage whatever in the daily or Sunday papers or on radio or television.

Our six-week campaign against the turning of the EU into a new United States of Europe began in August with a public statement and the production of 40,000 leaflets and 1,200 large posters.

In early September, Vice-President Des Dalton followed up on his March visit to Italy with an anti-Lisbon visit to Austria where he spoke at a large public meeting in Vienna and briefed the Austrian media.

Among the speakers there was Professor Karl A. Schachtschneider, former Professor of Law at Nuremberg University, Germany. The Professor took the famous legal challenge to the Lisbon Treaty at the German Federal Constitutional Court which delayed German ratification of that treaty.

Arising out of the contact made in Vienna Professor Schachtschneider along with Inge Rauscher of the campaigning group Wegwarte (Home, Nation, Environment) led a party of five people from Germany and Austria to Ireland in September. They took part in a press conference in Dublin and in public meetings in Dublin and Galway.

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They sought to contribute to the No to Lisbon campaign and paid the expenses of their entire trip themselves. We here today appreciate and are gratified by their practical expression of international solidarity. Question and answer sessions followed both public meetings and the Dublin event was covered by Swedish Television which also interviewed Des Dalton,

chairperson for the night.

The result of the Lisbon referendum in the 26 Counties makes for further integration into the EU; that is more power to Brussels and less power in Ireland. The current economic recession was harnessed by the Yes advocates to stir up the fears of the people. Massive resources were deployed at home and abroad and false promises made of "jobs" and "recovery" by simply voting Yes.

The reason for such a massive swing in sixteen months towards the Yes side was the fear about the economy and the doubling of unemployment since the first Lisbon referendum. A major contributory factor to the boom and the corruption which accompanied it was the handing over of control of interest rates and exchange rates to the EU.

The entire print media and the electronic media were unashamedly pro-Treaty in a vote which was not about EU membership. Like the notorious Act of Union which abolished the colonial Irish parliament in Dublin, the Lisbon Treaty had to be put twice in order to get it passed.

Will those who promoted Yes now deliver on their promises of "jobs" and "recovery"? And will the compliant media hold them to their commitments? In particular Republican Sinn Féin members and supporters who worked hard to oppose this tightening of the EU grip on Ireland are to be complimented, as is our European representative on the continent.

Meanwhile the recession bites deeper and the cut backs on ordinary people ensure that those who abused the system – the reckless bankers, the greedy developers, the grasping speculators in tow with the corrupt politicians – are not being made pay for their wrongdoing.

This year, next year, and the year after – we are told – €4bn must be sweated each year from working people, all the while unemployment rises higher, and still higher. The gains made over the years have been threatened with clawbacks, and trade union membership, while extensive in the public service is reported to be only 20% in private employment. Failure to join may well be regretted at present, but even more so in time to come. While the banks are to be bailed out by the so-called National Assets Management Agency, known as NAMA, using the people's money, no mercy is to be shown to the families who find themselves in difficulty with their mortgages. Repossession of their homes is becoming more and more common. At

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present 200,000 out of 600,000 find themselves in negative equity, that is their houses are now valued at less than what they owe on mortgages.

In the United States familiar names such as Freddie Mac and Fanny Mae and Lehmann Brothers on Wall Street have crashed. Ireland's world famous Waterford Crystal is now located in the Czech Republic and in Indonesia.

One big bluff created by easy credit has led to disaster. Devaluation cannot be carried out because the currency of the 26-County state is tied hand and foot to the Euro.

Republican Sinn Féin advocates "finance and banking under public, democratic or social control" (SAOL NUA; Long-Term Policy). Banks should be nationalised, sorted out and then, rather than staying under state control or being sold to outside investors, be turned into mutuals. In other words, they would be controlled by their account holders.

"The scope and extent of local community banking, like the Credit Unions, should be extended, so as to serve the needs of local people" (SAOL NUA). Essentially the banks would become co-operatives, with one vote per person rather than per account. They would operate under a Trust Deed which would govern the basis on which the bank had to be run, with security a primary objective.

Any surplus would be retained. The holders of voting rights would not be the owners, as ownership would still be vested in the state, although the state itself would not have the right to sell the banks either. There would be advantages in splitting each of the big banks into smaller units, e.g. on geographic lines. Foreign operations would be sold off for the benefit of members of the bank or of the state before the reorganisation.

However the Trust Deed would need to be drafted in such a manner as to prevent a repetition of past mistakes. Two banks established by the 26-County State, the Agricultural Credit Corporation (ACC) and the Industrial Credit Company were both sold off into private hands even though they had operated successfully for many decades.

Similarly, two existing mutuals, the Educational Building Society (EBS) and Irish Nationwide, were not adequately controlled by their members and were damaged by the property crash. Both instances prove the necessity for formulating terms which preclude privatisation and make for solid restraint by participating members.

All of this must be viewed against a background reality of the second highest level of personal indebtedness in the EU. To rebuild the failed institutions on the same model as before is to invite a repetition of the catastrophe we are now experiencing.

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We send greetings from all at this Ard-Fheis to the Republican prisoners in Maghaberry Prison, Co Antrim and in Portlaoise Jail. We salute them and pledge ourselves to continue to support their dependant families. We shall carry on with our campaigns on their behalf.

Even as the new head of the RUC/PSNI visits Dublin with a fresh briefing from the English government for the 26-County police, the Republican youth have been on the streets of the Six Occupied Counties defending their communities and resisting British rule here.

As reported in the Irish News, Belfast on September 30 last, Mr Baggot said in Dublin that "he would adopt a two-pronged approval" to the "substantial threat" being directed "at Northern Ireland" (sic): "building on support for the PSNI from the community while strengthening cooperation with the Garda".

The report went on: "The new chief constable said it was a mark of the importance he placed on collaboration with the Garda that he had made his first official visit to Dublin on his second week in the job".

But back in the Six Counties the Republican youth were out in Derry, Belfast, Armagh and other centres, while meetings of the so-called District Policing Partnership in Dungiven and other places were met with lively and noisy pickets and protests.

The appointment of Matthew Baggott, who as head of the Leicestershire Constabulary in England oversaw the introduction of plastic bullets in 2003, and last year championed the use of 90-day detention without charge or trial, signals the intent of the British government and their satellite at Stormont to bring in whatever repressive measures are required to prop up English rule and the partition of Ireland.

For our part we compliment the Republican youth on their courage and daring. They have

recognised British rule for what it is – the very same as it has been down the centuries. Having identified it, they have stepped forward to oppose it. Others – to their shame – have joined forces with the Brits; to cover their shame they have called faithful Republicans "traitors".

But anno Domini catches up with us all, eventually. My turn has come to step down as President. I do so on the grounds of age and health. I have given service in that role for 35 years, a first period of 13 and a second of 22. All in all I am in my 60th year as an active member of the Republican Movement.

My first Ard-Fheis was in 1950 when Margaret Buckley gave her last Address as President.

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I intend to continue with my activity, both at local and at national level;

today I am going forward for membership of the incoming Ard-Chomhairle.

I have never found any difficulty in carrying out my duties and want to record my appreciation and thanks to all who worked with me down the years and over the decades.

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

Victory to the Irish people.

An Phoblacht Abú