

Presidential Address

by Ruairi O'Bradaigh to the Sinn Fein Ard-Fheis, Liberty Hall, Dublin, 24th October, 1971.

A CHATHAOIRLIGH, a theachtai, a mhuintir Sinn Fein 's a chairde ar fad.

Is mian liom thar cheann na hArd-Chomhairle failte is fiche a chur romhaibh ag an Ard Fheis seo.

Is mor iad na h-athruithe agus is mor an dul chun cinn ata deanta ag Gluaiseacht na Poblachta o sheas muid ar an lathair seo taca an ama seo anuraidh. Maidir leis an gcuid o thuaidh d'ar dtír, ta an troid ansin tagtha go "cnamh na h-uilleann" beidh an uile iarracht gur feidir a dheanamh ag teastail san am ata romhainn ionnas go mbeidh an bhuaidh fe dheire ag an nglun seo Eireannach.

Ar thaobh eile den sceal ba e an cheim ba mho ar aghaidh d'ar thug an eagraíocht seo againn le tamall dhe bhlianta anuas na foillsiu "Eire Nua" an clar soisialta agus eacnamaíochta a cuireadh fe bhraid an phobail don chead uair go luath sa bhliain seo.

Leirionn "Eire Nua" go soiléir don te a dheanann staidéar air nach aon leathnu amach den staid "nua coilínteacha" sna 26 Condae ar fud Eireann uile ata mar aidhm ag Poblachtanaigh gurab e seibh ar Eirinn agus ar mhaoin aiceanta na h-Eireann a thuir ar ais go muintir na tíre seo an príomh-rud; gur geall le reabhlóid soisialta ata de dhíth ar Eirinn comh maith le reabhlóid naisiunta agus chun ar dtír a shabhail agus ar muintir a choinneail le cheile mar phobal i saol an lae inniu.

Mar sin ta obair agus an-obair romhainn. Ta páirt ar leith ag lucht na Gaeilge san obair sin. Na seasaidis ar leathtaobh. Ni mor duinn ar fad tuirt faoi agus an chraobh a bhreith linn an uair seo.

On behalf of the Ard-Chomhairle I wish to extend greetings and welcome you all to the 67 Annual Ard-Fheis of Sinn Fein. In particular I wish to welcome the delegates from the Six Counties and from overseas.

Here I would like to advert to the enforced absence of some Northern delegates who were prominent at other Ard Fheiseanna. In particular I wish to mention Ard-Chomhairle members Mrs. Maire Drumm and Mrs. Mary McGuigan who are serving sentences in Armagh Jail and Sean Keenan, Bernard McGivern and Oliver McParland of Belfast who are interned without trial in Belfast Jail and Long Kesh Concentration Camp.

The past year has been an eventful one both for the country and for our movement. The courage and resourcefulness of the people in British occupied Ireland has won for them the admiration of the world. Britain has attempted to impose a military solution, to bring about a "Pax Britannica" without justice and in furtherance of the policy has relied on brute force and has stooped to the most degrading levels. The conscience of many peoples has been shocked at the revelation of British torture of captive Irishmen in recent times.

The issue is now knit between Irish people struggling for freedom and the unwholesome thing known as British Imperialism. A distinguished American, Senator Edward Kennedy, has told us in the past few days that Ireland is now the only part of the Empire where British troops are fighting. He also said that our country is fast becoming Britain's Vietnam. How true!

In the face of these developments, how irrelevant must all the talk in Leinster House in the recent past be to the people who live face to face with the British Army of Occupation and its daily and nightly brutalities; how irrelevant must this flow of words be to people like our delegates here, from the Six Counties, who are giving leadership to the people in the civil resistance campaign and in the practical work to establish Dail Uladh as a first step towards a new governmental structure for all Ireland.

Within our organisation a very significant step was taken in the past year in implementing a resolution passed at the 1970 Ard-Fheis. I refer to the publication of our new Social and Economic Programme "Eire Nua" which in its 56 pages defines our Socialism and spells out clearly the nature of the New Ireland we seek to build.

We have not been content with slogans and shibboleths in our eagerness to remove both the Six County and the 26-County set ups.

We wish to replace the Settlement of 1921 in its entirety, North and South with a Democratic Socialist Republic, the 32-County Republic of Easter Week. "Eire Nua" visualises an end to the present neo-colonial situation in the 26 Counties, the ownership of Ireland and its natural resources by the people of all Ireland and the exploitation of these resources in the interest of our own people.

Since its publication in booklet form last June, "Eire Nua" has been selling at the rate of 1,000 copies per month. Likewise "An Phoblacht" has increased sales by 5,000 per issue while "Republican News" (Belfast) has changed over from a monthly to a weekly since August without any falling off in circulation. Internally, educational and organisational sessions have taken place throughout the country, notably in Dublin, Belfast, Cork, Limerick, Galway, Sligo, Donegal, Monaghan and Kilkenny.

Public activities have included sending speakers to debates to give the case against full membership to the E.E.C.; a nation wide 24 hour hunger strike in January against the threat of internment without trial North and South and the resistance of repressive legislation; the 12 hour picketing of 500 government offices in all 32 Counties in June in protest against the damages being done to the economy by the Anglo Irish Free Trade Area Agreement, the threat of immersion in the E.E.C. and in support of the "Buy Irish in Irish Shops" campaign.

Meanwhile events North of the Border have almost overtaken us. Stormont has grown more and more repressive and has shown to be incapable of reform. Reform and the Tory-Unionist Ascendancy are demonstrably incompatible, therefore Stormont must go to open the way to peace with justice. The abolition of Stormont has been one of the foundation stones of our policies over the past two years and if this is now accepted in many quarters, including what used to be the official Stormont Opposition, then it is a vindication of our stand.

But it is not sufficient to create a political vacuum. It is not enough to create a Six-County "alternative assembly" which merely provides a forum for some sections of anti-Unionist opinion. A political solution — that oft repeated phrase — to be lasting must be based on justice and peace. No permanent political settlement is possible in a Six County context; such a solution can only be found in a 32 County context

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Here we have a positive step forward in the move to establish Dail Uladh in all nine counties of Ulster. Comhairle Uladh will build an alternative administration among the people at ground level, which will in time and with hard work and the support of many organisations and individuals outside our ranks, grow into a full deliberative assembly of the parliament of Ulster.

Within Dail Uladh the former Unionists would still have a majority but they would also have a good strong opposition within reach of government. Thus they would have immediate access to power over a wider area and perhaps even a greater dimension than they now have in Stormont. Such a structure would be a practical bulwark against being swamped in a 32-County Ireland.

Similarly, in Connacht a convention has been called and a council for Connacht — Comhairle Chonnacht — has been elected, charged with establishing Dail Chonnacht, the second regional parliament. The revolutionary potential here is second only to Ulster since Connacht has suffered so much since 1921 from what has been called the East-West partition of our country.

All this activity is in keeping with our objectives of a national parliament with regional governments, of greater participation by the people in public affairs and of bringing decision making — in so far as is possible — into the area where the decision will be implemented. Hand in hand with this work must go economic resistance — the repelling of the tide of economic imperialism which has left us weak and underdeveloped as a nation.

At this stage I would wish to make certain observations on the present situation in our country and give some indications as to future courses of action :

1. *There has been an erosion of confidence in the institutions of government set up, both North and South, under the Settlement of 1920-21, coupled with an almost complete loss of faith in those who operate those institutions. This presents Sinn Fein with the greatest opportunity in 50 years to dismantle this partition system and lead the people forward to the Democratic Socialist Republic.*

2. *While commending all the good work of the past year whether it be in the form of public meetings, collection of funds, local involvement, support for the North or whatever, I should like to impress on all our members the vital necessity of expanding and strengthening our organisation and turn to good account the opportunities now presenting themselves.*

We must be in a position to carry out a successful campaign against full E.E.C. membership so as to defeat the Fianna Fail proposals in the referendum. We must be ready to contest on a large scale the 1972 local government elections, the next Westminster elections in the Six Counties and the next General elections in the 26 Counties. Our parliamentary candidates will be seeking election to Dail Ulah, Dail Chonnacht, and in the event of developments in the other two provinces, Dail na Mumhan and Dail Laighean.

Failure to fill the political vacuum being created by the sacrifices in the North will simply mean that unscrupulous politicians who a decade ago filled the Curragh Concentration Camp and collaborated to the fullest extent with the British Occupation forces will most cynically reap the harvest of public support and thus prevent the attainment of the national ideal.

Already Mr. Lynch has travelled to Chequers in the strength of the Northern peoples resistance to the in-

terment spearheaded by the I.R.A. The peoples resistance owes nothing to Mr. Lynch, but whatever he gave away at Chequers, he certainly gained nothing. Already the bitter fruits of Chequers are in evidence in the attempted extradition of defenders of the Northern minority to the Palace Barracks torture squad, the censorship of R.T.E. and the imprisonment of Northern refugee fighters.

3. *On the question of the E.E.C. we demand that there is a straightforward referendum on the proposed full membership terms and not another amendment or series of amendments of the 1937 Constitution.*

4. *On free trade, the effects of the Anglo-Irish Free Trade Area Agreement of 1965 are being keenly felt now the transition period has run more than half way. Factories are closing and the redundancies mount in number every week. We can expect from now on that the trend will continue and accelerate.*

It may also happen that firms which are English subsidiaries, such as Lever Bros., will use any labour disputes which may occur as opportunities to close down and pull out, thus leaving a pool of unemployment behind them. This is a very real prospect in the immediate future. It should be exposed and resisted by workers occupying the factories if necessary and forming co-operatives to run them.

5. *With regard to the North the approach must be three-pronged : physical defence of the people is the responsibility of the Irish Republican Army; we must continue to give leadership at ground level in the civil resistance campaign — civil disobedience and non-co-operation which strengthens the people's will and eats away at the very foundations of Stormont and British rule; we must work to build the alternative structure — both administrations and assembly — in the form of Dail Uladh.*

The most desirable sequence is to bring down Stormont by making the area ungovernable; this would be followed by an all-out effort to force British evacuation and disengagement; with Britain gone the question of a neutral peace-keeping force for a temporary period would be considered — having achieved this we would then be in a very credible position to go to all people North and South, Unionist and Nationalists with our Social and Economic programme and ask them to join with us in building the Democratic Socialist Republic. Here we envisage a pluralist society with the separation of Church and State.

It is vital that we appreciate the necessity to smash the power structure of privilege and ascendancy which divides the working people of the North to their mutual disadvantage before it is possible to bring about the reconciliation of Irishmen. Stormont must go and the British get out before Irishmen can be brought together. In a word the foreign body must first be removed before the nation's wounds can be bound up.

We stand on the threshold of a new era in Irish history. Great is the responsibility which events have thrust upon us. We must not stand idly by, we must not be content merely to reflect on the past or pay lip service to the present.

We must not fail our struggling people striving to be free of social, economic, cultural and political servitude; we dare not fail our dead — and there have been so many to make the supreme sacrifice in the past year — who made an act of faith in us, their comrades. Our oppressed and harassed people in the streets and the countryside our menfolk being subjected to unspeakable degradations in the torture mills, our women and men in the concentration camps and prison cells, our excited kith and kin all look to us.

Let us turn outwards — not inwards on ourselves — and face the opposition. There is unlimited hard work to be done.

To do it is at once our DUTY — and our PRIVILEGE.