

Gerry Adams TD

Presidential address to the Sinn Féin Ard Fheis 2013.

A chairde,

Tá failte romhaibh uilig chuig Ard Fheis Shinn Féin i gContae Maigh Eo.

Táimid an an sásta a bheith anseo san Iarthar.

A special Céad Míle Fáilte also to Friends of Sinn Féin from the USA, Canada and Australia; to our comrades from the Basque country, South Africa, Palestine, Cuba, Britain and to all foreign dignitaries.

I want to extend solidarity from this Ard Fheis to the Palestinian people and urge the international community to take decisive action for peace in the Middle East.

A Border Poll

This week saw the 15th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement. Sinn Féin is proud of the pivotal role we played with others in forging that Agreement.

There would be no peace process and no Agreement without the commitment, initiatives and political risks taken by Irish republicans.

Or, without the great work of individuals like Des Wilson, Harold Good, Inez McCormack and especially Fr. Alex Reid.

It isn't a perfect agreement.

But Sinn Féin secured the removal of the Government of Ireland Act, under which the British government claimed sovereignty over the North.

The Agreement provides for a border poll on Irish unity.

It's no surprise that the two governments are saying No.

But Sinn Féin is saying Yes.

And more importantly nationalist and republican Ireland says Yes.

And we now need to work together for a Yes vote.

It's time to let the people have their say on the future of Ireland.

It's time for a referendum on Irish unity.

Government Failure

From the 1798 rebellion to Michael Davitt, from the Hunger Strikers Frank Stagg and Michael Gaughan, to IRA activist and Sinn Féin Councillor Jackie Clarke, whose wonderful public collection of historic documents and memorabilia charts 200 years of republican resistance, Mayo has a long and distinguished republican history.

So it is particularly appropriate that we meet here.
And proof that the West is Awake.

Is Páirtí Poblachtach bródúil Sinn Féin.

Tá muid go hiomlán dílis do fíor phoblacht a thugann tús áite do chearta gach duine.

We stand for equality, social solidarity and freedom.

Sinn Féin has always stood by the people.

Sin ceann de na príomh difríochtaí idir muidinne agus an rialtas i mBaile Átha Cliath.

This government, like the one before it, has failed the people.
Its core values are those of austerity.

It has refused to negotiate a write-down on the Promissory Note.

It gave away our natural resources.

It tore up the Croke Park Agreement and is now targeting frontline workers on low and average pay.

It cut child benefit, carer's allowances and home-help hours.

But it has no problem putting taxpayers money into the pockets of bankers and financiers.

It and Fianna Fáil gave €64 billion to the banks.

Over the last five years, Fine Gael, Labour and Fianna Fáil have taken €28 billion out of the economy in taxes and cuts.

Cuts to hospitals.

To schools.

To garda stations.

Taxes on pensions.

On savings.

And on homes.

In October the Government will take another €3 billion. Next year, they will take €2.5 billion more.

They have little thought for the social consequences of their actions, of the divided, polarised, unequal society they are creating.

Of impoverished communities and families hurting from the scourge of drug and alcohol abuse, and suicide.

But the bankers, developers and politicians who created the mess have been untouched.

Despite all the election rhetoric from Labour and Fine Gael this is still the best small country in the world for big bankers, crooked developers or corrupt politicians.

The Family Home Tax

Be sure of this.

When we make promises and commitments we keep them.

Sinn Féin will put manners on the elites and the fat cats.

Sinn Féin is totally opposed to the Property Tax.

We are against plans to raid salaries, social welfare payments and pensions to get it.

We will fight this family home tax tooth and nail.

We have published legislation to scrap it.

And in government we will abolish it.

Sinn Féin is also opposed to the introduction of water charges and will resist any legislation to introduce them.

The only way to restore our economy and rebuild society is to break with the self-serving politics of Fine Gael, Labour and Fianna Fáil.

They refused to share the wealth during the boom years.

But they socialise the debt afterwards.

They are taking from those who have least to benefit those who have most.

Fairness

Sinn Féin was right during the era of the Celtic Tiger when we said that the wealth should be used to build public services, infrastructure and sustainable jobs.

Sinn Féin is right when we say the economy needs growth and jobs - not debt and cuts.

We were right in our demand to burn the bondholders.

We are right in our call not to pay the Promissory Notes.

We are right to tackle the high pay of politicians and top civil servants.

Táimid ceart faoin gá atá le smaintí nua agus focas nua ar cruthú poist.

Fairness is at the core of Sinn Féin's approach.

Of course the deficit must be tackled.

But those with the broadest shoulders must bear the heaviest load.

In a fair Ireland the weak, the vulnerable and the least well-off would be protected.

If this was a real republic working people would not be punished for the greed and corruption of others.

If the Proclamation of 1916 was a reality families would not be punished.

Women would not be punished.

Children would not be punished.

Citizens with disabilities would not be punished.

People in rural Ireland would not be punished.

The poor would not be punished.

Change is Possible Now

But change cannot wait until there is a real republic.

Tá Sinn Féin go han-soiléir faoina príomh cheisteanna seo.

It doesn't have to be like this.

Change is needed and change is possible now.

Sinn Féin is offering a realistic alternative.

We are committed to investing €13 billion in job creation and retention.

And we have presented realistic and costed, alternative budget proposals to reduce the deficit, create growth, and protect families under financial pressure.

Is seo cloch coirnéal ár bpolasaí.

The mortgage crisis is a direct result of Fianna Fáil policy and this government's failure to help struggling families.

Sinn Féin proposes the establishment of an independent mortgage distress body to adjudicate and enforce agreements on mortgages between banks and mortgage holders.

Public Services Delivered Fairly

The mark of a real republic has to be in the quality of its public services.

Tá cearta ag saoránaigh.

These include the right to a home; the right to a job; the right to education; to a health service from the cradle to the grave; the right to a safe and clean environment; and to civil and religious liberties.

This is what republicanism is about.

This is what real democracy should be about.

Public services delivered fairly and paid for by direct taxation.

This should include decent childcare facilities at affordable prices.

No matter what government Ministers say no parent should be forced from their job because they earn less than the cost of childcare.

Standing up for Rural Ireland

Last year, along with others, I visited many rural communities blighted by unemployment and poverty.

In places where our young people should have an opportunity to build their lives we saw at first-hand how emigration is tearing the heart out of rural families.

We met families bereft by the scourge of suicide.

Sinn Féin will shortly publish a comprehensive report - "Standing up for Rural Ireland".

This report outlines the need to:

- Reverse Fianna Fáil's decision to cut Garda numbers.

- Provide a full grant to upgrade septic tanks.
- Overhaul CAP to create a fairer distribution of payments.
- Ensure that income support for farmers is directed at those who need it most.

Creating jobs, particularly in the agri-food industry, and investing in our fishing industry, are key to ensuring a future for rural communities.

Especially in the west of Ireland.

But people who live in rural communities also need schools, an accessible health service, decent infrastructure, public transport and an end to isolation.

Gaeltacht areas need active regeneration.

And across this island the Irish language needs to be actively promoted, including an Acht na Gaeilge in the north.

Women Victims Need Justice

Women are among those most shamefully denied their rights under the conservative culture, which has dominated this state.

Mary Lou spoke for everyone on the day that the Magdalene report was published when she said it was time for a full apology to these brave women.

That happened eventually.

Now they need justice.

The victims of Bethany Home need justice.

The victims of symphysiotomy need justice.

People across Ireland have been moved this week by the reports from the inquest into the death of Savita Halappanavar and by the grace and great dignity of her husband.

I want to extend solidarity to Praveen and his family and friends.

Savita's death brought into sharp and tragic focus the failure of successive governments to legislate in the X case.

The people have spoken and firmly placed the responsibility upon their Oireachtas representatives to legislate on this issue.

It is time doctors had legal clarity.

It's time for protection for pregnant women whose lives are at risk.

Progress in the North

Sinn Féin opposes austerity across this island. Despite £4bn pounds of cuts by the British government, Sinn Féin's Ministerial and Assembly team under Martin McGuinness's leadership, has prioritised finding money to maintain frontline services, protect those on lowest incomes and assist disadvantaged communities.

The so-called Welfare Reform Bill is another example of the English Tory Agenda.

Sinn Féin is opposed to these cuts in exactly the same way that we are opposed to the cuts being introduced by our own Tories in Dublin.

We are also working for the transfer of fiscal power to the Assembly and Executive and a harmonisation of the Corporation Tax rate across Ireland.

Dialogue with Unionists and Loyalists

The Orange marching season has begun.

This year sees the added vexation about the flying of flags on public buildings.

Playing party politics with these issues is dangerous and counter-productive.

There are many genuine loyalists and unionists, including former combatants, working in disadvantaged communities who realise the dangers and risks involved.

They also know that it is citizens from these disadvantaged communities who will bear the brunt of any violent or disruptive actions.

These communities have more in common with their republican neighbours than they may realise.

Dialogue between them and Sinn Féin is essential and there is an imperative on republicans, challenging though it may be, to build alliances on social and economic issues with working class loyalists and unionists.

The Protestant, Unionist and Loyalist people are not going away. And Sinn Féin doesn't want them to go away.

They are part of what we are and we have to get to know each other better, to listen and take heed of what is being said.

I commit our party, without preconditions, to be part of such discussions as we face into the Orange marching season, and to find solutions to contentious issues and to tackle economic disadvantage.

This is the only way to build a fair society.
It is what the vast majority of citizens want.
The tiny minorities who espouse violence have been rejected.

Tá siad greamaithe san am atá caite agus thart orthu tá Éirinn Thuaidh agus Theas ag athrú.

And there is still work to be done to ensure that policing is non-partisan and civic.

Recent decisions by the PSNI have failed this test.

And clearly there are elements in the NIO who are uncomfortable with the new dispensation.

A Bill of Rights is long overdue.

And the continued imprisonment of Marian Price and Martin Corey is wrong.

They should be released.

A Truth Process

So, much work still needs to be done including the creation of a victim centred truth and reconciliation process.

Dubhshlán mór a bheidh anseo.

Almost 100 years ago the Tan War against British forces was deadly and vicious.

But the civil war left a bitterness and a legacy that still shapes politics to this day.

77 republicans were executed during those terrible years by the Free State - among them six young men from the west who were executed in Tuam 90 years ago this week.

Members of the Free State Army, of the Garda and civilians died too.

There was never any process of truth recovery or reconciliation after these events.

Ba chóir dúinn foghlaim ón meancog sin.

During the recent conflict, Gardaí and other members of the state's forces were killed by republicans.

Republicans were killed also, including Tom Smith, and Hugh Hehir.

During the era of the Heavy Gang many citizens were brutally assaulted.

Innocents were imprisoned.

There was collusion between elements of the Irish establishment and the British system.

Our friend Councillor Eddie Fullerton and John Francis Green and Martin Doherty and others died.

There were bombs in Dublin and Monaghan and Dundalk and elsewhere.

All this needs to be faced up to.

Sinn Féin has argued for the establishment of an Independent International Truth Commission.

The two governments; former combatants, and those in leadership across Ireland and Britain need to be part of such a process.

There can be no hierarchy of victims.

I and others in the Sinn Féin leadership have met many victims and victim's families in the north.

I am prepared to meet with victims' families in this state if they believe this will be helpful and I intend to do this in the near future.

Irish republicans will not shirk from our obligations to those who died as a consequence of the conflict.

Imagine a Different Future

Ireland is a great country.

But we are partitioned.

Our people are divided.

Imagine an end to these divisions.

Imagine a new agreed Ireland.

Imagine the unity of Orange and Green.

Imagine a fair society and an economy run democratically in the interests of all citizens.

Our vision is based on equality.

It means equal rights for citizens in same sex relationships, ethnic minorities and those of all creeds and none.

The Challenge for Labour

Our history is replete with challenges, adversity and great injustice.

This is such a time.

A time for real leadership.

A real Labour Party with a principled leadership should not be in government with Fine Gael.

If Fine Gael is set on implementing Fianna Fáil policy then let them do that with the support of Fianna Fáil.

Whatever the case for entry into coalition after the last election, there is now only one principled position for Labour.

Fágaigí an bealach ag sloite na bhFiann.

Stand by working people as Connolly and Larkin did.
Leave this government and leave it now!

Building a New Republic

We are internationalists in solidarity with people in struggle everywhere.

So, from this Ard Fheis I want to extend our love and solidarity to our friend and comrade Madiba - Nelson Mandela.

Our people have come through a lot.

In every generation brave men and women have shown the way.
In three years we celebrate the centenary of the 1916 Rising.
The government is contemplating bulldozing the area around Moore Street into the ground in the interests of private developers.

I commend the work of the families of the 1916 leaders who have highlighted this hugely important issue.

Every person with a sense of national pride will oppose such a shameful act of vandalism.

The Moore Street laneways of history should be developed as a 1916 Revolutionary Quarter.

This year also marks the Centenary of the 1913 Lockout.
The Lockout showed the courage and fighting spirit of the Dublin working class.

They chose to resist rather than submit.
They showed the way.

In Ireland today parents defending children with disabilities, frontline workers defending each other and vital public services, carers, teachers, health workers, citizens who are standing up for themselves and their communities, are showing the way.

Sinn Féin believes in the people of Ireland.

Join with us in building a New Republic.

Sin é. Ar aghaidh linn le chéile

