

# PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

The following is the text of the address delivered by Pádraig Mac Lógáin, President of Sinn Féin to the annual Ard Fheis held in Dublin on November 15 and 16, 1958.

**WE** assemble together on this occasion for the Ard-Fheis of 1958 and the 53rd annual one of our organisation. It is both a hopeful and encouraging indication for the future of Sinn Féin and for further advance towards achievement of our objective, that we can glance back over the period since the previous Ard-Fheis and record a continuance of the steady and consistent growth of the Republican Movement. The consistency with which our organisation has expanded over the past few years is very remarkable indeed. This expansion is all the more noteworthy because it has taken place in face of the active and persistent efforts of our enemies and opponents to smash the Republican Movement to atoms, and to finally stamp out and kill the urge for the full freedom of their country that prompts Irish men and women to sacrifice their liberty and welfare to achieve the liberation of their country from the yoke of foreign aggression.

It is not necessary for me to enter into details of the growth of Sinn Féin since the Ard Fheis of last year. The essential details are recorded in the report from the joint secretaries. Suffice it to say that we have good reason to feel gratified our organisation continues to attract to its ranks those of our people who are prepared to work actively for the freedom of Ireland. On a second count we have reason to feel gratified that members of the Irish Race at home and in exile continue to co-operate with, and support our Movement to an extremely generous extent. Without their help and active co-operation it would be almost impossible for the Republican Movement to withstand the methods of coercion actively operated against it. It is difficult to find words that would adequately express our gratitude. But it may go forth from this gathering that the assistance received from them merits and receives a full measure of appreciation.

Quite frequently Sinn Féin is bitterly attacked because of an alleged failure to put its policy and programme before the people and abide their decision. Such attacks are but a further example of the quibbling indulged in by the opponents of our movement. In point of fact Sinn Féin as a national organisation puts its policy before the people on both sides of the Border and gives them an opportunity of signifying their attitude towards the restoration of the unity and independence of Ireland. For this and other reasons publicity matter emanating from our organisation is, with a few notable exceptions, denied access to the columns of the press. This exclusion from the advantages of press publicity is either the deliberate act of those who control the press or, the intimidation exercised over it by the political rulers who govern Ireland through partition institutions of Government. And generally speaking those responsible for excluding Sinn Féin from and denying it the liberty of press publicity are the very people who unjustly charge that we are afraid to face the people of Ireland and to abide by their decision.

In the Six Counties our organisation is banned and membership of it made an illegality for which, according to laws of suppression, men and women are liable to arrest and imprisonment. Even the mere possession of literature setting forth the policy and programme of the organisation is sufficient to land a person behind prison bars. In the Twenty-six Counties meetings of the Ard

Chomhairle and meetings of other units of the organisation throughout the country are subject to interference and surveillance from the police forces under the control and direction of the professional politicians who rule from the Free State Parliament. Membership of the organisation suffices to land persons behind the barbed wire entanglement of the Curragh Concentration Camp.

## 'FURTHER POWERS'

Evidently the scope of the Coercion Acts operated exclusively against members of the Republican Movement is not wide enough to secure the objective of political leaders determined to obstruct and retard progress towards the political and economic unification of our country. This view is prompted because of an indication—a threat—issued from Leinster House that further powers may be sought and used in an effort to finally smash resistance to British rule in Ireland. What precisely is the need for further powers, or what the nature of them may be is a matter for speculation. However, in view of the wide scope of existent coercive legislation, the field for speculation is very substantially reduced. Can it be that the intention is to extend present collaboration with the Imperial forces of Britain the little bit that is necessary to achieve complete conformity and harmony with the pattern of things in the Six Counties? In such circumstances to challenge Sinn Féin to put its policy and programme before the people is a pretty good example of political manoeuvring, and of evasion of the realities of the position.

## WILL CONTEST ELECTIONS

Notwithstanding these realities and the obstacles with which we are confronted, Republican candidates in the next general election in the 26-Counties and the Westminster elections in the 6-Counties will go forward for election, and will in the name of Ireland's fundamental claim and right to full freedom give the people of Ireland an opportunity to once more demonstrate active support for maintenance of a right never yet surrendered.

And for the records, for the information of those who may think otherwise, and as an assurance to those who spread filthy misrepresentation that their latest efforts to create more dissension will fail, it goes forth from this Ard-Fheis on behalf of the entire organisation, that Sinn Féin is not selling out to anyone.

It has never yet been, and it is not now being turned aside from the pursuit of Ireland's full freedom. Now or in the future it is not abating its assertion of the right of the Irish people to complete separation from Britain, nor is it abating by a single iota their just demand for full freedom from outside interference in the internal affairs of their own land.

The principles by which Sinn Féin stands, and which receive the full support of the entire separatist movement are not on the political or other mart for disposal to the highest or any bidder

## MILITARISM

Quite often it is alleged that members of the Republican Movement glorify militarism, that they suffer from a presentation of history with a slant towards glorification of the men who gave their lives in the struggle for freedom and that they follow a policy dictated by a sense of frustration. The allegation is equally ridiculous as it is barren of even a semblance of truth.

Members of the Movement do not face death or imprisonment and hardships just to maintain a tradition of militarism or self-sacrifice. The struggle to-day is a striving to accomplish the task of achieving full freedom—a task left unfinished, in many instances deserted, by the living of an older generation. For the people of the Six Counties British misrule in a part of Ireland is as much of a reality in 1958 as it ever was for the generations of Irishmen who have passed away in the past 750 years. And Britain and her collaborators in Ireland use the old means of force and chicanery to perpetuate disunity and civil strife among Irishmen and to subject the interests of the nation to the political party manoeuvrings that stem from the opportunist and selfish mentality of professional politicians.

The forceable partition of our country and the establishment of partition institutions of Government does not satisfy the right to full freedom nor does it meet the lawful aspirations of a people to unhampered control of their own affairs. The need to assert that right and to seek fulfilment of those aspirations is equally as great to-day as it has ever been in the past, and those who profess to sit in judgment on the Republican Movement cannot reach a fair or impartial verdict whilst they continue to ignore the self-evident realities that confront Irishmen to-day.

North and South alike our country is suffering from the twin evils of emigration and unemployment. To a great extent these evils stem from retention of an economic system adopted from Britain, and designed, in the first instance, to keep Ireland in pawn to the economic needs of Britain.

To this fact we may add a further one that the economy of our country has to be geared to maintain triple Governmental administration and two separate administrative machines for Local Government needs.

The people of the Six Counties have to bear the burden of financing two Governments. In addition they have to contribute an annual sum to the British Exchequer which runs into millions of pounds. The people of the 26-Counties

have to carry the financial burden of maintaining a top heavy administration out of all proportion to their capacity to pay. It has to be borne in mind that the total cost of the quite unnecessary and unwieldy machinery of dual government in Ireland has to come from the earnings and savings of a total population of less than four million and a quarter people.

Advantage to this simple and plain truth makes it quite plain that prosperity and happiness cannot be the lot of our people until the country has been liberated from outside interference and until it has been united under the jurisdiction of a National Government with an economic system organised and geared to meet full national requirements.

## COLLABORATION

By imprisoning men the Governments responsible are denying and obstructing the right of Irishmen to pursue the struggle to free Ireland. The native born who collaborate with England share responsibility for helping to maintain the barrier which Britain erected to the unity and independence of their motherland. Rulers on both sides of the Border join hands and co-operate in hounding down men and imprisoning them in an effort to subdue the Irish demand for full freedom. In the process they overlook and ignore all but the interests of a foreign Imperialism. They deliberately disregard the simple

truth that the rightful interests of their own country and her people are gradually and relentlessly brushed aside. At present we are passing through another phase of the struggle to end British rule in Ireland with Irishmen, whether in jail or concentration camp or at liberty reasserting the rightful claim of their Motherland, and resisting the efforts of both native and foreigner to set bounds on the onward march of the Irish nation towards the goal of complete freedom.

Diverting Irish National politics from being a matter of crude and selfish ideals into the worthy ideal of unselfish service of our country and her people is the cause served by members of the Republican Movement. And none serve that cause more faithfully, or with more loyal devotion than do the men who languish behind prison bars, or the barbed wire entanglements of the concentration camp.

Much as the enemies of the Republican Movement would wish it these men are not forgotten. In the very near future the people of Ireland will be given an opportunity to record their objection to men being imprisoned because they strive to liberate Ireland from occupation by British forces. A referendum is being organised for that purpose and from this Ard-Fheis goes forth an urgent appeal to Irish men and women, both at home and in exile to

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accord full co-operation to this effort to defeat the claim of the politicians that they have a mandate from the people to imprison men for no reason other than that they serve in the cause to free their native land. To all in prison for Ireland we send greetings and an assurance that they are not forgotten and that they do not serve alone.

To our friends in exile, and to all others who have helped in any way to promote the interests of the Republican Movement and to support its efforts to achieve full freedom for Ireland we send an expression of our sincere gratitude. And with them we join in a sincere hope that our common objective will soon be brought to full fruition.