



**ÉIRE NUA**

**IS**

**LOCAL**

**DEMOCRACY**

# **ÉIRE NUA**

is

## **Local Democracy**

### **SINN FÉIN LOCAL GOVERNMENT POLICY 1979**

Because the age-old struggle for the national liberation of our country is now in its final phase, the Irish Republican Movement faces the most complex and difficult task it has undertaken to date. As Britain still refuses to pull out of the last area of military occupation in our land it is more essential than ever that Republicans concentrate on the development of broad political policies for the New Ireland that is emerging.

Sinn Féin is not only the one political organisation which has constantly taken a national stand in the dramatic events of the past few years. It is also the one political organisation which has documented, spelt out and published comprehensive policy documents to match the times in which we live.

Sinn Féin is probably the most documented political grouping in Ireland today. The broad headings of national policy were outlined in our *Éire Nua* document in January, 1971 and some 20,000 copies have been sold to date. Specific proposals on all major areas of public concern — Finance, Education, Housing, Planning, etc. — were outlined. Since then, in *The Quality of Life in the New Ireland* (May 1973 — 4,000 Copies have been sold), and in the recent booklets on *Mining and Energy* and *The National Offshore* further policy proposals were put forward.

In the meantime, other major proposals, concerned with the restructuring of government itself and local government in particular have been put forward and actively promoted by our public representatives. Sinn Féin's political performance is on record and can be studied by all those who are interested. The organisation is now contesting the Local Elections in the 26 Counties and seeks support from the Irish people for the ideals it promotes, for the vision it has and for the alternative to the present system which it offers.

### **IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL POLITICS**

There can be no doubt in anybody's mind about our stand on basic national issues. We aim to bring about an Ireland of self-governing communities in which people have control of their own affairs: their own employment, their own natural resources, their own schools, their own wages and prices, their own housing and environment. We aim at an Ireland which all Irishmen and women can call their own and in which they can take pride. We are opposed to the present system, on the national level (our relationships with Britain, the E.E.C., etc.) and on the domestic front (partition, over-centralisation, regional imbalance, etc.).

We stand for the right of each Irish community within an Independent 32 County state to mould its own destiny, to develop its own talents, to be itself, having neither to compromise the values it holds dear, nor to apologise to any other group, foreign or domestic, for being what they are. We are opposed to the borrowed pseudo-liberal values that are being foisted on the people from certain quarters. We oppose the deliberate distortion of Irish history, the attempt to misrepresent the essential ingredients in our national culture, the campaign to dis-establish the position of the Irish language in the Gaeltacht and outside the Gaeltacht, and the hidden persuaders who are attempting to assimilate our diverse communities into one mass-cultural grouping which can be more easily manipulated.

Because this statement is concerned with Local Government elections, we intend to concentrate on the issues at that level in this document. Sinn Féin is the only Irish political organisation which stands for the total restructuring of local government, North and South, East and West, not only in administrative detail, but also in the nature and functions of local government authorities themselves. Sinn Féin stands for a Socialist Federal Ireland, with four strong provincial parliamentary assemblies. This arrangement, including a nine-county Ulster offers the best hope of achieving national unity, yet guaranteeing absolute safeguards for the positive traditions of all the people of that historic province.

The proposal also has other advantages however, it would bring decision making nearer to the people most involved. It would help to arrest the east-west imbalance in the entire country and it would ensure a fair share of national wealth and development effort for each of the four provinces. The present system of government is the most centralised in all Europe. It is alien in origin and design and totally unsuited to the needs of today. Sinn Féin proposes a restructuring of government on four levels on the following broad general outlines:—

1 *Community Councils*: Voluntary representative bodies for every 1,500 — 6,000 people in urban and rural areas. Representation for such elected councils on District councils.

2 *District Councils*: This basic unit of statutory government would serve the needs of communities of 10,000 — 40,000 people (depending on local variations) and would have charge of all public services to individuals and families in the sphere of social welfare, education, labour guidance, trading and employment practices, housing, planning permission, agriculture and fishing, small industry development, etc.

3 *Regional Councils*: The Regional Council would concern itself with:

- (i) Public services which have a high technological content e.g. hospitals, major roads, tele-communications, third level education.
- (ii) Collection of local revenue.
- (iii) Economic, physical and educational planning.

4 *Provincial Assemblies*: This provincial legislature would allocate funds to the Regional Councils and co-ordinate regional plans. Proposals for the re-organised districts and regions are already available in varying detail for each of the four provinces. Each district would have a local government office where the citizen could conduct all his normal business — every service from housing and agricultural grants to information on the social services — and this information, all under one roof, would be available in a local town within an hour's drive of each and every citizen. There will be a Gaeltacht authority responsible for the Gaeltacht and a local office (as above) in each Gaeltacht area.

Sinn Féin proposals envisage more than a mere local and effective service. Each level of government would have real power and all major decisions concerning the citizen would be subject to democratic control.

Over the past few years Sinn Féin, as a political movement, and through its elected public representatives has been spearheading the drive for more local control, increased participation in government at every level, a fundamental change in structures, a radical decentralisation of administration and power and the building of a Federated Socialist Ireland that will ensure peace, freedom, a fair share for all and political recognition for all the communities that live in this island.

Our candidates will continue this work even within the present unsatisfactory structures of local government. Sinn Féin would like to reject for once and for all the smear suggestion, circulated by some of our opponents, that our elected representatives will not play their full part in local government. The record of our sitting members over the past five years clearly indicates that this is not so. Our members are amongst the hardest working local government representatives in the country as those who voted for them last time know.

More importantly, our representatives are committed to promoting the welfare of the communities who elect them both outside as well as within the council chambers, and they constantly do so. Because our members have no vested interests in power machines and do not regard their offices as passports to seats in Leinster House or free trips to mock-democratic "Parliaments" in Brussels and Strasbourg, they are in fact local public representatives in the real meaning of the term . . . They are also committed to the idea that each and every citizen is entitled to his/her rights without having to ask for "representations" or "favours" for things which as a tax-payer he or she is entitled to in any case.

Sinn Féin will play a full part in local government and co-operate with all other representatives who are sincerely endeavouring to serve the people and bring about improvements. They will oppose corruption and jobbery, malpractices, inefficiency and bureaucratic abuse of people's rights. They will carry on the fight in the council chambers and outside them and will not allow red tape or managerial veto to prevent them from getting progress and justice for all citizens, regardless of social status or financial standing.

## IMMEDIATE AIMS

Sinn Féin will continue the effort to secure a basic restructuring of the local government system on the basis of the principles outlined above. Our attitude to many of the other day-to-day problems will be determined by our basic philosophy of more local control, decentralisation and a greater measure of self-government for all communities. Our immediate aims therefore on matters which come within the sphere of the local authorities would include:—

*Local Financing:* Sinn Féin believes local authorities should have the power for local financing. Without control of funds, local authorities lose their effectiveness and cannot serve the people they are elected to represent.

Sinn Féin envisages local authorities with annual budgets drawn from local, regional and provincial taxation and central funds. It stands for the rights of these local bodies and the local representatives of the people to a fair share of the national cake which is allocated to each area in a manner which is decided democratically by the local people without having to wait

for "sanction" from the central government. Rates and valuation systems should be abolished entirely and the revenue for local government should be based on a more equitable taxation system based on incomes and one's ability to pay.

While Sinn Féin opposes the present system it will support moves to have the cost of certain major items e.g. national road networks, health, etc. paid from the central exchequer, but will insist that the local representatives should continue to determine democratically the way in which the service is administered within each region.

Sinn Féin will press for the immediate abolition of the system whereby malicious damages claims are imposed on the community.

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

Sinn Féin does not accept that the present Health Boards arrangement is satisfactory or that all parts of the country share equally in this vital matter. Sinn Féin has pressed continually for a comprehensive free medical service with choice of doctor, for all citizens. It will intensify that fight now that the aim is in sight. It will insist that the introduction of that scheme will not lead to a falling in standards. The aim should be to "round up", not to drag down the general service provided. But there must also be as fair an access to the health services on a geographic basis as possible. In the new governmental structure of Éire Nua we envisage all health and social services to the individual and the family being available at district level. Large Hospitals and expensive medical equipment would be provided at a regional level. Thus for example Donegal would not have to depend on Galway for major surgical services.

## LOCAL HOSPITALS

Within the present structure, Sinn Féin is opposed to the closing of what are incorrectly called "small hospitals" that are in fact local hospitals. It is true that some of the buildings in question are very old. But a good general hospital service should be within easy reach of all — and this includes an emergency transport service for islands and other remote areas. We advocate the retention of district hospitals at present threatened and the building of new ones in areas which do not have them. Sinn Féin insists however — and here the medical profession generally agree — that the provision of a balanced and fair hospital network frequently has more to do with investments in equipment and personnel than in buildings. Hospital units should be determined by geographic and population considerations — see our proposed units of district and regional government. A fair and balanced hospital development programme throughout the entire country would help to relieve the overcrowding in Cork, Dublin and larger city hospitals as well.

Sinn Féin calls for the abolition of Comhairle na nOspidéal. It is a bureaucratic body and not subject to any statutory agency. Its policies of high centralisation have been proved a failure and are alien to the Sinn Féin philosophy of decentralisation. We advocate comprehensive dental, maternity, and geriatric services and, in particular, each town having a fully serviced and maintained senior citizens' home. The problems of the aged and infirm are not adequately catered for under the present system and Sinn Féin promises to remedy this situation.

In particular we believe that the problems of old people should be examined and that institutionalised care of old people needs up-dating and that our senior citizens should be cared for in a situation as near the home atmosphere as possible. Where Gaeltacht children or old people in particular have to be removed to larger hospitals adequate Irish-speaking staff should be available.

We also believe every household should be circularised twice yearly as to the benefits of the Health service.

## **WATER SUPPLY**

Sinn Féin believes that the provision of piped water in all areas should become a major priority of local bodies and will continue to press for provision of schemes especially in rural areas. Our elected representatives will call on local authorities to set targets and initiate a crash programme for the provision of piped water to every household within a short period. The method of doing this will vary from area to area.

Group schemes must be actively promoted in a planned manner and without delay. Such group schemes should be adaptable for connection and integration into the proposed regional schemes later on. They should qualify for 100% grants and their costs should be spread on the community at large. They should be co-ordinated and integrated and regarded as part of the regional schemes.

## **HOUSING**

Detailed proposals for tackling the housing and other planning problems of the nation are outlined in pages 35-38 of our *Éire Nua* policy document. These include:—

1. Establishment of a central National Construction Authority responsible for co-ordinating all building and construction work, subject to local needs and approval.
2. Meeting the social and economic objectives of the developing Irish economy.
3. Providing secure employment and proper working conditions for those engaged in it.

One of the fundamental problems with housing as with other issues is the high cost of money and lack of national control of money and credit. Sinn Féin stands for the rights of every Irish family to a home sufficient for the requirements in each case. We hold that commercial considerations and private profit must not be allowed to interfere with the provision of this basic human requirement. That is why we advocate:—

1. The removal of housing finance from the hands of commercial interests.
2. The creation of a National Housing Fund to finance housing at nominal interest rates which would enable the maximum number of people to buy their own homes.
3. The elimination of speculation in building land through its compulsory purchase with compensation by the relevant local authority.
4. The improvement and acceleration of public housing where this is necessary.

Sinn Féin's main aim however will be to bring about a situation where all those who wish to purchase their own house will be able to do so. The

housing situation must be seen in a broader light, connected not only with financial and economic matters, but also with questions of economic and regional imbalance, environment and planning. We are conscious in particular of the lack of a genuine school of Irish architecture and planning which would design and plan to suit Irish conditions and temperament. We are also aware of the impractical nature of many of the designs and plans which are foisted on new householders and suggest that the complaints and recommendations of tenants' associations, and housewives in particular should be officially recognised — through the community councils and considered before schemes for housing are finalised. The recent sad experience with the National Building Agency in several parts of the country must not be repeated.

Sinn Féin is totally opposed to high rise flat development. Experience has shown that this form of development creates more problems than solutions. Our representatives will press local authorities to promote house building on a co-operative basis. Encouragement must be given to groups of citizens to join together in co-op schemes of house-building. The provision of serviced sites, technical expertise and low rise mortgage rates to voluntary groups will be strongly encouraged by Sinn Féin. The provision of serviced sites for the Travelling People by each local authority will be sought by Sinn Féin.

## PLANNING

Sinn Féin accepts that a certain level of urbanisation is necessary for a good community life and agrees that people should be encouraged to form vital thriving villages. But it opposes over-centralisation. It is opposed to bad planning and to the current mentality which aims to force large numbers into new housing estates and impersonal suburbia which are alien to our values.

We aim in particular to avoid the "one generation" "little boxes" suburb, where all the householders are the same age, usually of the same income group and where children and young mothers have to cope with the lack of the wisdom and stability which the age-range and class-mixture of the traditional village entails. Such housing, such "planning" leads to social and mental problems which even in money terms cost the community in the long run much more than whatever short-term economies may have been made.

As the new generation grows up, schools, churches, shops and other community services become over-crowded, only to revert into a deserted area of aging parents in a further 10 or 20 years. The tragic thing about this is that most of the people who are being forced by economic circumstances and job-availability to live in the new suburbs are people from rural parishes where schools, roads and other infrastructure are being run down through lack of people.

We also oppose the economic system which is breaking up the "inner city" communities and forcing families to move out and make way for the demolition squads. We support the idea of "mixed development" in mid-city parishes in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway, etc. We will champion the cause of city preservation bodies and press for urban renewal that will serve the people, not the property speculators.

Sinn Féin opposes the present system of a centralised Appeals Board. The system is unjust, unfair and too far removed from the people. We believe Regional Appeals Boards must be established where planning applicants have the right to appear in person and present the case against a planning refusal.

We further believe that Community Councils must have full access to all plans for estate development to ensure that adequate schooling, health, recreational and road facilities are provided and maintained.

Planning applications by state bodies must be subject to the same scrutiny and conditions as apply in all other cases.

## **GROUND RENTS**

Sinn Féin has led the struggle for the complete abolition of ground rents and will continue to do so. Ground rents are immoral and should be abolished at once without compensation. We do not accept that householders should have to pay six years rent to purchase their freedom from a rent which cannot be justified on any grounds in the first place. We also oppose the creation of new ground rents in any form.

## **EDUCATION**

Sinn Féin calls for greater local involvement in education at all levels and for increasing involvement in the provision of educational facilities by local authorities.

Local authorities should play a role in the Primary school system. We advocate the establishment of Primary Education Committees on an area basis to ensure that educational programmes, policies and facilities are geared to meet local requirements. The short-sighted policy of closing small schools in rural areas was foisted on the public without any consultation with local authorities.

In the area where local authorities are most involved i.e. the post-primary level, more pressure should be applied to integrate the various types of schools and facilities in a truly comprehensive system that would serve the needs of each local community and be subject to their control. Sinn Féin will press for the implementation of the proposed decentralisation plans for education and for the regionalisation of both administration and courses on the lines we have proposed for general local government restructuring.

It is our belief that not sufficient emphasis is being placed on agricultural education, especially in rural vocational and comprehensive schools. The syllabus pursued in these schools should be subject to the approval of Vocational Education Committees to ensure that the realistic requirements of the Community are met.

Sinn Féin wants to see the educational system used as something which will train our youth not only in technical skills and the arts but also in good citizenship. The educational system should equip the citizen to deal with the state, to know his rights and to insist on them. Such training should form part of the civics programme in schools. National self-respect, self-reliance, pride in our heritage and training in co-operativism and self-help, along the lines of the Danish educational system, should be encouraged.

Local authorities should not only introduce such training into the schools they control, but it should also be extended in the form of adult education courses. Classes in the Irish language, beginners' crash-courses and refresher courses should be available to all who want them.

Adult education should include not just agricultural instruction and cookery but every subject in which people are interested. A basic familiarisation with the arts should be available to all who want it. Library

facilities should be improved and should no longer be confined to books only, but should include films, slides, discs, etc. Courses in history and heritage should have a strong local base so that learners can proceed from the familiar to the new. Consumer education is vital — the emphasis again being on the local realities rather than the theoretic textbooks. Sinn Féin will press for the initiation of its educational policy in local authorities by seeking the powers the authorities need to do this work and then pressing their programmes at local level.

In view of our growing youthful population Sinn Féin will promote the establishment of more Colleges of Technology on an area basis. The demand for Third Level Education is growing rapidly and now is the time to meet it.

We are opposed to efforts to water down our history or aspects of our heritage or to leave our people ignorant of their roots. We are not suggesting that the classroom should be used for propaganda purposes and we realise that attempts are being made to cover-up some aspects of our past and to protect the interests of the status quo. We have no such fear. Truth is our greatest weapon. That is why we will oppose on all levels slick propaganda about the reality of the Irish neo-colonial situation and our relationship with the E.E.C.

Sinn Féin believes that cultural contacts with all countries should be encouraged but especially with small independent nations, (e.g. Finland, Iceland, Norway, Denmark) and not yet liberated (e.g. Wales, Brittany, Euskadi) and the emerging Third World. Sinn Féin will oppose the takeover of the Irish text-books industry by international Anglo-American companies and will press for the production of Irish text-books that allow for regional variations.

## **CONSUMER COURTS**

Sinn Féin will seek the establishment of local consumer courts under the supervision of the local authorities. We hold that citizens are entitled to compensation for losses incurred through administrative inefficiency at all levels of government and for failure to pay benefits to people in time. We will press for detailed information of entitlement to be easily available to all in district Citizens' Advice Offices.

Consumer Courts will also examine the abuses citizens suffer in cities and towns. Flat dwellers in particular will have the right to bring grievances about rents, inadequate facilities and landlord abuses before Consumer Courts. There will be no charge on the citizen for this service.

## **GAELTACHT**

A self-governing Gaeltacht should go a long way towards stabilising these communities. Sinn Féin will promote the use of Irish in local government and stands for equal rights for Irish speakers and their families in all dealings with public authorities. All forms, documents, etc. should be available bilingually. The general rule that citizens are communicated with in the language of their choice should be enforced and citizens who suffer hardship or expense because of insisting on their linguistic rights should be compensated. Similarly, higher levels of government and administration should deal with the lower levels in the language of the smaller body.

## ROADS AND TRAFFIC

Sinn Féin proposes that main roads should be a regional government function. Regional authorities should be established to fulfil this function and draft realistic programmes for a modern road network. Sinn Féin insists that the rights and objections of local communities and community councils will have to be considered in the planning. Generally Sinn Féin supports a reduction in city-centre motor traffic and will press local authorities to take the initiative in providing public transport in shopping areas.

Traffic regulations at junctions, etc. should conform with international practices. Road signs should be standardised, using international sign-language. Now that a map of Ireland is available in Irish there should be no excuse for not giving the correct Irish names of towns full prominence on signs. In accordance with our general policies on advertising, commercial sign-posting should be very severely restricted on all roads and limited, outside urban areas, to local goods and services.

## UNEMPLOYMENT

Sinn Féin believes that local authorities must play a more active role in providing job opportunities especially for school leavers.

Sinn Féin councillors will press for programmes of public works organised and supervised by local authorities. The schemes will be intended to provide productive employment and designed to improve the services and amenities of local communities.

The financing of the public works schemes must be principally borne by the central exchequer. Sinn Féin will look for the allocation of an annual budget to cover these schemes.

## THE E.E.C.

Sinn Féin is still opposed to the basic philosophy of the E.E.C. It is a highly centralised political and economic power bloc where decisions about our lives are taken in institutions which are completely undemocratic. The so-called "European Parliament" is an attempt to put a democratic face on the whole operation, but it is in effect only a talk-shop, because it has no real power.

Our struggle has been for freedom to manage our own affairs and the Sinn Féin programme is for maximum power at the base in the local communities. This is real democracy and the very opposite of centralised E.E.C. imperialism.

Under the E.E.C. our resources are being taken from us, prices were never higher, unemployment is massive and our youth are emigrating again. The E.E.C. bureaucrats are doing well on their large salaries and so are the big farmers. But the plan is to wipe out the small farmers and restructure our industry so that the E.E.C. centre can prosper at our expense. Thus our footwear and textile factories are being closed down.

We feel the best interests of our people would be served by boycotting the E.E.C. Elections. Furthermore, our local government representatives will oppose and expose any directives from Brussels which will damage Irish interests.

In this and other matters, Sinn Féin representatives will not hesitate to take issues outside the council chambers into the streets or anywhere that is necessary to ensure the interests of the people they wish to serve.

# SINN FÉIN

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# Rialtas Áitiúil

Táimid ag obair ar son córais nua a thabharfaidh fóir-  
chumhacht daonlathach do gach pobal in Éirinn.

Bí linn agus cabhraigh linn san obair seo.

Tabhair do chéad vóta do iarrthóir Sinn Féin.

\*OUR Candidate in The  
Local Elections June 7  
is JOE Mc DONAGH\*

**We aim to take power from the  
party machines and bureaucracy  
and give it back to  
YOU**

**VOTE  
SINN FÉIN**