

proposed cultural policy document

THE MAIN MEDIA

Background

Television and radio are crucial elements in moulding the opinion and values of their audience. In the Irish context all the main media are used by Free State or British governments to promote Anglo-American culture and to attack republican ideals and policies.

Present Situation

Sinn Fein recognises that RTE, BBC and IBA are obstructing the language revival north and south by their refusal to provide a comprehensive broadcasting service for Irish speakers.

Neglect of the Irish language can be seen in the fact that:

- RTE provides just 2% of all television programmes in Irish.

- BBC broadcast less than 10 hours of programming – all on radio – during the whole of 1985.

- The IBA companies Downtown and UTV have yet to broadcast an Irish language programme.

Long-term Aim

Sinn Fein's long-term aim is to establish a 32 county television and radio service entirely in Irish.

We vigorously support language organisations north and

south which are demanding a proper percentage of Irish programmes and an all-Irish television station.

26 Counties

In the 26 counties Sinn Fein calls for the present percentage of programmes in Irish on RTE to be increased significantly until the establishment of an all Irish radio and television service.

We call on RTE to provide one substantial programme in Irish on television each evening.

We recognise a special need for Irish television programmes aimed at pre-school and school-age children.

Six Counties

In the six counties Sinn Fein calls for:

- The establishment of an all-Irish radio and television service.

- Television programmes for: learners, school-children and Irish speakers.

- 20 hours of radio programmes in Irish per week.

- An increase in the amount of material produced in Ireland.

ROAD AND STREET SIGNS

Background

Many local authorities in the 26 counties fail to implement the regulations regarding the use of Irish on roads signs.

In the six counties, Irish street names are banned under an act introduced by the Stormont regime in 1949.

26 Counties: Sinn Fein believes all road and street signs should be bi-lingual and in Irish only in Gaeltacht areas.

Six counties: Sinn Fein supports the right of nationalist communities to gaelicise their own areas if they so wish.

Where possible Sinn Fein will use its position within local government to erect Irish Street signs and thus challenge the archaic, racist 1949 law.

Sinn Fein calls on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Department of the Environment to erect Irish road, street and safety signs where that is the wish of local people.

We commend Irish language activists, including Sinn Fein councillors and members of their stance on these issues. We note the dishonest attempts by the Dublin Government and SDLP to claim advances on the cultural front for the Hillsborough Agreement. In this regard we note especially the remarks of British minister Needham in his leaked letter on the question of Irish street names: *"I gather that the Irish place heavy significance on early progress in removing the prohibition on the use of any language other than English in street signs. Apparently they consider that this would help to reduce the publicity and support which Sinn Fein has obtained through the use of street signs in Irish. The Irish are accordingly pressing strongly for us to publish in the Autumn proposals of a draft order."*

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Background

Local government policy in the six county areas dominated by unionist or 'constitutional' nationalist parties has been to ignore the fact that the nationalist people cherish the Irish culture and wish to see it promoted.

Sinn Fein pledges to use local government structures to promote Irish language, dancing and music at every possible opportunity.

Six Counties

We will continue to work within councils to set up culture committees which will outline the way ahead for the cultural revival in each area. Attempts to promote the Irish language will be constructive and will not disenfranchise any section of the electorate.

Sinn Fein supports the following measures in council

areas where the cultural revival is still at a modest level:

- Promotion by grant aid of local feiseanna.
 - All council stationery to be bi-lingual.
 - Council vehicles to have bi-lingual names.
 - Council 'welcome' signs into areas in Irish.
 - Use of Irish at formal council events and the start of debates.
 - Council-sponsored social events should emphasise Irish music and dance.
 - Priority areas should be nominated for the national competitions which exist to promote Irish culture.
- Where the cultural revival is already well under way in an area we will take the following steps to create a vibrant Irish atmosphere:
- Grant-aiding Irish music and dance activities and ensuring that all council festivals etc. prioritise traditional music.
 - Encouraging the use of Irish at council meetings.
 - Making council stationery and a selection of advertisements bi-lingual.
 - Making all signs on council property bi-lingual.
 - Corresponding in Irish with anyone who wishes to conduct business in Irish.
 - Providing language courses for council staff to improve their knowledge of Irish.

Sinn Fein recognises the need for close consultation with local and national cultural organisations in the implementation of our local government policy.

IRISH CULTURE AND PRISONS

Background

Republican prisoners, especially in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh, have played a crucial role by their example in winning the nationalist people over to the cultural revival. The British response to the prisoners' use of Irish has been, predictably, to harass those wishing to speak their own language.

Present Situation

At present all publications and letters in Irish are not allowed into six county prisons. This ban extends to newspapers such as *LA* and *ANOIS* and to Irish literature. It is forbidden to speak Irish during visits and the Fainne (even the cloth version) is banned.

GAELTACHT

Sinn Fein realises the Gaeltacht is in danger of disappearing as more families decide to raise their children with English.

Cumainn in Gaeltacht areas will give preference to the sale of *Saoirse*, *Nuacht Feirste* and other Irish language publications produced by Sinn Fein.

In Gaeltacht areas cumainn should conduct their business in Irish, public meetings should be conducted in Irish and posters etc should be in Irish only.

The powers of Udaras na Gaeltachta should be comparable to those of a county council i.e. planning, roads, services etc. and all members of it should be elected by the people of the Gaeltacht.

There is a need to redraw the Gaeltacht boundaries so that they more realistically reflect the state of the language. Grant-aid should be increased to areas in which the language is growing in strength with the establishment of Gaelscoileanna etc.

In Gaeltacht areas the social and economic infrastructure is

26 Counties

Sinn Fein supports the efforts of Bord na Gaeilge to promote the Irish language at council level by setting up bi-lingual working parties.

Local authorities should play a much more prominent role in the cultural revival by supporting the already existing organisations engaged in the promotion of Irish – Conradh na Gaeilge, Comhaltas Ceolteoiri Eireann, Cumann Luthchleas Gael etc.

Sinn Fein also supports the following steps which could raise considerably the profile of the language in local government:

- Irish speakers should be able to conduct their business with local authorities, at all levels through Irish.
- Advertisements, signs and literature should be bi-lingual.
- The Irish version of the name of the local authority to be used exclusively e.g. Comhairle Chontae Phortlairge.
- Sponsoring of local competitions for shops, schools, community organisations, businesses etc. who would actively encourage and promote the language.
- The Gaelicisation of street names, town lands etc. and the exclusive use of these by the councils.
- Local authorities also have their part to play in putting pressure on RTE, and on community radio when set up, to actively promote Irish culture, rather than downgrade it, as has been the case in recent years.

In addition: Sinn Fein supports the right of communities to retain their traditional place names for postal purposes.

Support

Sinn Fein supports the demands of republican prisoners in the six counties for:

- The right to obtain all Irish language publications.
- The right to speak Irish during visits.
- The right to wear An Fainne.
- The right to study Irish at formal classes to degree level.

Gaelic Games and Music

Sinn Fein backs the prisoners' demand for the right to be allowed to play Gaelic football which is banned from the playing fields at the H-Blocks.

Sinn Fein also opposes the ban by the prison authorities on Irish musical instruments such as the bodhran and tin whistle.

worse than in most other areas in the country. Employment, roads, hospital service, sewage disposal, phone service etc. are all below the national average standard.

The infrastructure must be improved.

Due to the chronic standard of hospital care within each Gaeltacht region and the long distance involved in travelling to the nearest hospitals, Sinn Fein supports the establishment of hospital units staffed by Irish speaking staff in each of the Gaeltacht regions.

Udaras na Gaeltachta should have full control of all planning in the Gaeltacht.

To prevent Gaeltacht land being bought over by individuals or companies which will not promote the interests of the Gaeltacht, Udaras na Gaeltachta should set up a land bank. Anyone in the Gaeltacht wishing to sell land to a buyer outside the Gaeltacht would sell land to the land bank at the normal rate. The land bank would then conduct the sale of the land ensuring that all land goes only to people who will promote the interests of the Gaeltacht.