

## SINN FEIN POLICY DOCUMENT

### WOMEN IN THE NEW IRELAND

#### INTRODUCTION

Women in Ireland face significant difficulties in their daily lives as a result of the long years of discrimination and injustice endured by them. James Connolly described the women of Ireland as "the slave of the slaves".

This situation will not be resolved until the abysmal ignorance which surrounds it is wiped away. Men must realise that there is no innate threat to their position in the liberation of women, rather that they will be equal and this equality will help to liberate us all.

Sinn Fein says that in the New Ireland there will be no second class citizens. Once this premise is accepted it is obvious that close attention must be paid to the special repression directed against women and the resultant status of second class citizens. This repression is not merely, nor even primarily, legislative. It is deep rooted, mainly inherited from Victorian England. It is interesting to note that in Celtic Ireland women had more equality with men than at any time since, and that divorce was allowed, and that the concept of illegitimacy was unheard of.

Sinn Fein is not content just to recognise these problems. We are prepared to make these issues our own. The production of this policy document is an attempt to make men and women alike give deeper and more detailed consideration to this problem.

We recognise that thought alone is not enough and that additional safeguards to protect women's rights will be necessary in the future New Ireland. Only then can it be said with truth that we 'cherish all the children of the nation equally'.

#### SEXISM AND STEREOTYPING

Sinn Fein commits itself fully to equality between the sexes.

In the New Ireland we would envisage: (a) co-education at all levels; (b) all subjects would be made available to every student and a conscious effort would be made to reverse the current result of sexism where predominantly boys take some subjects and girls do others; (c) at secondary level all students would be required to complete housecraft, home repairs, sex education, home economics, marriage and parenthood classes; (d) the physical education and development of all children will be given equal importance and remedial programmes would be developed, especially for girls, to bring all children to a peak level of fitness; (e) schools would make a conscious effort to combat the crippling emotional effects of present-day sexism and stereotyping, such as relegating certain emotions and characteristics to one sex or the other - (e.g. boys don't cry, girls are emotional etc).

In the interim Sinn Fein will campaign to combat sexism within the educational system. We believe that education should be changed to promote the equality of the male and female.

Although we believe that sexism and stereotyping can only be gradually eradicated through concentration on the education of our children to accept the equal role of the sexes, there are many blatant aspects of sexist thinking that should be discontinued in the interim. We particularly condemn the use of women's bodies in the advertising of commodities and the portrayal of women as mindless house robots in advertising and publicity campaigns.

## **EQUAL PAY AND EQUAL WORK**

In the New Ireland Sinn Fein envisages the following improvements being included in future legislation:

The enactment of new laws to govern equal pay for women to replace the present Equal Pay Act in the 6 counties and the Employment Equality Act in the 26 counties, which would avoid the weaknesses and loopholes of the present laws and eradicate the means by which employers are able to dodge the requirements of the present acts.

The introduction of a comprehensive programme of paid maternity/paternity leave for all workers before and after they have had their child.

The introduction of adequate training schemes for women employees to ensure that women enjoy equal opportunities with men to obtain job qualification. This would cover, for example, apprenticeships and day-release training. Jobs done at home (outworkers) should be abolished as they are non-unionised and tend to isolate the women. They are generally low-paid and in fact they represent slave labour.

The achievement for women of total equality with men in regard to state and community benefits and grants. These would include all aspects of tax, national insurance, unemployment benefit, sickness benefit, invalidity benefit, industrial injuries benefit, pensions, supplementary benefits, students grants etc.

The rejection of a partner's right to sell the family home without consent of other partner and the protection of a partner's right to stay in the family home.

An end to discrimination against women with regard to loans, grants, hire-purchase agreements, mortgages and general shopping.

The introduction of legislation to protect women's rights in the New Ireland will be monitored both at national level through federal constitutional courts and at district level where councils are responsible for employment opportunities and social development.

In the interim Sinn Fein will denounce (for instance picket) firms and companies which openly discriminate against women or treat women as second class workers

Sinn Fein members active in trade unions should voice Sinn Fein policies on these matters, for instance, denounce unjust treatment of women re promotion or new labelling of jobs within a firm allowing a better wage for male counterparts e.g. cleaner (male,) assistant cleaner, (female).

## **VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

In the New Ireland Sinn Fein envisages that the protection of women against violence will be the responsibility of the lowest level of government at local or district level who will enforce legislation and provide facilities for the victims of maltreatment, whether physical or mental.

In the interim Sinn Fein will take its responsibility seriously and support campaigns against such violence, such as rape crisis centres, homes for battered women, marches against rape etc., and Sinn Fein public representatives will be encouraged to support such campaigns as much as possible.

### **FAMILY LAW CONTRACEPTION**

Sinn Fein recognises that the use of contraception is a matter of conscience for the couple involved and that safe contraception should be available from Family Planning Clinics, under community control, with adequate safe-guards for the protection of the young.

We also recognise the necessity of encouraging research and education on contraception and we will promote women's health collectives to educate women on their health and the abuses they are now subjected to by the medical profession, especially as regards control of their fertility. At the same time men should be educated to realise that contraception is equally their responsibility.

### **ABORTION**

There is a need to face up to the problem of abortion no matter what individual opinions are. We do not judge women who have had abortions but recognise that it is an indictment of society that so many women should feel the need to avail of abortion. We are opposed to abortion but we are also opposed to the attitudes and forces in society which impel women to have abortions.

### **ILLEGITIMACY**

We demand the abolition of the legal status of illegitimacy. No child in the New Ireland will be forced to live under the stigma of illegitimacy.

### **MARRIAGE LAWS**

There are several areas of marriage law, particularly in the 26 counties, which require drastic reform. Sinn Fein must campaign for the removal of the laws in the Free State regarding conjugal rights, loss of consortium, criminal conversation and harbouring.

Separated women and widows are discriminated against by society and by law; separated women should have the right to free legal aid to obtain a legal separation.

In keeping with our demand that the powers of Church and State be separated, we accept in principle the introduction of divorce for those who wish to avail of it.

In this context we recognise the importance of making available pre-marriage classes and advice for young people and marriage guidance for couples contemplating divorce.

### **CHILDCARE**

Childcare must be shared as an equal responsibility between both parents, and also as a responsibility of society as a whole who must organise its economic life in accordance with this responsibility.

The aim must be to give all women the choice of being full-time mothers, working in the home, or working outside the home or a

combination of these roles. For economic reasons and due to an inadequate system of childcare, neither option is a free choice at present.

Twenty-four-hour childcare centres must be provided, staffed by qualified, caring well paid persons, in an adequate setting to provide a safe, secure and stimulating environment for children while their parents work. This is particularly necessary for one-parent families and for equal opportunities for women, since many must work shifts and weekends when nurseries presently do not operate.

Childcare benefits must be on realistic scales, taking into account that costs increase with every child rather than remain static or decrease. Subsidies should be designed to avoid the poverty trap, such as at present in the 6 counties, where those on supplementary benefits see their child benefits increased on the one hand and then subtracted from their total benefit, leaving them worse off than before.

We envisage adequate maternity/paternity leave on the birth of a child, with pay, which can be taken by either parent or shared, with a guarantee that one's job will be available when one returns after the regulation leave. Maternity/paternity leave should be able to be utilised on a shared basis, so that both parents may share the task of caring for the very young child in their own home if they wish.

In keeping with Sinn Fein's overall principle of decentralisation and local control of personal services, we advocate decentralised maternity care, ensuring that women are not subjected to highly institutionalised care at this time in their lives, and with special efforts to cope with the extremely common syndrome of post-natal depression. Where possible, every woman should have the choice of woman obstetricians.

The Eire Nua constitution will embody the extending of the family unit to a community concern, in that all members of the community will participate fully in the welfare and care of its children. Instruction in childcare would be an important part of school education for both sexes, so that all the community can benefit from the effort of maintaining the well-being of the child.

In the New Ireland an allowance will be paid to a father or mother to encourage him/her to stay at home and near his/her children, so that he/she does not have to take on a job during the first years of the child's life and as a recognition of the importance of the role of parenthood in society.

A Charter of Children's Rights will be drawn up which will guarantee legal protection to children who do not get a fair deal in education or are submitted to violence.

## **THE NEED FOR SEX EDUCATION**

Parents will be educated in matters of sex so that they can pass their knowledge on to their children with confidence and competence.

Sex education will be available in all schools and will deal with the full emotional and social aspects of sexuality, including current sexual oppressions. We envisage that this would be provided through proper courses at second level school.

In the interim Sinn Fein will campaign to achieve these aims and to emphasise the need for such education.