

Dublin, March 7, 2010, speech of Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams at the Ard Fheis:

Make Change Possible



„If ever Ireland needed leadership it needs it now ... But let me be clear about this. I am not talking about leaders coming down to us from on high. I am talking about everyone who is prepared to make a stand against corruption, greed and injustice ... Every little act of resistance, of rebellion, of protest, makes change possible.“

A half a million citizens unemployed. Social welfare payments cut. Wages cut. Health and Education in crisis. Families facing eviction. Mass emigration back again. Parts of the country under water. In other parts the drinking water is unsafe. Billions of taxpayers money gifted to a dysfunctional, toxic banking system.

Widespread anger, rage even, at the government parties. And a sense of hopelessness and disbelief. It would be easy for me to stand up here and to rail against the government - to become Mr. Angry for a half an hour. But that is not enough. Most people know how bad this government is. They elected it. Which is why there is such a sense of betrayal. Most people also know that the policies of a Fine Gael led government would be no different from this one.

The Irish people deserve better.

Everyone who lives on this island has the right to a home; to a safe environment; to access to education and child-care; to civil and religious liberty; and to meaningful work with proper terms and conditions. Everyone has the right to health care. Everybody has the right to equality, and to respect and dignity.

This is the essence of republicanism. It is the essence of citizenship.

Is any of this reflected in today's Ireland? The answer to that is no. Sinn Féin believes in a genuine republic. Not a nominal dictionary republic, but one in which the people are truly sovereign.

I gceann cupla seachtain beidh muid ag ceiliuradh agus cuimhni ar na mna is na fir a chuaigh amach le linn Seachtain na Casca.

Chuir said brat na hEireann os cionn Oifig an Phoist anseo i mBaile Atha Cliath. Is maith is eol duinn go raibh fis ag na fir agus na mna seo. Bhi se de run acu deireadh a chur le riail na Breataine sa tir seo agus tir iomlan nua a thogail anseo.

Bhi fis acu don Phoblacht Nua le saoirse ag a chroilar. An aithneodh siad an stat seo mar bhuaic na haislinge sin? Ni doigh liom e.

The Proclamation of the Republic asserts the need to cherish all the children of the nation equally. It doesn't say 26 counties of the nation. It speaks of ALL the nation and ALL its parts. All 32 counties. The Proclamation speaks to ALL the children of the Nation. It doesn't say - unless you are poor or elderly. Or unless you have autism; or learning difficulties; or disabilities. Or unless you come from a remote rural area. Or from Moyross or Sheriff Street; or

Strabane or Ballymena. It doesn't say unless you are a child in the care of the state. The protection of children is a fundamental human right. The protection of children is the responsibility of all of us and it should be guaranteed in the constitution.

The establishment parties, like us, know that republicanism is in many ways the conscience of the Irish people. Little wonder that they wrap themselves in republican rhetoric while avoiding any genuine examination of the real meaning of republicanism.

Which brings us to the hard question. How can society be changed? How can a real republic be achieved?

The answer to that starts in the heart. It is a belief in people. That is the starting point. And what starts in the heart has to move to the head. It is not enough to wax lyrical about peoples' rights.

Caithfidh muid seasamh le cheile.

We have to stand up for these rights. The people of Ireland have yet to realise our destiny as a nation. We have yet to complete our journey.

This summer marks the 40th Anniversary of the IRA appearing on the streets of Belfast when Republicans joined with the people of Ballymacarett in the defence of St. Matthews chapel and An Tra Ghearr. That single act of resistance. This stand against the Orange State marked the beginning of a journey for many activists, that has been played out on the streets, in the jails and around the negotiating table.

During this time Irish society has changed in many fundamental ways.

Imagine what can be achieved now in these more peaceful times with the leveling of the political playing field and in a climate where the phony republicanism of the establishment is being laid bare.

So, we have to build on all that is good in our society.

We have to recognise all our heroes and heroines; all the carers and health workers; all the active citizens in the community and the voluntary sector, people involved in sports, the arts and music; all those citizens who create hope in place of misery, and common purpose in place of me feinism and selfishness.

The key to building the new republic, democratically shaped by the people, is to start now. We have to embrace our strengths. Our language. Our unique culture. Our history.

And all of us who believe in a better way, in a just society, in a real republic; we need to make our beliefs relevant to more and more people. We need to be about empowerment. We need to raise our voices. We need to make a stand.

If ever Ireland needed leadership it needs it now. Leaders from throughout our communities. Leaders who will make a stand.

The Irish people needs leaders who will give voice on the ground and from the ground up, to the belief they have in their hearts, so that hope and networks for change can be built. The Irish people needs leaders to ensure that no banker will evict a family from their home. That no farm of land will be sold off over a family's head. That no worker will be victimised. We need leaders to ensure that no community will be robbed of its social entitlements.

But let me be clear about this. I am not talking about leaders coming down to us from on high. I am talking about everyone who is prepared to make a stand against corruption, greed and injustice. Every woman, every man, every citizen who makes such a stand is a leader. Every little act of resistance, of rebellion, of protest, makes change possible.

Most struggles aren't won by single actions. Or by iconic leaders. Though they have their role. They are won by people, taking individual actions, which accumulate into irreversible change. It was true of the suffragettes. It was true of the anti-apartheid movement. It was true when Rosa Parks wouldn't give up her seat and it is true here in Ireland.

When the Celtic Tiger economy was at its height, and when the surplus of wealth was the greatest in the history of this state, the establishment refused to distribute the wealth in the common good and to secure the future. They would not nationalise the wealth. But now they are happy to nationalise the debt.

There is talk of a Cabinet reshuffle. This government doesn't need a reshuffle. This government needs to go. Do they really think the people are amadans. Do they really expect the people to foot the bill for the bankers, the developers and their political cronies? The people need to send them a message. The people need to tell them to get lost. Don't wait until the next election. Make a stand now. Be a leader. Don't wait for anyone else.

That's the main thing, to stand up for ourselves. And for others.

That is what happened throughout our history. In our homes. On the streets. On lonely hillsides. By glensides. In the prisons. This is what happened in the history of human kind. It's what is happening across the globe.

Representatives from many of these struggles are with us tonight.

Cead mile Failte romhaibh to all of our visitors.

Especially, to our friends from the Basque country; from the USA and Canada; from Cuba; from South Africa, agus go hairithe ar n-anam chaired from Palestine. All these struggles show the enduring power of the human spirit in the search for freedom and justice.

Freedom and justice is possible, if we really want it.

And those of us who care about the world; who care about Ireland; those of us who believe in the people of this island, we have no choice but to make a stand, particularly for those citizens who cannot at this time stand up for themselves.

Sinn Féin is opposed to this government because it's not fair and because its policies are unsustainable. But we are also opposed to them because there is an alternative that will work.

Sinn Féin has proposed a major 3.2 billion euro stimulus package.

- We would establish a jobs retention fund for small and medium businesses.
- We would set up a youth jobs fund to create 20,000 jobs.
- We would use the public sector to kickstart the economy
- We would include a social clause in public contracts for hiring of a set number of apprentices, young unemployed and long term unemployed, as has been done in the north by the Sinn Féin Minister for Regional Development Conor Murphy.
- We would reclaim Brand Ireland and introduce an aggressive all-Ireland export strategy.

All of this is possible. Jobs can be protected. Jobs can be created. Frontline public services can be sustained and developed if public finance is raised in a fair way. This means real social solidarity. It means uniting public and private sector workers, not dividing them.

Among our proposals are:

- a third rate of tax for those earning more than 100,000 euro a year;
- a solidarity tax of 1 per cent on all assets worth more than 1 million euro, excluding farm land;

- and an end to the hundreds of unfair tax reliefs which this government refuses to get rid of. Caoimhghin O Caolain called it right when he said 'the closer you are to a minister in the Dublin government the less you will suffer.'

This Fianna Fail/Green Party government has also inflicted deep cuts on the farming sector and on disadvantaged rural areas. Sinn Féin understands the difficulties facing rural communities. Our TDs and our Senator have produced three major Oireachtas reports. These set out proposals to regenerate the west, to ensure a viable future for fishing and farming communities, and to create more jobs in the agri-food sector.

In the north Minister for Agriculture, Michelle Gildernew, is tackling the needs of farmers in disadvantaged areas and the needs of rural women.

O thaobh an tuaiscirt de, ta sarobair deanta ag Martin McGuinness agus foireann na gcainteanna Sinn Féin. Bhi an tionol agus na hinstiuidi uile Eireann i gcontuirt mar gheall ar an DUP. Ach le diograis agus focas ar ndaoine, bhi Sinn Féin agus an DUP abalta teacht ar chomhaontu nua. Rinne muid conradh agus bhog muid an proiseas iomlan seo ar aghaidh go dti an chead cheim eile.

Just over a month ago we concluded an agreement at Hillsborough with the DUP on the way forward. Many thought this couldn't happen. But it did. This was a hugely important, and symbolic moment. I want to pay tribute to Martin McGuinness, Gerry Kelly and our other Ministers, as well as to the Sinn Féin negotiating team. Here is proof, if proof was needed of the importance of negotiations as an area of struggle.

Policing and justice powers will be transferred in April. By the end of the year there will also be the transfer of powers from London to Belfast to deal with the issue of parades. More powers moving from England to Ireland.

Outstanding issues including Irish language rights will also be delivered on and there is additional funding for the Irish language.

This Agreement is a staging post. It is proof that change is possible.

Sinn Féin achieved all of this by being bold and by being focussed. By standing up for ourselves. By standing up to the governments. By standing up for the rights of citizens in a continuous process of change.

The last year has been a challenging one for us, for the peace process and for the people of this island. It has also been a difficult period for my clann. I thank everyone who has expressed solidarity with my family. Colette in particular has asked me to thank all those who sent her get well messages. Go raibh mile maith agaibh go leir

I want to congratulate Maurice Quinlivan on his determination to clear his good name. In the end Willie tripped over his own moustache but be assured he would still be in this awful government if Maurice had not made a stand. Maith an fear Maurice.

Will that be the end of attacks on Sinn Féin? Of course not. The only difference between Willie and the other smearers and backstabbers is that Willie got caught out.

As this government lurches toward an election we can expect more of this. But we have a message for the government and its fellow travellers. Let there be no doubt about this. Given the mandate, Sinn Féin will dismantle the culture of political cronyism and the golden circles.

This proud party is interested only in making a positive difference in the lives of the Irish people. Those who say that this isn't possible should look at what is emerging from our efforts in government in the north.

This includes tackling fuel poverty; it means free travel for the over 60s; the ending of prescription charges; and the freezing of the regional rate. Sinn Féin Ministers have introduced class room assistants in every P1 and P2 class; we have invested in schools; in jobs; in infrastructure. We have staved off water charges; and brought forward funding to tackle rural poverty and social exclusion.

Everything that Sinn Féin has done is rooted in the equality agenda.

That is why some of the big initiatives, particularly on education, have met such resistance.

The opposition to the removal of the 11 plus is mainly class driven and arises from the desire of a small minority to protect an unequal system.

Parents want the best for their children. So do we. Every school should be a good school and every child should have full equality of opportunity. I am absolutely convinced that this will be the outcome, not least because of the leadership shown by the Minister of Education, Caitriona Ruane and progressive educationalists, and teachers.

In the next few weeks the Westminster elections will give us the opportunity to strengthen our mandate. Sinn Féin will be making a stand in every constituency in the Six Counties.

If the Northern Assembly runs to its full term all communities in the north will have benefited from Sinn Féin in government. We are already planning for the next Assembly term. We want to build on the successes of our Assembly team and set more challenging targets and goals for Sinn Féin in government.

And let me invite the viewers at home to help us write that manifesto for change. Sinn Féin will once again be holding Town Hall meetings. We want to be a citizen's conduit to government. I invite you to come along - to put your issue - your needs - your requirements on the Executive table.

Unionism?

Unionism knows that Sinn Féin is a willing partner in a government that is responsive, effective and delivering. One of the big tasks facing the Executive is to eradicate sectarianism. The vast majority of people want this. There is work for everyone. And it is up to unionists to demonstrate that unionism and sectarianism are not the same and that they are as opposed to sectarianism as we are.

Luaigh me nios luaithe na haislingigh naoi deag se deag agus fis a bhi acu. Bhi fis ag Wolfe Tone roimhe sin. Chuir seisean sios ar an nasc leis an Bhreatain mar foinse dar gcuid trioblóidí polaitiúla go leir. Caithfidh muid teacht ar ais chuige agus muid ag ullmhu don chead chuid eile den turas don Phoblacht Nua.

[In many ways we are back to Tone and the need to unite catholic, protestant and dissenter. We do this by making friends with unionists and developing normal human relationships based on tolerance, respect and equality. Let me be clear about this; the unity of people in everyday life and the unity of this great country of ours is part of the same human endeavour.]

Sinn Féin believes that a free, independent and United Ireland makes political and economic sense.

Last year I set out our intention to engage with the Irish diaspora and to marshal its political strength in support of a United Ireland. Over the last twelve months thousands of people came together in New York, San Francisco, Toronto and London at major conferences to put their weight behind the demand for Irish unity. This campaign is gathering momentum. Now is the time to make partition history. Now is the time to build an Ireland we can be proud of.

Sinn Féin is united and strong. Sinn Féin is looking to the future. Sinn Féin is making a stand.

The British army, the heavy gangs, the old Orange regime and slibhin governments here could not break us. Censorship, the prisons and the death squads could not break us. And no amount of black propaganda in the Tony O'Reilly press will break us either.

20 years ago Nelson Mandela - Madiba - the first President of a free South Africa - walked free from prison.

20 years ago there was war in Ireland.

So, when someone tells you that that apartheid would never end; or that peace is not possible; or that a United Ireland is 'pie in the sky'; or that we can't make a deal with the DUP; or that we can't beat this recession; don't believe them - not for one second. Believe in yourself.

Make a stand. Make it happen. Join us.

Bigi linn. Agus ansin, tiocfaidh ar la.

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