

Sinn Féin

WEST BELFAST BULLETIN



CREATE PEACE — UNITE IRELAND

JUNE 1995

US hears Adams call for economic democracy

A unique opportunity that should not be squandered.

This was how Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams described the historic three-day Washington Trade and Investment Conference which began on Wednesday, 24 May. The conference was organised on the personal initiative of US President Bill Clinton. Clinton's objectives are to encourage "long-term benefits of enhanced economic growth, fair employment and a shared economic prosperity".

In a speech to the Washington Press Club on the eve of the conference Gerry Adams outlined the basics of the Sinn Féin position. He said:

"Sinn Féin believes that any new investment, development or funding must be used for the benefit of those most directly affected by the conflict and partition."

"Sinn Féin's vision is of a society that grants economic justice to all its people. Everyone, irrespective of their background should be able to gain meaningful well paid long-term employment in jobs that provide genuine security and fair working conditions. Everyone should have a meaningful role to play in developing the economy, particularly at a local level."

"A partitioned Irish economy does not and cannot provide for the achievement of these goals," said Adams. As an example of this he highlighted the failure of the British government to deal with employment discrimination in the Six Counties:

"In 1969 the then British Prime Minister Harold Wilson promised that 'Every citizen of Northern Ireland is entitled to the same equality of treatment and freedom from discrimination'. Today in the 1990s Catholics in the Six Counties are still 2.2 times more likely to be unemployed than Protestants after 20 years of so-



SINN FÉIN PRESIDENT GERRY ADAMS

called fair employment legislation. The British government admitted in 1992 that 'on all major social and economic indicators Catholics are worse off than Protestants.

"Last year also saw record payouts in compensation to Catholics in fair employment cases taken against state health boards, local councils and the Queens University in Belfast. Several weeks ago an Equal Opportunities report confirmed the high level of employment discrimination against women.

"Sinn Féin sees the need for clear and comprehensive legal powers to eradicate discrimination and to ensure that equality is realised. We support the MacBride Principles and support affirmative action as the key to

redressing the imbalance in the workforce with a timetable for eradicating the imbalance in employment ratios.

"However, employment discrimination is only one of the economic problems which confronts the Irish people. Problems such as urban deprivation, endemic long-term unemployment, emigration and the marginalisation of rural and border areas are all factors that have to be resolved if a real tangible peace dividend is to be achieved.

"Sinn Féin believes that the resolution of these problems and the achievement of our economic objectives can be realised through the creation of a democratic all-Ireland economy."

EDITORIAL

FALLING BY STALLING

The ghettos of impoverished West Belfast are far removed from the glitz of wealthy Washington. And yet a republican from West Belfast, Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams, has captured centre stage in the world's most political city. While the spotlights were on Gerry Adams, the searchlights hunted those corridors of power for the British representatives who skulked and hid like thieves in the night, frightened by their own shadow in case it resembled a handshake.

Republicans are in America for one reason and one reason alone. The accumulative weight of 25 years of unremitting struggle and sacrifice has carried them there. Unlike past republican leaders, prior to the present conflict, who were either forced or duped into going to London at the behest of Britain, the present republican leadership has bypassed London and gone to where it matters. And the

British have followed. How indeed times have changed.

The peace process has been long and slow. While republicans have moved gracefully from one issue to the next, the British have fumbled and faltered, stumbled and stalled. Republicans have leapt each hurdle erected by the British, while the British themselves have fallen at them all. The first was whether the cease-fire was permanent, the latest is decommissioning. In between, the British have stalled on prisoners, stalled on exploratory talks, stalled on ministerial talks — in short they have stalled on peace.

Let there be no doubt. The upright stance of Gerry Adams in America as against the bowed skulking gait of Mayhew is symbolic of the direction we are all heading in. Every dog has its day. The British bulldog's is over. The Irish wolfhound, proud, erect, defiant, has come of age.

Minister responds to councillor's appeals

Upper Springfield Councillor Marie Moore has welcomed new arrangements by the Health and Social Services Boards and the Housing Executive to fast-track minor adaptations to housing for disabled persons.

The announcement was made in a response from NIO Environment Minister Malcolm Moss to correspondence from Councillor Moore. The councillor had written on 12 April and 4 May complaining about the dilatory process of rehabilitating disabled tenants and urging that the necessary work be authorised without the condition of an assessment by an occupational therapist.

Last week, the minister's private secretary replied to Councillor Moore stating that as a result of reviewing the adaptations process "arrangements have been put in place where by some minor adaptations to public sector housing, such as grab rails, can be made directly by the Housing Executive without the need for an assessment by an occupational therapist".

Councillor Moore said: "This announcement is a welcome change. The implementation of this new arrangement will help to alleviate some of the difficulties currently



COUNCILLOR
MARIE MOORE

experienced by the disabled in acquiring suitable housing. However, the needs of disabled people must be given greater priority in the provision of public services and in daily social life. It is now accepted by government that special measures need to be in place to facilitate disabled people, then this now needs to be applied consistently."

Sinn Féin welcome for IFI move

Upper Falls Sinn Féin Councillor Máirtín O Muilleoir, has welcomed US moves to link IFI funding with the MacBride Principles.

"This makes the decision not to include a commitment to fair employment in the new economic strategy from Belfast City Council all the more worrying.

"Efforts to link IFI funding to targeting areas of need also deserve the support of working-class people on both sides of the sectarian divide, while Sinn Féin is pledged to continue its campaign to obtain representatives from the most disadvantaged communities onto the board of the IFI."

Meanwhile, Councillor O Muilleoir has congratulated the people of Carrickfergus on news of 250 more jobs for the town.

"However," he said, "this latest investment points up once again the IDB's belief that West Belfast is a no-go area. There is no reason why this new Daewoo investment couldn't go to the empty advance factory in Poleglass where 100 IDB jobs promised in December 1992 have failed to appear."

"I will be meeting Minister for the Economy Baroness Denton shortly to press for an effective jobs task force for West Belfast."



COUNCILLOR
MÁIRTÍN O MUILLEOIR

Sinn Féin call for proportionality in Belfast City Council

At a press conference in City Hall, Sinn Féin Councillor Alex Maskey called on Belfast City Council unionists to introduce proportionality into all levels of council structure.

Councillor Maskey said: "Unionists must realise that it is no longer acceptable for them to control 53% of the seats in City Hall but 93% of all the committee chairs, deputy chairs and top Council positions."

"The 45% of the people of Belfast who are nationalists are caught in the classic taxation-without-representation bind. They must see their representatives involved in the rotation of the top council position."

Councillor Maskey revealed new figures showing the number of chairpersons each party in City Hall would receive if the principles of proportionality were introduced. These figures



COUNCILLOR
ALEX MASKEY

show that Sinn Féin and the SDLP would be entitled to the chair of one principal committee and the chair of three subcommittees. At present neither party holds the chair of a principal committee and the SDLP hold the chair of just one of the council's 14 subcommittees.

Councillor Maskey added: "Proportionality would extend also to council appointments on outside bodies and end the farcical situation where, for example, Sinn Féin which represents 25% of the Belfast city electorate, is denied even

one of the 15 council places on the Belfast Education and Library Board."

"In the context of this report I am calling on all the party groupings on the council to refuse to lend a veneer of democracy to the systematic exclusion of nationalists from the council structure."

INCREASING DRUG PROBLEM

On Monday, 300 people from Clonard/Lower Falls packed Clonard Hall to discuss the increasing drug problem in the area. This was the third public meeting in four weeks.

At the meeting, the Concerned Residents Group read a list of 18 names of those living in the area suspected of being involved in selling drugs. Concern was widespread within the hall that something had to be done to stop the scourge of drugs educationally. Confronting those who sell them, and, as a last resort pickets and marches to the homes of those involved.

After the meeting local shops, pubs and clubs displayed the list of names under the heading these people are a danger to your children's health.

commenting on the events said: "For too long these people have preyed on our community and I fully support the actions of residents and wish them all success in their campaign. Republicans have said for many years that communities have it within their grasp to dramatically change events within their area. I



COUNCILLOR
FRA McCANN

hope that all areas follow the example of the people of Clonard/Lower Falls as a positive and effective way of dealing with those who try and destroy our communities. It will also be interesting to see if those groups who have offered nothing but condemnation will throw their weight behind the residents demands of a drug-free crime-free area."

Replace room heaters

Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams has issued a request for an urgent meeting with the Board of the Housing Executive to discuss Mr Adams' proposal that a work programme for the replacement of solid fuel room heaters be immediately introduced.

The meeting request was issued after Mr Adams had disclosed, through a party colleague, details of an internal report by the Housing Executive. The report's findings, which lend favour to Mr Adams' proposal, have been revealed in the week following the latest dangerous room heater accident in which six-year-old Kerry Marron of Aitnamona narrowly escaped serious injury when the room heater in her home exploded.

Mr Adams said that the Housing Executive must comply with tenants' requests to have room heaters replaced.

"I believe the case in support of this request is irrefutable and in light of this internal report the Housing Executive's position in refusing to provide oil heating as an alternative, is untenable," said Mr Adams.

"GPs have already indicated their concern about fuel emissions from these room heaters and it is alleged such emissions may exacerbate the health condition of asthma sufferers. Furthermore, many elderly people have physical difficulty in operating these contraptions."

"Also at issue is the question of efficiency," said Mr Adams. "According to the Housing Executive's own information for the first four months of this year, there have been over 1,000 faults in room heaters in one West Belfast housing district alone. This report, commissioned by the Housing Executive concludes that oil heating would be a cheaper and a healthier option."

Mr Adams declared: "The Housing Executive should now make oil-fired central heating optional for tenants in all future new building programmes and make early provisions to introduce it as a choice for existing homes."

COUNCIL ROUNDUP

West Belfast rolled out the red carpet for Boston Mayor Thomas Menino, who was leading a fact-finding delegation to the North.

At a reception in the Cultúrlann on the Falls Road, Sinn Féin Councillor Alex Maskey praised the Mayor for breaking from his official itinerary to visit the west of the city.

In the Cultúrlann, the Mayor met with children from the Irish language secondary school, Meánscoil Feirste, before attending a reception with community and justice campaigners. Among those he met were rubber-bullet victim Emma Groves and representatives of the Saoirse campaign.

"Mayor Menino pledged to do his utmost to bring US investment to Belfast and I think that's the type of practical solidarity we need," said Sinn Féin Councillor Alex Maskey who presented the Boston First Citizen with a bodhrán to mark his visit to the Falls.

Sinn Féin Councillor Pat McGeown says he is confident Belfast City Council will now officially commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Famine.

"I was concerned at the fact that there were no plans to mark the anniversary — in contrast to the lavish and expensive Council celebrations to mark the Tercentenary of the Battle of the Boyne in 1990," he said.

"However, having raised the issue with Council officials, we are now hopeful that pro-

posals will be brought before the Council's Arts Committee for consideration. One of the proposals we have made is for the Chieftains to be invited to the city to perform their Famine Symphony written for the official commemorative events in the South."

Sinn Féin Councillor Paddy McManus has become the first-ever party representative in Belfast to be appointed to an outside board.

From June, the North Belfast representative will sit on the Eastern Health and Social Service Council. His election to the board came at the May full meeting of Council and was supported by Alliance and SDLP representatives. Councillor McManus beat off the challenge of South Belfast Official Unionist Margaret Crooks to take the position. "I will be using the appointment to highlight continuing cutbacks in hospital services and the closure of homes for the elderly," said Councillor McManus. "This is a useful start and should signal the end of the unionist domination of all outside appointments."

Also in June, Councillor Fra McCann will take up a Council appointment to the board of the new Community Work Programme employment project.

Upper Falls Councillor Máirtín O Muilleoir was among five Sinn Féin representatives who recently addressed the Joint Committee on the Irish Language in the Dáil. Made up of Senators and TDs, the Joint Committee wrote to all

parties in the Six Counties seeking their views on the status of Irish in the North. Only Sinn Féin replied and the party was subsequently invited to send a delegation to meet the committee to speak on their submission.

"We asked the TDs and Senators to throw their weight behind the reasonable demand for parity of esteem and basic civil rights for the Irish language community in the North," said Máirtín O Muilleoir. "This would mean full official recognition for Irish as a living language in relation to education, broadcasting and government administration.

"It is clear that the British are not willing to concede even basic rights to Irish speakers and believe the present situation where six out of ten Irish schools are denied funding, where Irish is banned in Belfast City Council and in the courts, and where Irish is treated as a non-language by government amounts to parity of esteem. Clearly it does not."

Sinn Féin councillors on the Economic Development Committee at City Hall are to step up their efforts to encourage debate about the new economic opportunities for the most disadvantaged areas of the city.

Later this month, the Sinn Féin Six-County Chairperson Councillor Gearóid O hEara from Derry will address a Belfast meeting of representatives of economic agencies and statutory bodies on the role of the Irish language in community and economic development.

Meanwhile, the Chairperson of the Northern Ireland Economic Council, Sir George Quigley, and UNISON Regional Secretary Inez McCormack have also been invited to address breakfast meetings on job creation issues in the west of the city. Attending will be local politicians, community leaders, traders and representatives of training and industrial bodies.

Said Councillor Una Gillespie: "For years, the nationalist job blackspots have been ignored by the powers-that-be and no effort made, but now we want to encourage some of the most influential opinion-makers to come to West Belfast to exchange views with local people on how more jobs can be brought to the area."

To further progress in the Irish peace process Sinn Féin needs the assistance of all of our many friends and supporters. To harness this support Sinn Féin's 1995 Ard Fheis decided to create a new network called Cairde Sinn Féin/Friends of Sinn Féin.

As a member of Cairde Sinn Féin you will automatically become a subscriber to our newsletter. In its pages you will be kept fully informed of all up-to-date political developments.

However, your subscription payment will not only help to finance the production and circulation of this newsletter it will also help to support Sinn Féin in all its efforts.

At this time much finance is needed to ensure that Sinn Féin can develop as a party with a strong involvement in the peace process and we will need your support if we are to succeed.

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