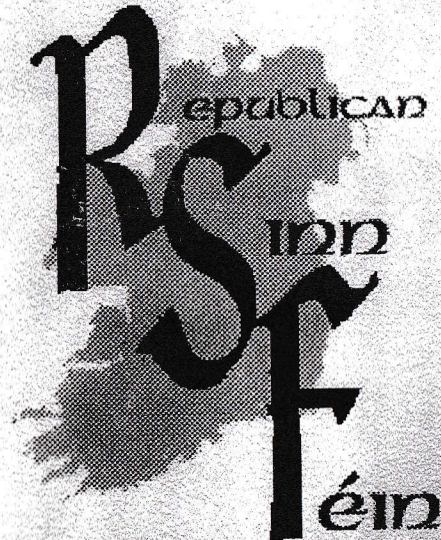


26-COUNTY

LOCAL ELECTION

MANIFESTO, 2004

THE POLITICAL WILL TO CHANGE



Republican Sinn Féin

26-COUNTY LOCAL ELECTION MANIFESTO, 2004

As an integral part of its alternative to the present system in Ireland, North and South, Republican Sinn Féin visualises and puts forward the objective of an Ireland of self-governing communities in which people will control their own affairs.

Éire Nua is about delivering real local democracy, about true decentralisation of power from national, to provincial, to regional, right down to local and community level.

Decentralisation has become a buzz word for many in the political establishment, a word to be bandied about close to election time, dangled like a carrot before the eyes of the electorate, a reward awaiting to be bestowed upon a community by an all-powerful Dublin-based Minister. Such an attitude highlights a total lack of understanding or indeed an unwillingness to understand what decentralisation really means. It is not, as the present Fianna Fáil/PD administration seems to think, about simply moving civil servants from one part of the country to another. Such a scheme would see all key decisions concerning financing, spending, allocation of resources etc continue to be made in Dublin, whilst the department itself remains centralised, all that will have changed is its location.

This is in stark contrast to Éire Nua which sets out a programme of genuine decentralisation not only of the

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department, services etc but also the entire decision making process.

Éire Nua enshrines the concept of local democracy, ensuring that all decision-making which affects the everyday lives of communities, in areas such as health, education, job creation, planning, housing and the environment, are accountable to the people upon whom they will have most impact. It is this philosophy which also underpins Saol Nua, our social and economic programme, which is designed with the aim of delivering real economic democracy.

Éire Nua and Saol Nua taken together, are driven by the idea of empowering people, communities, regions and the provinces in a meaningful way, socially, politically and economically. This is what true local democracy and decentralisation is all about as summed up in the introduction to Éire Nua: "So, we must work to liberate the Irish people and establish a democratic system, based on justice and equal rights – to build Éire Nua: a New Ireland. In that Ireland, Irish people will begin to experience real power in their own communities serving as the foundation for a modern pluralist Irish Republic".

Éire Nua and Saol Nua envision an Ireland based on Republican, Socialist, Self-Reliance and Ecological principles.

END POLITICAL AND BUSINESS CORRUPTION

A succession of Free State politicians have been exposed as acting in their own selfish interest against the national interest – and the entire structure of the Free State must be dismantled and re-structured in a new and united Ireland.

Political and business corruption must be ended – and clear and transparent lines of demarcation drawn between politics and 'big business'. The high level of corruption which existed at the heart of the 26 County political establishment, and which is being daily documented at the various 'tribunals', was taking place while hospital patients died on trolleys and the queues awaiting treatment grew to gigantic lengths.

Therefore from a national level it must be stressed that the effects of political and economic corruption trickled down to local communities throughout the island and deprived people of services and indeed impaired their right to the best available facilities and support of the state.

While the corrupt politicians were feeding their secret offshore and non-resident accounts those who voted for them were being penalised by high taxes and exorbitant prices as the rising cost of living affected the lives of most ordinary people.

IMMEDIATE AIMS

Republican Sinn Féin believes local authorities should have power for local financing. Without control of funds local authorities lose their effectiveness and cannot serve the people they are elected to represent. Republican Sinn Féin envisages local bodies with annual budgets drawn from local and provincial taxation and from central funds.

Revenue for local government should be based on a more equitable taxation system based on income and one's ability to pay. While opposing the present system it will support moves to have certain major items, eg national road networks, health etc, paid from central funds but will insist that the local representatives will determine the way in which the service is administered.

Republican Sinn Féin opposes the 26-County Administration's introduction of 'stealth taxes' such as service charges. Our candidates will campaign intensively to reverse the policy of privatising local services, ensuring that these services are placed once again under the control of the local authorities.

THE HEALTH SERVICE IN MELTDOWN

The health of a nation is an indicator of its state of mind and fitness – the present public health service in the 26 Counties is a ramshackle and creaking structure ready to collapse.

The endless waiting for clinics and services as opposed to

immediate attention for those with money points to a two-tier system where the wealthy and those who can afford it obtain a far superior level of treatment. It is a scandal and it must be scrapped and replaced with a service where the emphasis is on the patient and his or her needs – not his or her ability to pay the bill.

An efficient and well-managed health service is vital for any country – in the 26 Counties today the health service is badly managed in terms of allocation of resources. The 'Lion's share' of the 'health budget' is being spent on 'administration' whilst health service's at the point of people's need are the targets of public spending cut-backs.

Unlike the proposals for the centralisation of essential health services such as A&E to hospitals in the major cities, made in the discredited 'Hanley Report', ÉIRE NUA envisages all health and social services being available at district level.

We are opposed to the closing of local hospitals. A fair and balanced hospital development programme throughout the entire country would relieve overcrowding in Dublin, Cork and larger city hospitals. We advocate each town having a fully serviced and maintained senior citizens' home.

The problems faced by elderly people are not adequately addressed. Our senior citizens as of right should be cared for as near the home environment as possible.

Social welfare should have a minimum rate of benefit as per

the recommendation of the Commission on Social Welfare in recent years. Allowances should be paid as of right in accordance with a code of practice rather than having "discretionary" payments as at present.

HOUSING

Republican Sinn Féin advocates the removal of housing finance from the hands of commercial interests and the creation of a National Housing Fund to provide the service at nominal interest rates which would allow the maximum number of people to buy their own homes. Speculation in building land should be eliminated through its compulsory purchase with compensation by the relevant local authority for resale to individuals and families adding solely the administrative cost.

Due to the cutbacks in local authority housing, figures for homelessness are again reaching crisis proportions. The lack of affordable housing/accommodation is contributing to the rising numbers of people who are 'sleeping rough' in our towns and cities. This situation must be faced now with funding made available, accelerating the construction of high standard public housing. Ground rents should be abolished completely at this stage and without compensation.

PLANNING

Republican Sinn Féin opposes the "one generation" and "little boxes" suburb where children and young mothers have to cope with the lack of wisdom and stability which the age-range and class-mixture of the traditional village entails. As the new generation grows up, schools, churches, shops and other community services become overcrowded, only to revert into a deserted area of aging parents in a further ten or twenty years. As a condition of planning permission, house builders should be obliged to allocate a percentage of their development land for modestly-priced dwellings.

We are also opposed to 'dirty industries' which severely damage the environment, and which have rightly been refused location in other countries being sited in Ireland.

WASTE DISPOSAL

Since 80% of industrial and domestic waste can now be recycled, we are proposing that each local authority set target dates, so that in five years time 50% of all rubbish will be recycled. These targets are being reached in most European countries and there is no reason why they cannot be achieved here. As industry is the biggest producer of waste, they must also be made take responsibility for the cost of disposal and recycling waste. We are opposed to incineration as a means of waste disposal. Incinerators pose a serious risk to the environment in general as well as the health of the

communities in which they are located.

WATER SUPPLY AND GROUP SCHEMES

Piped water should be provided in all areas as a major priority and the cost should be spread on the community at large. Group schemes should qualify for 100% grants.

ROADS AND TRAFFIC

The condition of county roads especially is a disgrace in most counties. As well as the total of road tax, the excise duty on fuel oil and the purchase tax on vehicles in a local authority area in contributions to central funds merits a far greater disbursement towards roads maintenance. Major repairs to county roads now taking place are too slow and gradual and "pot-hole" filling is inadequate.

Main roads should be a regional government function and the rights and objections of local communities will have to be considered in planning. Generally, Republican Sinn Féin supports a reduction in city centre motor traffic and press local authorities to provide public transport in shopping areas. We are opposed to toll charges on roads and bridges.

Road signs and traffic regulations should conform with international practice and the correct Irish names should be given full prominence on signs. Advertising on all roads

should be very severely restricted and limited, outside urban areas, to local goods and services.

There should be a Euroroute (road of Euro standard) leading from County Donegal, past Sligo, Galway, Limerick and Clonmel to Rosslare Europort.

AN POST

Republican Sinn Féin opposes the closure of local post offices, with the consequent loss of jobs and the limiting of rural postal deliveries to roadside post office boxes. These closures are contrary to our long-standing policy of decentralisation. Services should be updated and post offices should provide other services such as local banking, now mainly the monopoly of private commercial banks.

CONTINUING JOB LOSSES

The continuing loss of high tech jobs is a cause for concern – as the mobile multi-national companies move away to seek even cheaper locations in the Third World. The loss of computer jobs is a crisis – as many millions of euro have been spent in attracting such companies into Ireland in the first place. Low cost call centres are no adequate replacement for the lost highly skilled research and development jobs now lost to the economy.

LOCAL EMPLOYMENT SCHEMES

Unemployment is still with us and many areas remain deprived and without work, proper infrastructure and educational facilities, a sure sign of the failure of successive governments and of full EU membership. Local employment schemes should provide productive jobs for school leavers; if properly resourced and administered they can deliver an important social service. We oppose the drastic cutbacks in these schemes by the present Dublin Administration.

EDUCATION AND CULTURE

Republican Sinn Féin calls for greater local involvement in education at all levels by local authorities. A string of sub-standard schools from primary sector to secondary are tolerated because there is said to be a funding crisis. Primary Education Committees should be established on an area basis to ensure that programmes, policies and facilities are geared to local requirements.

At post-primary level, pressure must be applied to integrate the various types of schools into a truly comprehensive system that would serve the needs of each local community and be subject to its control.

We wish to see the educational system used to train our citizens not only in technical skills and the arts but also in good citizenship. The individual should be equipped to deal

with the State, know his/her rights and insist on them.

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.

Library facilities should include computers with internet access, videos, slides, tapes etc. Charges for library membership should be abolished. Consumer education is vital, with emphasis on local realities. Courses in history and heritage should have a strong local base so that learners can proceed from the familiar to the new.

The demand for third level education continues to grow and Republican Sinn Féin will promote the establishment of more Colleges of Technology on an area basis. Maintenance grants to those qualified should be increased in accordance with the cost of living.

We will press for the use of Irish-produced text books that allow for regional variations and oppose the take-over of that industry by international Anglo-American companies.

We are opposed to the watering down of our history and attempts to reduce the significance of our heritage, all of which leave our people ignorant of their roots.

Cultural contacts with all countries should be encouraged and especially with small independent nations, eg Finland, Iceland, Norway, Denmark, Switzerland, Austria and nations not yet liberated, eg Wales, Scotland, Brittany, Euskadi.

CONSUMER COURTS

Republican Sinn Féin will seek the establishment of local consumer courts under the supervision of local authorities. Citizens are entitled to compensation for administrative inefficiency and failure to pay benefits on time. Detailed information of entitlement should be as easily available to all in district Citizens' Advice Offices. This service will be free of charge.

GAELTACHT

We have earlier stated our advocacy of Gaeltacht self-government. The use of Irish for Irish speakers and their families in all dealings with public authorities will be promoted. All forms, documents etc should be available bilingually as in Canada and other countries. The general rule that citizens should be 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 all communication by central government with local government bodies in Gaeltacht areas must be done so in the Irish language.

Pending full Gaeltacht self-government there should be a local Co Council office in every Gaeltacht area, eg in Ceathrú Rua for Conamara, with a local Engineer, Manager and staff

who would provide a full service through Irish.

EUROPEAN UNION

Republican Sinn Féin has opposed full membership of the EU from the outset as a highly centralised political and economic power-bloc where decisions about our lives are taken in completely undemocratic institutions. Our struggle has been to manage our own affairs and our programme is for maximum power at the base. That is real democracy and the very opposite of EU imperialism.

Under the EU our resources (eg fish) are being taken from us, house prices are spiralling out of control and traffic is in gridlock in many places. The EU bureaucrats are doing well on their huge salaries and so are the big farmers. But the plan is to wipe out the small farmers and restructure industry so that the EU centre can prosper at our expense. Thus footwear and textile factories are being closed down and moved to low-wage countries.

In agriculture far from the promised guaranteed level, cattle and sheep prices are unstable. Milk, due to rising costs, is not as profitable as it was and many small farmers are getting out of milk production.

Bovine TB after 40 years of attention is still a problem as are Brucellosis and BSE. We can expect all these processes to increase further and after the next period of five or six years

the future of smaller farms is uncertain, especially for young people. If rural Ireland disintegrates for lack of development and failure to address poverty then there will be no community remaining outside the large towns.

Neutrality has been undermined. We were told that in 1992 — as we were told in 1972 — that the Border would wither away. It will not, no more than will the border between France and Germany. The British garrison remains in the Six Counties.

We are opposed to membership of the NATO Partnership for Peace, to the militarisation of the EU and to the continuing use of Shannon and Baldonnell airports in the Anglo-US occupation of Iraq. We believe that a reformed United Nations, with collective world responsibility, should continue to have responsibility for peace-keeping duties and not any power-bloc with its own selfish interests.

In these and in other matters, Republican Sinn Féin representatives will not hesitate to take issues outside the council chambers into the streets or wherever may be necessary to ensure the interests of the people they serve.

BORDER AREAS

The spending of large sums of money from abroad in equal amounts on both sides of the Border is designed to bolster up Partition and British rule from both sides. Meanwhile shameful Border collaboration costing many millions of Euro a year is

the fruit of sustaining the present system which Britain is attempting to update and make more acceptable — nationally and internationally — through the Stormont Agreement. The spending of large sums of money from the US and EU in particular is done so with the purpose of reinforcing partition and British rule.

LOCAL ELECTIONS

It is 105 years since the establishment of local councils, a first step in local democracy introduced by the British as part of a policy to “kill Home Rule by kindness”. Local democracy was weakened ever since, not least by the failure until recently to hold elections at regular intervals. Republican Sinn Féin advocates reducing the interval between elections to every four years — as in the Six Counties.

THE POLITICAL WILL TO CHANGE

There must be a radical change of political direction if this country is to cherish all the children equally — the will of the people is supposed to be expressed at the ballot — therefore our candidates will be going forward on a wide range of policies for change — in local communities all across this land there are issues that affect the people who put the politicians into power — now is the time to advocate change — and change shall only come when the people demand it.

For the past 33 years Republican Sinn Féin as a political movement and through its elected 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 power and administration and the building up of a Federal and Democratic Socialist Republic that will ensure peace, freedom, a fair share for all and political recognition to all the communities on this island.

Our candidates will continue this work even within the present unsatisfactory structures of local government. Our members are amongst the hardest working local government representatives in the country as those who voted for them last time know.

The Republican Sinn Féin candidates stand out as persons of integrity and honesty anxious to work for the people in contrast to the blatant scandal and corruption from local level to central government and even to the EU Commission itself.