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SINN FEIN MANIFESTO

The Sinn Fein Manifesto was launched on 1 June. A lengthy and detailed document of almost 40 pages, it seeks to demonstrate that the party has a comprehensive policy for both the short and long term. It describes itself as 'an open, democratic and revolutionary political party'. One leg of its strategy, aimed at the long term, embraces the military activities and political proposals for bringing about a united Ireland. The second leg is aimed at the short term objective of improving the social and economic situation of nationalists in the North.

Political Approach

The vision of a united Ireland is the talisman which engenders and shapes most, if not all, of Sinn Fein's policy. Partition and the dependence on Britain it breeds are seen as synonymous and consequently unity and independence are seen as interdependent. The major stumbling block is not the unionist population but 'British colonial interference'. Loyalists are described as 'a national minority in Ireland. The loyalist cause is also a minority issue in Britain.'

A peaceful and stable Ireland, the Manifesto argues, will only emerge 'through the process of decolonisation and dialogue.' The initiative must be taken by Britain with the repeal of the Government of Northern Ireland Act and a disengagement within a specific time period. Britain 'must declare that its military forces and political administration and system will remain only for as long as it takes to disband the RUC and UDR, transfer power to sovereign authorities, and withdraw'. An all-Ireland constitutional conference would be established to determine a new constitution, including guarantees for unionists, 'and to organise a national system of government'. British withdrawal would not be contingent on the extent or outcome of the conference. A cessation of 'all offensive military actions by all organisations would create the climate necessary for a peaceful transition to a negotiated settlement'.

The manifesto is dismissive of the Anglo-Irish Agreement and 'the process it involves' which, it says, 'seeks merely to camouflage the fact that the Six-County state is a failed social, economic and political entity'.

* Security

The 'armed struggle' is posited in counterpoint to the 'many reform campaigns maintained with little results'. Britain, it says, 'reacts to armed struggle in a way which enhances the negotiating position of the nationalist community'. It equates Sunningdale with the rise in PIRA activity in the early 1970's, and the 'London-Dublin Intergovernmental' talks with the rise of Sinn Fein since the 1982 Assembly election 'and the continuation of the armed struggle'.

While it argues that 'full civil rights and equality ... are not achievable inside an artificially-created sectarian state', as part of its short-run aims, nonetheless, it calls for:

- the repeal of the Emergency Provisions Act, the Prevention of Terrorism Act, the Payment of Debt Act and the Criminal Law Jurisdiction Act;
- an end to the use of Diplock Courts;
- an end to the use of plastic bullets and strip searching;
- the repatriation of Irish prisoners in jails in Britain and an end to forced integration in prisons in the North.

The Economy

In line with its thesis that partition has had a baleful influence not just on nationalists in Northern Ireland but on the island as a whole, the manifesto argues that neither the six nor the twenty-six counties can reach their full social and economic potential - partition 'has divided the Irish economy into two parts which were forced to lean separately on Britain'. While British control remains, Northern Ireland 'will suffer further deindustrialisation and

** you forgive me for this mess and I'll forgive you for yours.*

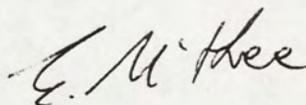
greater dependency on politically-motivated hand-outs from Britain'. As a regional peripheral economy, separated from its natural hinterland - i.e. the South - the Northern Ireland economy has suffered with 'higher rates of poverty, unemployment, bad housing, demoralisation and ill-health', not to mention 'the wholesale export of capital'.

As for the short run, the manifesto calls for various reforms of the social welfare and education system, a massive increase in public expenditure on housing, 'a new and radical approach to health and health care', and the freeing of Irish agriculture from 'the restrictions of both Britain and full EEC memberships' (in preference to associate membership).

The long term solution is only implicitly seen as a united Ireland and there is no specific proposals on the nature of its economic policy for a united Ireland; 'socialism' has been denied even a cursory genuflection in the Manifesto.

Discrimination

The manifesto addresses itself to discrimination within Northern Ireland because 'Sinn Fein recognises the necessity of defending the social and economic interests of working class people and small farmers under existng conditions'. It advocates the adoption of the MacBride principles, that affirmative action programmes be codified in legislation, that statutory obligations be imposed on both the public and private sector to ensure the eradication of discrimination, and the use of statistics to identify discrimination and determine goals and timetables for its eradication.



E. McKee
Political Section
Anglo-Irish Division

Secretary
AI Section
Box
London
Washington
Paris
Vatican

0480C