

SINN FEIN

SEIRBHÍS INMHEÁNACH FAISNEISE

WORDS, WORDS, WORDS.

Their Meaning and Their Power.

6d.

Leabhrán Uimhir 1

Iú Moan Fómhair, 1962.

Oifig an Ard-Rúnaí, 30 Plás Gardiner, Baile Átha Cliath 1.

These notes are compiled and issued for the use and guidance of Sinn Féin organisers, speakers, press officers and canvassers. They are not for public distribution. The points made below are not to be regarded as hard and fast rules. They are intended as suggestions for the improvement of Republican publicity.

WORDS, WORDS, WORDS.

Their Meaning and Their Power.

Introduction

Our job is to win the support of as many as possible of the 4 million people in this island for the Cause and principles of Irish Republicanism. These people - and all their wealth, both spiritual and material - constitute the Irish Nation. They are men and women, boys and girls, of varying ages, creeds, classes, groups and outlooks. Their support will be won by the power of words - words spoken, words written, properly, correctly and to best advantage. Words are weapons. Words win wars.

Action, it is said, speaks louder than words. But our actions, no matter how good, how noble, how exemplary, can be misrepresented by the propaganda machine of the enemy, and of those who assist him. Words must precede and follow action. People's minds must be prepared for the action to take place so that immediately it happens they will perceive its significance. Following the action - whether it takes place in the political field or otherwise - the political explanation and interpretation of it must be driven home relentlessly in simple terms. The fight for Irish freedom is labelled "a civil war" and those who take part in it are called "terrorists", "irresponsibles" and even "murderers".

Propaganda is the only effective weapon against propaganda. Silence is no shield at all, no matter whether it comes of fear, disdain or pride. To be silent against the attack of the skilled propagandist with all the mass media of communication at his disposal, is to be encircled and snared by words You must break your silence and reply. If you do not, it will seem to the multitude that you cannot. If you have a good case, you are expected to state it. If you do not state your case, it goes by default.

Many people have the idea that the word "propaganda" is of recent origin, and that propaganda is always a distortion of the truth. Both ideas are wrong. Some may be surprised to learn that it was the Catholic Church which first organised propaganda: it created, in 1622,

the first censorship and the first propaganda organisation - the office De Propaganda Fide, from which the word itself is derived. There is no need to be scared of the word. It is a perfectly good Latin term, from propago, to extend, enlarge, increase, carry forward, advance, spread. To propagate, to make known, to spread an idea.

Because some put forward propaganda from a camouflaged hide-out called a "bureau of information", it is essential to understand the difference between "information" and "propaganda".

Here are two statements: one is information, the other is propaganda:

"The dramatist, Mr. Brendan Behan"

"The magnificent dramatist, Mr. Brendan Behan"

By the addition of one word the plain statement of fact becomes propaganda. It is propaganda strongly biased in favour of Mr. Behan.

Propaganda is a method of presenting a statement of fact, an idea, an ideal, a particular point of view, of focussing attention on one thing and making it stick in the mind. We are all affected to some degree by propaganda. "Spitting prohibited" is health propaganda, and it has helped to check the spitting habit. "Post early for Christmas", "No smoking", "Post no bills", "Keep off the grass", "Passengers must not cross the line" All these are propaganda commands, warnings or exhortations, and we usually obey them.

Information is the raw-material of propaganda. It is not propaganda itself. Propaganda is a skilled technique of presentation.

The propaganda machine of the enemy is very powerful, very efficient. It presents the information in a certain light, unfavourable to the Republican Movement, e.g. "Sinn Féin leaves trail of lost deposits", "Sinn Féin hands Fermanagh seat to Unionists", "Sinn Féin will split the Nationalist vote", "Danger of Civil War in North", "Terrorists wreck Border post. Old woman in danger", "Bridge blown up. Nationalist families isolated".

To counter all this propaganda, it is not enough merely to tell the truth. To have any effect, in peace or in war, the truth must be well told. Not only what is told, but the way it is told, is of vital importance. The truth, the bare facts, cannot overcome a skilfully devised propaganda of falsehood, unless it is presented in such a way as to arouse as much interest and curiosity as the lies and half-truths of the enemy. To be armed with the truth, and to have the means and skill to present it in such a way as to fire the imagination, is a gigantic advantage.

Sinn Féin must flood Ireland, and the world, with FACTS - FACTS - FACTS. Facts skilfully presented. Not dry-as-dust facts, but facts that startle and sparkle. Facts that conjure up a picture - facts that come alive - that haunt you - that make you think, make you talk, make you want to act!

If we are organising a campaign for the release of Irish Republican prisoners, it is not sufficient for Sinn Féin to give the public information - that there are so many men in jail. We want them to realise that these men are Irish, that they are good men, that they are suffering for a good cause, for the Irish people themselves, that they (the public) should do something about getting the prisoners out

Effective propaganda depends upon arousing interest and maintaining it. Most propaganda is carried by words. The following points deserve particular attention:

1. Use of Terminology

This is important because the terms used indicate an attitude, a stand, a point of view. The listener or reader may well pick up these terms, think in these terms and use them himself. If this happens, he is well on the way to understanding and perhaps accepting and advocating your point of view.

During the Campaign in the Six Counties between 1956 and 1962 the men who attacked the British Government there were referred to by various names - resistance fighters, freedom fighters, guerillas, raiders, terrorists, murder gangs. The same thing happened in Hungary, in Cyprus, in Algeria. If A read one particular newspaper which called them "freedom fighters", he probably called them by the same name himself, and came to approve of their actions. If B constantly read a newspaper which called them "terrorists" he probably took his stand against them.

Here are some hints on terminology:

Never call Sinn Féin a "party" - call it a "national organisation."

Never say "Northern Ireland" or "Ulster" - say "Occupied Ireland", or "the Occupied Area", or "the Six Counties".

Say "imprisoned without trial", rather than "interned".

Say "Concentration Camp" rather than "Internment Camp".

Say "Crown Forces", "R.U.C.", "B-Specials", "British troops", but never say "Northern Police".

Say "Resistance Campaign", "the fight for freedom", "the fight in the North" but never "Campaign of violence"; say "the 26-County military" not "the Irish Army".

Never say "the country", "the nation", "Ireland" or "Éire" when describing "the 26 Counties" or "the State".

Always bear in mind that we are pro-Irish and anti-British, i.e. against British rule.

2. Simple Language

Choose the shortest and simplest word available, provided that it conveys what you have in mind. Sometimes a longer word may have to be used because the short word is not precise enough, but this is uncommon. Always choose words the listener or reader will understand. Never use rare words or difficult or specialised terms in an effort to display what a wonderful vocabulary you have.

Keep the sentences short. This makes for simplicity and clarity. Complicated construction is the chief enemy of clarity. The aim should be to get each idea into the listener's or reader's mind as quickly as possible, without wearying him in the process.

Avoid the use of abstract nouns. Good writing generally has less abstract terms than bad writing. In "As You Like It", Shakespeare described the seven stages of a man's life from infancy to the grave in the famous passage beginning "All the world's a stage ...". That passage contains only one abstract noun. In proverbs, the use of concrete nouns rather than the circumlocution of abstract terms conveys the ideas better.

An excerpt from a Washington publication is interesting -
Federal Security Agency, Training Manual No. 7, 1950 -

Said Franklin Roosevelt, in one of his early presidential speeches: "I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished". Translated into standard bureaucratic prose his statement would read:

"It is evident that a substantial number of persons within the Continental boundaries of the United States have inadequate financial resources with which to purchase the products of agricultural communities and industrial establishments. It would appear that for a considerable segment of the population, possibly as much as 33.3333% of the total, there are inadequate housing facilities, and an equally significant proportion is deprived of the proper types of clothing and nutriment".

3. Positive - not merely negative

There is a real danger of people getting the impression that Republicans have no positive or constructive plans, that all we aim to do is to break, destroy or remove. The party-politicians are very quick to foster this impression, and consequently we should be careful lest our listeners and readers come to think of us as a group of wreckers, destroyers, philistines, iconoclasts.

Instead of saying merely "Break the connection with England" it is better to say "Break the connection with England and establish an independent 32-County Irish Republic" or "Sinn Féin aims to establish an independent, 32-County Irish Republic". To do this it is necessary to break the connection with England". Instead of saying merely - "Break the link with Sterling", why not say "Break the link with Sterling and establish a national monetary system".

Let the people know that we intend to build an independent, happy, prosperous Nation.

4. Quotations from patriots

Quotations from Irish patriots are a help, but they must be used in the right way. It is all very well to quote Pearse and say: "As long as Ireland is unfree the only honourable attitude for Irishmen and Irishwomen is an attitude of revolt". The reaction of many of the crowd may well be: "That was fifty years ago. So what?"

Republicans have read the writings of the Irish patriots, and accept them as indicating the true sure road to freedom. How many of the ordinary people of Ireland to-day have read the writings of Thomas Davis, and accept him as one of the four evangelists of Irish Separatism?

Quotations are useful because they invoke the authority of great and revered men, and they put our Movement of to-day in proper perspective as being in the tradition of Irish Republicanism. A bare quotation though is not enough in itself. We must be able to explain it, and show that it is as true to-day as it was when it was first said or written. We must be able to apply it to the circumstances of our own time.

5. Effective arguments

It would probably be true to say that at the present time the public image of Sinn Féin is of a group of enthusiastic hot-heads, sincere and well-meaning, but most impractical and unwise in what they advocate.

Our reputation for honesty, sincerity and truthfulness has not been easily won. We have achieved it by the sacrifices of many men and women, to a great extent. It is something to be jealously guarded, because once lost in any generation, it is well-nigh impossible to regain it for many years.

Unfortunately, sincerity is not enough in itself. It will bring you a certain distance, and no farther. It must be backed up by provable facts and effective arguments that will appeal to the reason and intelligence of the audience. The facts, figures, statistics we use must be absolutely correct, and they should be marshalled in the best possible way.

In the construction of arguments there are pitfalls. A knowledge of the elements of logic will guard us against these. The subject is too large to develop here, but one familiar trap may be mentioned - the non sequitur. This is an argument which on the face of it appears convincing, but is false because the propositions are not truly related to each other. In some forms this type of argument is obviously false - e.g. "All pennies are copper coins: this coin is copper: therefore this must be a penny".

At all times, the idea must be countered that Republicans enjoy the hard work of the Movement for its own sake, that they are naturally given to disturbance and revolution. It should be made quite clear that

members of the Republican Movement do their hard work out of a sense of duty, and that this work is an unavoidable means to an end.

6. The other man's background.

If our job is to influence the public to a fresh way of thinking, and to project a favourable image of the Republican Movement, we must appreciate the other man's background and point of view. We must "get inside" his mind and see things as he sees them.

This may not be so easy for those of us who have been reared to Republicanism, who devote most of our spare time to Republican activities and are constantly moving in the same small circle. When we address the public we may be using terms and phrases, talking of events, with which they are not at all familiar. We may fail entirely to get across to our audience because we forget that we are not preaching to the converted at a meeting of our own Cumann.

The "closed circuit" mind is a real danger to the effectiveness of Republican propaganda. We must break out beyond it by widening our horizons and moving among other groups. Then we will be much better equipped to publicise our programme and policy.

7. Prisoners of the past?

When listening to or reading an exposition of Republican aims, the man in the street is much more interested in what we have to say of the future than what we have to say of the past. Granted, it is most times advisable and often necessary to trace the history of the Republican Movement, but we should be very wary lest people get the impression that we are a group of old cranks who can talk of nothing except the events of forty or fifty years ago, when most of to-day's general public were not even born.

To say that our elected representatives will not sit in partition assemblies because to do so would be to betray the 77 who died for the Republic in 1922-23 is quite all right. But it will hardly be accepted as valid enough reason by the man or woman who was not born till 1942 or '43. We must be able to give sound convincing arguments as to why both as a matter of principle and as a matter of tactics, it is better not to attend Leinster House, Stormont or Westminster, but to seek to convene an all-Ireland Parliament.

Calling the part of Ireland now ruled from Dublin the "Irish Free State" is to give the impression that we are prisoners of the past. That title was dropped in 1937, and its name has been changed on a few occasions, but nobody can quarrel with the title "26-County State", which should be used more, for the benefit of the younger generation. We must point forward, not backward.

Further we must bear in mind that words like "coercion", "felon-setting", "disaffection" are not familiar terms to-day. They are understood only by the older people.

If the title "Dáil Éireann" is used it must be explained that what we mean is a 32-County Dáil; because the title has been given by the 26-County party-politicians to their partition assembly, many will misunderstand.

8. The Abstract and the Concrete

Talking in terms of "sovereignty" and "jurisdiction" and "dereliction of duty" may sound very well, but these words are understood by the few only. It is of course quite impressive to say:

"We aim to restore the sovereign, independent Irish Republic with a parliament which will have effective jurisdiction over the entire national territory". But the question in the minds of 90% of the listeners will be: "What exactly will that mean to me, to my family, to our community here in (e.g.) Cavan, to the sons and daughters of Ireland? What real changes will come in our everyday lives?"

The Sinn Féin speaker, knowing his audience, their attitudes, their problems, should be able to explain the theory, the abstractions, the fine principles he has enunciated, with practical concrete examples of the benefits which will arise.

9. Reason and emotion

We have seen that we must state our case clearly, and make it at the same time, interesting, arresting, intriguing. We must put over statements of fact without in any way twisting or distorting the truth. Convincing arguments will impress and win the support of our audience.

The abstract and theoretical approach will on its own be often useless with many, especially with women. While we do not advocate the building up of personalities in front of the public, it is as well to realise that women (who number 50% of human beings) have more interest in people than in things. A woman's intuition may be mysterious, yet it is true to say that the way she feels about something is the most compelling argument for her.

While there is no difference in intelligence as between man and woman, notice that she is much more interested in people. Typically women's occupations - private secretaries, telephonists, counterhands, nurses, school teachers - are essentially concerned with people. Women think differently from men, but it is a difference in kind and not of degree. What can be perceived with the eye, or felt by the hands, or observed by the senses is more easily understood by them than neat logical or abstract reasoning.

Take a lesson from the salesman. If he sells a razor to a man, he will argue that 10,000 other men are using the same model. From the abstract figure of 10,000 a man will reason and deduce that the model must be good. When he sells a washing machine to a woman that argument that 10,000 other women are using it is not so likely to convince, but that Mrs. O'Sullivan next door has one, will. Mrs. O'Sullivan is known, can be perceived, can demonstrate - that convinces.

To a man, abstract reasoning can be convincing. To women, logical proof is not always conclusive; a conclusion arrived at by them intuitively or emotionally will carry more weight - and who is to say which is better?

Sinn Féin speakers should avoid building up personalities. This does not mean that they should not talk in terms of people. To put across the propaganda it is necessary to appeal to the emotions and imagination as well as to the mind and intellect. In the case of women it is especially true that we must paint the human picture - e.g. of emigration, unemployment, imprisonment, etc.

Appealing merely to the emotions of a crowd is not sufficient either - we must appeal to both the intelligence and the feelings of rational beings.

Factionism: The use of expressions and language calculated merely to hurt some person or group and thereby afford personal satisfaction to the speaker or to a section of his audience must always be avoided. The aim should be to win new adherents and draw interested people closer - not to relieve the personal feelings of the speaker or of (a section of) his audience. In this as in other fields of Republican activity, there is no room for selfishness.

10. The Written Word

As regards pamphlets, handbills, posters, etc. lay-out is of the utmost importance. By this is meant the physical features of the document as they strike the eye. Care with margins, type size, spacing of lines and words, placing of headings, and many other technical details, adds greatly to the pleasure which a document gives the eye. That a document should be mechanically, as well as mentally, easy to read is of marked advantage. A high standard of lay-out should always be observed.

Conclusion

All the suggestions made above are intended to help in making Republican propaganda more effective, and this can be done without in any way surrendering as much as one iota of our principles. Words are not deeds, but they make deeds happen - and stop them from happening. The success of our propaganda will depend on our use of words. They should appeal, as our National Unity and Independence Programme indicates,

"to the reason, national instincts and popular imagination" of the Irish people.

Finally, we should never forget that our efforts will be of no avail without good example which has always been considered to be an essential part of teaching. We should practise what we preach; our conduct should always be exemplary and edifying; we have truth on our side and should always live up to it. Thus, we can and will succeed.

This booklet is the first in a series to be issued for the guidance of members of Sinn Féin. Criticism of the material in it, and suggestions for future publications will be welcomed, and should be sent to Head Office.

APPENDIX 'A'

Condensed from "Tips on Talking" (British Association for Commercial and Industrial Education).

Effective Speaking.

Before you speak THINK about these points:

1. What type of AUDIENCE are you going to talk to?
2. What is the PURPOSE of your talk?
3. What SUBJECT MATTER do you want to include?
4. How will you PRESENT it?

1. The Audience.

- (a) What is their general attitude likely to be - interested, indifferent, friendly, sceptical?
- (b) How much will they know already?
- (c) How fast can they take things in?

2. The Purpose

- Is it
- (a) To give background?
(so long as they get the general picture it will do).
 - (b) To give detailed information?
(they must remember certain things)
 - (c) To put forward a new point of view?
(they must be influenced and interested)
 - (d) To teach a particular skill?
(they must know the drill from A to Z).
 - (e) To outline a proposed course of action?
(they must be clear about what is required of them).

You may have different objectives at different stages in your talk.

3. Subject Matter

Collect your material.
Sort out your ideas into groups.
Decide which groups will form your introduction, main arguments and conclusions.

4. Presentation

Speak clearly and audibly - don't put on a special voice, but do speak naturally.
Speak to the audience - not to one corner.
Avoid mannerisms like jingling coins, fiddling with notes, etc.

Show your enthusiasm - your topic may be old to you but fresh to the audience.

Give the audience time to TAKE IN what you are saying.

Hammer home your main points.

Summarise and conclude, and above all avoid a bedraggled ending.

Everyone has a natural style of speaking, which just needs to be corrected and developed. Be yourself and don't try to put on an act. Speak as you talk, but with more emphasis, continuity, liveliness and illustration.

APPENDIX 'B'

From a circular issued by An Ard-Chomhairle, March 31, 1962.

The Work of the Press Officer.

Reports sent to the Press should be strictly of a factual nature. Concerts, céilithe, collections, commemorations, public meetings, police searches, raids and arrests should all be covered. All that is necessary is to write a short account in simple language. No attempt should be made to outline Sinn Féin policy or to report speeches. That is covered by statements issued to the Press from this office according as the need arises e.g. the Common Market.

The following few rules will guide your Press Officer:

1. There is no need whatever to use big words or long sentences. Write simply and clearly.
2. Leave an inch margin on the left hand side of the paper and do not cramp the lines together.
3. Write on one side of the paper only.
4. An editor likes to get a "readymade" news item. So keep the report short and write it carefully.
5. Do not surmise or take a chance with anything. Be sure ALL your facts, names, etc. are correct.
6. Send your report in good time to the local newspapers and to the 'United Irishman'.
7. Do not be disappointed if the first report is not published. Keep trying.
8. Each Cumann should send reports to the Comhairle Ceantair Press Officer, who will be responsible for getting them to the newspapers.
9. Enclose a covering letter for the Editor, signed by the Press Officer, so that he will know it is authentic.