

STATEMENT BY OUTGOING PRESIDENT RUAIRÍ Ó BRÁDAIGH TO THE ARD-FHEIS
OF SINN FÉIN ON SUNDAY AFTERNOON, NOVEMBER 13th, 1983

My departure from the office of President of Sinn Féin became inevitable with the defeat in 1981 by a simple majority of the Éire Nua policy of a new Four-Province Federal Ireland with maximum decentralisation of power and decision-making within a Democratic Socialist Republic. In 1982, by a two-thirds majority, all references to that policy were deleted from the Constitution of Sinn Féin.

As one who had been closely and personally identified with that policy for ten years, my position as President in the face of a repeated defeat on a major policy had become untenable. It did not require a B.B.C. Panorama interview following last year's Ard-Fheis to bring that home to me.

Had the Social and Economic Programme been similarly defeated or the objective of a Democratic Socialist Republic been removed from the Constitution, or if our policy of neutrality and non-alignment had been rejected, I would equally have felt obliged to stand down as President.

Then during the past year I was defeated in Ard-Chomhairle sub-committees and on the Ard-Chomhairle itself on important policy questions. I opposed Sinn Féin candidates participating in the E.E.C. Assembly if elected next year. I also opposed a commitment in principle to contesting all parliamentary elections in the 26 Counties whether the time was opportune from/Republican viewpoint or not. On these two questions I was beaten. My paper on the effects on our political strategy in the 26 Counties of Sinn Féin's abstention policy was rejected by the sub-committee in question.

For these reasons then I have not sought re-election this year. I would emphasise that I consider the public credibility of the office of President and through it of the entire Movement to be of paramount importance. Such credibility was seriously impaired with the defeat of policies which I wholeheartedly believed in and had publicly espoused over a long period of time.

I am very proud of two things : firstly, I regard the period 1969-83 as having marked a high point on the graph of the Irish people's struggle for freedom ranking alongside the 1798 Rising, the Land War of 1879-82 and the 1916-'23 period; secondly, during my 14 years as head of Sinn Féin there were no splits or splinters - long may it remain so, as it will, provided we stick to basic principles.

I am glad to be able to report that my health has improved greatly. It was never a factor in my decision not to seek re-election. I have had a good rest and expect a final clearance from my doctor in about two weeks. I want to thank all who sent messages wishing me a speedy recovery.

Finally, I have asked my colleagues not to engage in votes of thanks or anything like that and they have agreed to my request.

Go dté sibh ar fad slán!