

THE ROLE  
OF A  
SINN FEIN  
CUMANN

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT.

## INTRODUCTION

### Function and role of the cumann

The cumainn are the base components of Sinn Fein, and collectively, along with Comhairle Ceantair and Comhairle Limistéir at the Ard Fheis, they form the ultimate policy making body of the party.

The cumann functions as the link between the people in the cumann area and the leadership of the movement:

Working in their area the cumann becomes aware of the issues which affect the people. Sinn Fein therefore grows closer to the people and less isolated, as, through the cumann, Sinn Fein policy comes to reflect these issues.

The cumann, as a component part of Sinn Fein, brings the policies of the party to the people in the area.

The overall role of a Sinn Fein cumann is to build support for the struggle:

To build links with groups in their area - to make Sinn Fein relevant.

To build up contacts, associates, financial supporters, and to recruit new members and to give members support and education which enables them to become active and able members of Sinn Fein.

The role of the cumann can be divided into a number of activities of the cumann, all of which have the objective of building Sinn Fein into a party which will one day form the government of a united 32 county Ireland. For simplicity we will treat each one of these activities separately. They are:

**Publicity**

**Finance**

**Advice centre work**

Campaigns  
Electoral Activity  
Education  
Making policy

The cumann elects officers who are responsible and accountable for each of these activities. (See handbook on role of officers in Sinn Fein)

### PUBLICITY

The main publicity organ of the Republican movement is our paper the AP/RN. The cumann play a vital role in selling the papers, ensuring that large numbers of people are able to get the republican viewpoint in spite of State censorship and the hostility of the big business interests that control the larger newspapers, and a lot of the local ones as well. Selling in pubs is O.K. as a simple money making activity but it is of doubtful political value as many of the papers are left unread and contact with the buyers is minimal. It is much more effective to sell door-to-door where in time people get to know the sellers and so can communicate easily with Sinn Fein, whether they need help or can offer it to us. If your cumann are thinking of undertaking door-to-door selling, experience shows that it is a serious mistake to overextend in the first burst of enthusiasm. Two reliable cumann members should be given about 100 houses to do every week, even if one is sick the other ensures that the paper is delivered. It is vital that deliveries are reliable and by the same people if value is to be got from the paper selling. Once a month every house should be tried, the other three times deliver to the houses that always take one. Sales in the pubs are usually not affected very much by door-to-door sales. Sometimes a person will do a paper round who

does not have the free time to be a cumann member. If they are accompanied by a cumann member they can still provide good contact with Sinn Fein. Try to get local shops to sell AP/RN as well.

Another form of publicity is a cumann news-sheet giving a combination of local news and national issues. This can be put out by the cumann P.R.O. A photo-copy will do if a few hundred are required and it can be printed by Head Office if larger numbers and better quality are required. A photo-copier is expensive for a cumann but one might be available locally or bought between several cumainn at Comhairle Limisteir level. They cost about £2,000 or £12.00 a week. The advantage is that the copies can be available much quicker if they can be done on a locally available photo-copier rather than being sent to Dublin for printing. Local news must be fresh to have much value.

Often the cumann will want to put out a local leaflet to perhaps only a few hundred houses, advertising a meeting, or photocopying a story which has local interest and appeared in AP/RN. A Gestetner is an invaluable asset for such leaflets.

Cumainn should also consider screen printing which is very cheap and enables cumainn to turn out a topical poster in small numbers which can be very effective politically.

A letter to local papers will often get to households which AP/RN does not reach. Local papers can also be approached to cover Sinn Fein activity and Republican (social, economic, political and national) issues.

The Press offices (in Dublin and Belfast) will give you any assistance you require in drawing up good publicity material for local papers.

## FINANCE

A pre-requisite of all cumann work is finance - raising sufficient funds to finance cumann activities. The

first need of a successful cumann is financial position. The work of finance can be broken down into two parts:

- (a) Keeping proper accounts.
- (b) Raising sufficient funds.

- (a) Book-keeping and a proper weekly financial statement of account is essential. (See handbook on "Role of officers in Sinn Fein" on how books should be kept.). The AP/RN account needs also to be kept in balance week to week.
- (b) There are numerous ways of raising finance. These include organising functions, raffles/draws, collecting in pubs, (even at doors in election times). Areas differ as to the most successful methods of raising finance.

#### Financial Obligations

The cumann must pay an annual affiliation fee of £15.00 established or £5.00 new and annual membership of £5.00 per person (usually paid by members themselves) to Head Office. In addition there must be adequate finance to cover the running expenses of the cumann which can run from a few postage stamps a week to financing a centre, and accompanying bills. In addition election campaigns are costly, and funds must be gathered in intervening periods for elections. Finally numerous campaigns require finance and often ask cumainn for help. In particular cumainn try each year, usually at christmas to contribute to Cumann Cabhrach and the prisoners.

#### ADVICE CENTRE WORK - A POLITICAL CENTRE

If your cumann can afford it a premises should be got and staffed by one or two very reliable members as an advice centre. This is more often done at Comhairle Ceantair level and the costs shared out, as well as the work. The centre provides a service to the public who

turn to us for advice on a whole range of problems but it also provides a focus point for Sinn Fein activity in the area. The advice centre can also be an election headquarters when needed. An advice centre is a good means of making contact with the public but can be quite a burden on time and resources, so consider carefully whether it can be afforded or not.

It is very important that there be a secure press or filing cabinet to keep confidential documents relating to the cases that the centre deals with. No-one else in the cumann should be allowed read any of this material as it would be disastrous if peoples private problems became the subject of loose talk or gossip. If you are at the stage of considering an political/advice centre you should go and talk to the people who already work in centres. Their advice can save you a lot of wasted time and effort.

### CAMPAIGNS

Sinn Fein is engaged in several campaigns and of course cumainn take part in these. The cumann might give particular attention to a campaign that has local significance, say because a local person is a prisoner or in danger of being extradited. Here is a list of some campaigns that are going on at present:

- 1 Extradition Campaign
- 2 Plastic Bullets
- 3 Section 31
- 4 '68 Committees
- 5 Portlaoise men doing life sentences
- 6 Education and Health Cuts
- 7 Show trials
- 8 English prisoners
- 9 Housing maintenance
- 10 Rents on Public Sector housing

- 11 Water Rates  
12 Concerned parents

Almost all campaigns are of necessity Broad Front campaigns. Sinn Fein people are involved, but do not aim to have a controlling or majority position, because this limits the involvement of others - and leaves us with only ourselves in the campaign and consequently a weak campaign which never goes beyond Republican circles and thus fails in its objective. In this work we are setting up Broad Fronts, not 'fronts' for Sinn Fein.

Setting up broad front campaigns, locally, means going to see 'middle of the road' people, who may not support Sinn Fein, or the struggle, but WHO CARE ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN ISSUE. They need in turn to be encouraged to draw in their friends. The campaign needs to have defined objectives so that it cannot be waylaid or 'taken over'.

### ELECTORAL ACTIVITIES

Electoral work goes on all the time, building up an election fighting organisation, identifying supporters, marking the register, and keeping in touch with them. Candidates need to be selected well in advance and made known to people in the constituency. Finance needs to be collected and materials gathered to fight the next election. The cumann play a very important part in all these activities under the direction of the Comhairle Ceantair or an election organiser/director.

When an election is only a matter of weeks away the members of the cumann will be giving it almost all of their attention. They will be involved in such activities as canvassing their area, postering and distributing leaflets, organising food and perhaps

sleeping quarters for full-time workers, canvassers and speakers. They must see to it that there are cars, petrol money, loudspeakers that work, lists of voters who will definitely vote for us or who will help out or who need a lift or babysitter to get out to vote. The cumann will need to arrange briefing sessions from experienced people, on canvassing and manning a voting booth. Equally important is that provision is made for the next election, no matter what are the results of the present one. A street by street breakdown of the vote is vital for future decisions on whether to run one or more candidates and for locating just where do we need to put in extra work. The cumann must play a full part in all this activity. But election work should not stop from one election to the next. One most useful way to continue this political work between times is through Supporters Meetings - where the councillor meets with a broad group of supporters/election workers and discusses the council agenda and broader current political issues. Supporters meetings can of course be more easily built around an elected councillor, but such meetings can also be held without. They aim to tie together the broad family of republicans and supporters in an area to raise political issues and Sinn Fein's position.

#### EDUCATION - POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE PARTY

In order that the cumann members may get a better political understanding of what we are doing and why there is an education officer in the cumann. The education officer has the job of developing political discussion and thinking within the cumann, and of tying in the cumann to political developments in the movement.

It is the Education officer's job to ensure that communications between the cumann and the leadership are

good: that the monthly Head Office communication - FOGROIR - with notices and Ard Comhairle decisions, and the political report of the Ard Comhairle meetings, are communicated to everyone in the cumann and discussed fully. It is the Education officer's job to ensure that the cumann discusses relevant political issues at meetings, and do not only consider organisational details. It is also their task to ensure that political papers are circulated and discussed, that members who want the IRIS BHEAG (a monthly internal magazine for political discussion in the movement) is received by those who want it; that the policy documents are discussed and understood by members of the cumann.

The National Education Department holds regular weekend seminars to help activists/education officers do this work. All education officers, before they take on the job, should attend these seminars.

Education officers are also responsible for developing political education amongst new members, before they join the cumann. (See **New Members Pack**, available from the Education Department, Head Office.) They should also ensure that new members attend the weekend seminars for new members.

The Irish language is an important subject which is usually dealt with by the education officer of the cumann. Often there are classes organised locally by Irish organisations, and attending such classes is a good way to build links with local Gaelgoiri.

The Cultural Department will help in any way they can and some of the Education Department lectures are available in both Irish and English.

### MAKING POLICY

The policies of Sinn Fein are made or changed at the annual meeting called the Ard Fheis. Every cumann in

the entire country is entitled to have delegates there and to send resolutions calling for changes or new policies. The delegates have voting rights and can vote on any resolution. They can also speak for or against any resolution to influence others who have not made up their minds. It takes a simple majority vote to change policy but the constitution can only be changed by a two thirds majority.

The first step in making policy is for some member of a cumann to propose the new policy or the change in an old policy that they think is needed. If some other member will second their resolution then it can be debated and perhaps get a majority vote of the cumann members. It is then written clearly or typed out and sent to Head Office. It will be included in the clar or list of resolutions to be debated at the Ard Fheis. If it gets the necessary support it will then become part of the policy of Sinn Fein.

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TWELVE WAYS TO KILL A CUMANN

- 1 Don't attend meetings, or at least arrive very late.
- 2 Be sure to leave before the meeting is over.
- 3 Next day find fault with officers and committee.
- 4 Take no part in cumann affairs, or if forced to do so do a sloppy job.
- 5 Be sure to sit at the back so that you can talk to a friend, and don't take part in any discussions.
- 6 Get all the cumann will give you but give nothing in return.
- 7 Never ask anyone to join the cumann.
- 8 Talk co-operation but never co-operate.
- 9 If asked to help with anything always say you havn't time.
- 10 Never accept an office, it's easier to criticise.
- 11 If appointed to a committee never give any time or service to it.
- 12 Never do anything more than you have to, then when others willingly and unselfishly use their ability, yell and scream that the cumann is being run by a clique.