

Building an Ireland of Equals

Introduction

There is a real choice in General Election 2002.

It is a choice between those who are working to create an Ireland of Equals and those who have created an unequal and divided Ireland. It is a choice between the only all-Ireland party and the partitionist parties. It is a choice between the only growing force in Irish politics and the stagnant array of parties who have failed to inspire the electorate. It is a choice between political commitment and political careerism. It is a choice between real change and more of the same. It is a choice between Sinn Féin and all the rest.

In this Sinn Féin Manifesto we present our vision of an Ireland of Equals and our political, social and economic programme for the building of a better society on this island.

No government since 1922 had a better opportunity to share wealth and create equality than the outgoing Fianna Fáil/Progressive Democrats administration. But it has squandered that opportunity. It has failed to cultivate equity and share prosperity. Instead the outgoing government, like its predecessors, has widened the gap between rich and poor. After a period of unprecedented economic prosperity the majority of our people do not have access to adequate public services.

Creidimid i Sinn Féin go bhfuil dúil ar fhorhóir na ndaoine in Éirinn, páirt suntasach a ghlacadh i sochaí ina bhfuil an comhionannas agus an cothrom mar bhonn lárnach ann. Tá daoine ag iarraidh go gcaithfear a gcuid cánach le haghaidh seirbhísí poiblí níos fearr a sholáthar, agus le haghaidh feabhas a chur ar ghnáth-shaol an duine. Tá an beart seo de dhíth, ach tá an toil pholaitiúil riachtanach le haghaidh é seo a dhéanamh go ceart - toil atá go mór in easnamh leis na páirtithe caomhnacha le fada an lá anois. Tá sé de dhualgas ar gach feisire atá tofa, agus ar an Stát i gcoitinne na rudaí seo a leanas a chur i bhfeidhm:

We in Sinn Féin believe that the vast majority of our citizens want to participate actively in a society that cherishes all the children of the nation equally. They want to see their taxes used to provide better public services and a better quality of life for all. That is a democratic imperative, requiring the real political will which has been lacking in the conservative parties. It is the duty of elected representatives and the function of the State to ensure that:

- Our two-tier health system is replaced with an equitable and efficient health service • Deireadh a chur leis an gcóras sláinte éagórach, agus córas cothrom a chur i bhfeidhm sa tír
- Housing is provided as a right • Ceart na tithíochta a dhaingniú
- Education at every level is open to all • An t-Oideachas a bheith mar bhuncheart
- Childcare is accessible for those who need it • Cúram leanaí a sholáthar go forleathan
- Rural Ireland is regenerated. • Forbairt tuaithe a bhrú chun cinn.

These are among Sinn Féin's priorities in this Manifesto.

A key democratic test of the next government will be whether or not it implements the decision of the electorate on the Treaty of Nice. A referendum replay of the same Treaty rejected by the people would be a travesty of democracy.

As republicans we are totally committed to Irish unity and sovereignty. We want to build upon the peace process and the Good Friday Agreement. We want to prepare for the unification of all the people who share this island in a 32-County Republic.

Mar Phoblachtánaigh, tá athaontú na tíre mar bhunsprioc againn. Táimid ag iarraidh Phróiseas na Síochána agus Chomhaontú Aoine an Chéasta a dhaingniú, agus chun dul ar aghaidh le tógáil orthu. Táimid ag ullmhú le haghaidh athaontú mhuintir na tíre seo i bPoblacht aontaithe Uile-Éireannach.

It took political will, courage and determination to build the peace process. Sinn Féin will apply

those qualities equally to the building of real social and economic change in our country. The only promises we make are the promise of hard work on behalf of the citizens we represent and the promise of our total commitment to social equality, economic justice and political freedom.

PEACE PROCESS

The Peace Process grew out of Sinn Féin's peace strategy. It has delivered the IRA cessations and the Good Friday Agreement and offered us a route map out of conflict and into a new Ireland based on equality and justice. The Good Friday Agreement is an all-Ireland agreement. It transcends partition and it offers a new opportunity for people throughout our island.

This potential, this opportunity, has still to be fully delivered. Yet despite all of the obstacles Sinn Féin is committed to and is determined to see the potential of the Good Friday Agreement realised.

Republicans have taken many risks for peace over the past ten years.

This imaginative and flexible approach to peace making has been a consistent element of this entire process.

Sinn Féin remains convinced that the changes which are clearly necessary - and indeed promised - under the Good Friday Agreement must be delivered. We have been consistent in our demand that the Good Friday Agreement be implemented in full. Since the signing of the Agreement we have been involved in a series of public and private negotiations with the Irish and British governments, with other political parties and with the US administration.

On the policing issue we will continue to demand the accountable policing service promised in the Agreement. We have been to the forefront in demanding not just an accountable policing service, but on issues of demilitarisation, an acceptable system of criminal justice, equality and human rights.

We have honoured every commitment made under the Good Friday Agreement and we now demand that others do likewise.

Throughout the entire peace process, throughout the highs and the lows, Sinn Féin has been the engine for change. We have given real leadership. We have been dynamic and have met all of the challenges placed in before us. We will continue to do this. We will not be diverted from demanding equality and justice. We will continue to be a source of confidence and strength, replacing conflict and division with peace and opportunity.

Our vision of a new agreed Ireland has been the driving force behind our peace strategy. The strategy and the Peace Process that it delivered is about creating change. Change in ordinary people's lives up and down this island. In Derry or Kerry, West Belfast or Dublin South-West.

At this election you can join with Sinn Féin in ensuring that these changes and future changes become irreversible. By supporting Sinn Féin you are strengthening the search for peace and becoming part of the process of delivering change.

Sinn Féin believes that the new Dáil and the incoming government, whatever its composition, must prioritise the peace process. It must put renewed impetus into the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement.

Sinn Féin proposes:-

- Building upon the progress of the all-Ireland Ministerial Council and the Implementation Bodies
- Integrating public policies and services on an all-Ireland basis
- Rapid progress on:
 - Demilitarisation
 - A truly new policing for the six counties

- human rights and equality
- Inquiries into killings involving suspected collusion between British forces and loyalists
- The repeal of the Offences Against the State Act
- The release of all remaining prisoners qualifying for release under the Good Friday Agreement
- A full public inquiry into the Dublin and Monaghan bombings and other killings in the 26 counties involving British forces in collusion with loyalists

IRISH UNITY Building an Alliance for Irish Unity

Sinn Féin is a republican party. We are the only all-Ireland party. We are the only party with a strategy and policies for achieving Irish unity and independence. We are the only party that people can vote for whether they live in Derry, Kerry, Wexford or Antrim. We are the only party bringing a distinctly republican and socialist analysis into the heart of Irish politics. Successive Irish Governments have not had a strategy for advancing Irish Unity. Sinn Féin will address the issue as a matter of urgency.

The primary objective at this time has to be to sustain the peace process and to build the political progress and the Good Friday Agreement. But Sinn Féin continues to work for an end to the union and to ensuring that Irish unity becomes a reality. In recent years we have seen the repeal of the Government of Ireland Act, the creation of all Ireland institutions, some progress on the issue of northern representation in the Oireachtas and the removal of the unionist veto.

Good Friday Agreement

The Good Friday Agreement is an all Ireland Agreement. Our priority is to see that Agreement bedded down, implemented fully, and the peace process stabilised. Sinn Féin will continue to actively develop and advance the potential of the All-Ireland institutions and Implementation Bodies. We will work to ensure that the necessary financial and other resources are available so that substantial progress can take place.

Sinn Féin proposes:

- In the next Dáil we will seek to work with others to begin the process of drawing up a Green Paper on Irish unity.
- To work alongside other political parties, community groups, trade unions and other interested sections of our society in creating an 'Alliance for Irish Unity'.
- The appointment of a Minister of State with specific responsibility for driving forward and coordinating the work of the All-Ireland institutions and implementation bodies.
- To amend Dail procedures to facilitate direct reporting of the progress of the North South Ministerial Council.

Northern Representation

"It is the entitlement and birthright of every person born on the island of Ireland, which includes its island and seas, to be part of the Irish nation. That is also the entitlement of all persons otherwise qualified in accordance with law to be citizens of Ireland ..."

For many years now Sinn Féin has been lobbying intensively for Northern participation in the political life of the nation. It is a logical extension of the outworking of the Good Friday Agreement and is something that will bring considerable benefits to all of us living on the island. We welcome the publication of the report from the All-Party Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution and will continue to work to see this issue developed.

A new Relationship between Ireland and Britain

The process that we are involved in is about creating the conditions for a new democratic, pluralist

dispensation on the island and a new relationship between Ireland and Britain. We want to end British jurisdiction in Ireland. We want to initiate a process for discussing, negotiating and agreeing the future form of all Ireland government structures.

Engaging with Unionists

Republicans do not underestimate the challenge that the changing nature of politics on the island poses to unionists. But neither should unionists ignore the fact that they represent 20% of the population of this island. Their potential is greater in an Irish state which wants their vital and essential contribution than it is as 2% of a British state which has consistently demonstrated no real interest in them except when it serves British establishment interests.

Our goal as Irish republicans therefore is an Irish unity that is inclusive, that unionists will feel welcome in, that they are part of. So we have to quietly, persuasively, and as friends and neighbours persuade unionists that they should consider positively the advantages of a united Ireland. Unionists should be prepared to put forward their vision for the future and to consider, discuss and engage with nationalists and republicans about the nature and form a new united Ireland will take.

While nationalists, republicans and unionists are engaging in a process of change so too must society change to accommodate all of us who live on the island. A United Ireland must be inclusive for all and must guarantee the rights and entitlements of unionists so that they have their own place, their own stake in and a sense of security and ownership.

HEALTH

Introduction Health care is the big casualty of the Fianna Fáil/Progressive Democrats tax-cutting strategy favouring the rich. The effects of cutbacks in health since the 1980s, and subsequent chronic under-funding, have pushed the State to the bottom of the European health league. Thirty years ago Irish men and women lived longer than the average European; Today they will be the first to die.

The poorer you are in Ireland, the more likely you are to become ill and to die prematurely. Unskilled manual workers have a mortality rate 250 per cent higher than in the professions.

The inequalities in health mirror the inequalities in wealth, created by the current Government.

Access to quality health care is increasingly dependent on ability to pay and not on need. Public patients wait years for treatment that is available to private patients within weeks. The result is that more and more people are turning to private health care as they are afraid to depend on public health care; others are abandoned on waiting lists.

Fifty-eight per cent of people rely on the public system for health care, including 18 per cent who are ineligible for a Medical Card but cannot afford insurance cover.

Sinn Féin is proposing the establishment of an all-party cabinet committee to bring forward a focused and integrated plan for the strategic transformation of the health system. This must include widespread public consultation.

The 26 Counties has:-

- The worst life expectancy in Europe for men and women aged 65.
- Four times more women likely to die from cancer than the European average.
- The highest rate of premature death from coronary heart disease in Europe.
- 15 per cent of acute beds closed due to staff shortages.
- 28,000 on public hospital waiting lists
- A five-year waiting list for orthodontic treatment for children.

Waiting Lists

There are almost 28,000 people awaiting hospital treatment; more than 10,000 adult public patients and over 2,000 children have been on hospital waiting lists for 12 months or more.

The Fianna Fáil/Progressive Democrats last-gasp strategy presents a plan to reduce waiting lists, but their targets are little more than wishful thinking as they have failed to guarantee long-term funding and have not dealt with the inequality in the system itself. The current year's matching of European per capita spending masks years of under funding - from a low of 60 per cent in 1989.

Sinn Féin proposes:-

Establishing a single waiting list that ensures universal access to acute services on the basis of need. This process should be fair and transparent.

Two-Tier Health Care

Health care in this state is still a two-tier system and the private sector is subsidised by taxpayers.

The private sector is allocated 20 per cent of the beds in public hospitals but only contributes 11 per cent of the costs of running these hospitals. The two-tier system gives consultants an incentive to occupy as many hospital beds as possible with private patients.

A study by Margaret Wylie of the Economic and Social Research Institute on Private Practice in Irish Public Hospitals found private patients accounted for 30 per cent of hospital admissions, despite the 20 per cent rule. Taxpayers are spending "165 million annually to subsidise the hospital stays of private patients.

Proposals to establish a Treatment Purchase Fund to allow public patients to be treated in private hospitals, while offering a short-term method of cutting waiting lists, perpetuates inequality in the system.

Sinn Féin proposes:

As a central demand a health care system free at the point of delivery for all. This would include GP care, hospital care and medication.

Obviously this cannot be achieved overnight. But with political and administrative will it is an achievable objective. A serious, pragmatic and credible commitment to public services and equality within those services would win huge public support from all sections of society, and could be the basis for civic and social regeneration.

That in the short-term health funding should be increased to 9 per cent of GDP with a sustained period of additional funding to help redress years of under-funding and cutbacks in the public health care system.

That tax incentives for private medical care should be removed and all privileges in waiting times, appointment decisions and medical vested interests be ended.

In the short-term there should also be an extension of Medical Card eligibility to all those on or below the minimum wage and everyone under the age of 18 and people still in full-time education.

Health Insurance Over 1.5 million citizens subscribe to the VHI while BUPA has nearly 200,000 customers. Consumers have seen their subscription costs rise and rise over the past decade (15 per cent in the last year alone for VHI subscribers).

The VHI exists as a stop-gap measure between a fully market driven health system and a public national health service.

The 2000 Economic and Social Research Institute study of the health insurance market found that 77 per cent of people surveyed said that the reason they had bought health insurance was as a means of ensuring they got 'good treatment in hospital'. At the same time, with the entry of BUPA into the health market, there has been an erosion of the principle of community rating where all subscribers on the same insurance plan paid the same fee regardless of age.

Sinn Féin believes that there should not be a market for health care. There should be one public system, free at the point of use.

Sinn Féin proposes:-

A ten-year strategy to convert the private health insurance system into a single-tier public system that really is world class for everybody, regardless of how much they earn or where they live or how old they are.

To oppose any attempt to further privatise VHI or to undermine community rating in health.

Staffing the Health Service

The proposed increase in consultants and other hospital staff is welcome, albeit overdue. A shortage of medical specialists is severely hampering the provision of public health care. From 1980 to 1999, the number of medical, dental and nursing staff in the health services fell from 33,700 to 32,500. And then there are huge inequities in wages and working conditions in the health service.

There are over 15,000 registered non-practising nurses in the State who have chosen not to work in the health service.

In our hospitals, consultants are being paid from the public purse for treating public patients while at the same time they profit from the thriving private health business. They are allowed to work unlimited private hours in public hospitals, using public medical resources and public offices funded by the taxpayer for their business for personal private profit. Their skills can be bought and public waiting lists by-passed at the right price. No system built on that basis can be either fair or efficient.

Sinn Féin recognises that if transforming the health system and creating equality means taking on the vested interests of the most powerful minority in the health services - the consultants who benefit from both private and public practices.

We need to address the shortage in health care workers, especially in specialist consultancies, and ensure that they are distributed throughout the State.

Sinn Féin proposes:-

Additional consultants to work solely in the public sector for the first years of their contracts.

A special location allowance for nurses and junior doctors working in the Greater Dublin area.

Ending the existing system of long working hours for junior doctors and to see the recommendations of the Commission on Nursing implemented.

More public health nurses employed and carers in the home.

More consultants, especially in Accident and Emergency.

Women and Health

According to the National Cancer Registry, one in 13 women in Ireland will develop breast cancer in their lifetime. A woman living in Ireland is four times more likely to die from cancer than her European counterpart.

Sinn Féin proposes

The establishment of a free and prompt national breast and cervical screening programme for all women over 40 and for teenage girls.

Funding for an outreach programme under the auspices of the Women's Health Council to empower women in determining their own health needs.

All Ireland Co-operation on Health It is clearly inefficient that on a small island of less than six million people we have two distinct health systems.

The skills of service providers in the health systems, North and South, can be better utilised, and hospitals and other resources more efficiently deployed if we have enhanced all-island co-operation in the short-term leading to a single all-Ireland health service.

Ending the Accident and Emergency nightmare Hours spent queuing to see a triage nurse, then a wait for a consultation with a doctor and yet more hours delay in receiving actual medical treatment are the norm for patients presenting at Accident and Emergency departments. This creates an intolerable situation for medical staff, patients and their families.

Sinn Féin proposes:-

That decentralisation of services and, building on that adequate capacity in community and hospital services, and the funding of emergency rooms on a proper regional basis, would have the greatest immediate impact on providing a better health service.

Health Promotion

Promoting a healthy lifestyle should be a central element in a good health strategy. Information is key to this and should be available to the public at every opportunity.

Health promotion should involve the health proofing of all public policies and creating environments that promote health and healthy lifestyles.

Tackling Poverty

Poverty, poor housing and other social and environmental factors still determine our health status.

In Ireland today, one in four children and one in five adults live in households existing on less than half the average income. And one in four women raising children or managing households on their own experience poverty. Many students and young workers work excessive hours and are living in sub-standard accommodation that can seriously affect their health.

Sinn Féin supports the development of a comprehensive all-Ireland strategy to eradicate poverty and deprivation in Ireland. This must be properly resourced and carried out within a specified time frame.

Reform of the taxation and social welfare systems must be part of the process to redress health inequalities.

Pharmaceutical Costs

Little attention has been paid to date to the pharmacy costs borne by both the public hospital service and the GMS scheme.

Pharmaceutical companies are among the most profitable businesses internationally and there are huge discrepancies in the prices these companies charge across markets.

This is an issue that needs to be immediately addressed as there is huge potential for health cost savings from instigating a policy of generic drug prescribing and securing bulk discounts. Because of economies of scale, those discounts could be significantly increased if purchasing was organised on an all-Ireland basis.

Regionalisation Round trips of hundreds of miles and then long delays for a ten-minute consultation are the norm for many people in need of medical care living outside of Dublin City and Cork City.

Even within the Dublin region there are huge discrepancies in the provision of health care services.

Sinn Féin proposes:- The establishment of new primary care centres in areas of greatest need as soon as possible.

The strategic development of a regional health care strategy that provides targets and guarantees to ensure delivery.

EDUCATION

Equal Access to Education Sinn Féin will promote an education policy based on the recognition that the people are the richest resource of the nation. We believe education is a fundamental right of all people and can be an essential instrument for the building of an Ireland of equals.

Recent studies have shown over 1.1 million Irish adults without formal educational qualifications and up to 25 per cent of all adults have some level of literacy problems. This is one of the lowest levels of literacy in the industrialised world.

The Higher Education Authority reported in 2000 that there had been no significant improvement in the number of school-leavers from disadvantaged backgrounds reaching university over the past five years. The figures show that of 14,000 students graduating from universities in this State, only 2.2% come from households headed by an unskilled or semi-skilled worker. From the first rung of the education ladder at pre-school, children of low-income families carry a burden which means that they never reach the top rung at third level.

The Problem

Education can fundamentally and positively transform society. At its best, it is child- and student-centred, focusing on the needs, aspirations and talents of each individual learner. Decades of under-funding, however, have prevented children and adults from reaching their full potential through the education system.

The education system continues to mirror and maintain social division and exclusion. Free education is a myth. Participation in education is, to a great extent, still determined by class. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are still extremely unlikely to reach university and are more likely to leave school early.

Many school buildings around the country are in a disgraceful state of disrepair.

Secondary teachers do not receive adequate levels of pay.

The community is the background against which education takes place. This inter-connectedness must spread through the system at all levels, from pre-school through to further education, working to remove barriers to education for the most disadvantaged and groups with specific needs and to promote an ethos of inter-culturalism to serve a diverse population.

The social value of teachers at all levels needs to be recognised

Sinn Féin will support and work for the development of an ethos of "learning organisation" within the education system. This will be alongside the building of Learning Neighbourhoods ñ meaningful partnerships between local education providers and the community they work with and within, where life-long learning is available to all and where a range of educational services are provided to meet individual, community and economic needs.

Towards an Education System for All of Ireland Sinn Féin will support and work for an all-Ireland education system.

Sinn Féin will campaign for the all-Ireland implementation of the right to education, for increased sharing of resources and expertise, easier contact and mobility, and a harmonisation of the two systems based on equality and inclusion.

The Irish Language

Sinn Féin believes that the Irish language should have a central place in the education system at all levels. Emphasis should be on Irish as a spoken, living language.

Improvements in the teaching of Irish at primary and second level should be made with appropriate support and resources for teachers and pupils.

We recognise that, in the past, the responsibility for saving and reviving the Irish language was

placed almost solely upon the education system. What is needed now is for Irish in the education system to be integrated with a multi-faceted approach to the promotion of Irish led by the State and the Irish-speaking community and involving all sectors of society.

Early Years

The primary weakness is the lack of any entitlement of children to early childhood education and the high costs to parents of private early childhood education.

A system of universally available, publicly funded early childhood education is essential.

Sinn Féin will work for:-

- Appropriate resources to enable nursery schools and other early childhood services to work with parents and offer them support and on-site facilities.
- Early detection of special educational needs and dyslexia and providing direct support to the child.
- Extend the Early Start programme.
- A maximum child to adult ratio of 12 to 1.
- Measures to recruit and retain suitably qualified staff, including proper remuneration.
- Provision of naiscoileanna where there is demand and with proper resources.

Primary Level

The primary education sector is characterised by unacceptably large class sizes, low levels of investment in school building and accommodation, staff shortages and inadequate levels of funding. Investment in primary schools should be increased and additional funding made available to schools in marginalised and disadvantaged communities.

Sinn Féin will work for:-

- Primary schools centred in and reflective of the community.
- Co-educational schools in terms of gender where there is local demand.
- Resources to enable detection of special educational needs with a reduction of waiting time for assessment to less than six months.
- Reduction of the pupil-teacher ratio to accord with European norms.
- Extension of the Early Start programme to all schools with pupils from disadvantaged areas.
- Increase in capitation grants to at least "200 per pupil per year
- The provision of gaelscoileanna where there is demand.
- Facilitate cross-Border access to the school that is geographically closer.
- All-Ireland curriculum initiatives.
- Continuing overall priority and increased budgetary provision for primary education.
- Radical action on remedial teaching with increased numbers of teachers and real access to remediation for all schools.
- More flexibility in determining staffing needs of schools to ensure that schools are not left understaffed.
- Fair and just pay and pensions levels for teachers in line with the requirements of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation.

Post-Primary Level Sinn Féin advocates a system of comprehensive, all-ability, 11 to 18 years education, with a broad and balanced curriculum including academic, technical and vocational subjects.

Sinn Féin will work for:-

- Substantially increased support for pupils with social and educational needs, and for extra teachers in such schools.
- Adequate numbers of education support personnel.
- Progressive reduction in class sizes.
- Investment in the infrastructure for science education in schools.
- All-Ireland curriculum initiatives and production of teaching resources on development education.
- Creation of Irish-medium post-primary schools where there is demand.
- Facilitate cross-Border access to the school that is geographically closer.
- Fair levels of pay for post-primary teachers.

Third Level, Further Education and Higher Education

For too long, third-level institutions have been seen as bastions of privilege.

The abolition of university fees has done nothing to help the children of the least-well-off to get into college. They still cannot get to the starting line because of the prohibitive costs of going to college. They cannot live on the totally inadequate grants now available.

Students from outside the university cities face the additional disincentive of the acute shortage of accommodation and the high cost of that accommodation if they are lucky enough to obtain it.

The Government must act to allow access to university to all on the basis of educational merit.

Adult Education

More support is needed for Adult Education aimed at the 500,000 adults in the 26 counties who have basic literacy problems.

Funding is required to open the Back to Education programme to people in employment. Only those unemployed for six months or more can currently access the programme, thus excluding most adults with basic literacy problems.

Free access to second-level education should be recognised as a right for all.

An all-Ireland adult literacy campaign with a clear objective of reducing adult illiteracy to under 5 per cent within four years

Sinn Féin will work for:-

- Access programmes that create meaningful links between colleges and universities and schools that have a low uptake of university places.
- An increased student maintenance grant to social welfare levels, with additional allowances for children and dependants, and greater uniformity of funding and student grants.
- Co-ordinated and common entrance procedures for all the universities in Ireland.
- The development of policies outside the CAO to facilitate access by mature students and students from disadvantaged groups.
- Greater harmonisation of approaches, accreditation and qualifications throughout the island (for example, mutual acceptability of medical qualifications).
- A good childcare infrastructure to support adult education.
- The development of joint curriculum projects in the Irish language and a more extensive national provision of third-level courses in that medium.
- The establishment of an Irish-language university.

- Provision of facilities in every third-level institution where students can pursue their studies through the medium of Irish.
- Special measures to provide student accommodation in the context of addressing the overall housing crisis.

HOUSING

The Housing Problem The last decade has seen a crisis across all parts of the housing sector.

Rising house prices have made the option of owning their own home unaffordable for most people on average incomes.

Waiting lists for local authority housing are at an all time high, up 18 per cent in 2001 alone to 54,000.

Homelessness has doubled in our cities while rents in private rented accommodation and evictions have quadrupled.

There is an illusion that the housing crisis is being solved. It isn't. Despite three expert consultants' reports and a Commission on the Private Rented Sector, there is still a housing crisis in Ireland.

The Housing Crisis

The housing crisis is caused by three factors:-

Uncontrolled vested interests in the private house building sector.

Under-funding of local authority house-building programmes by central government.

Failure to plan for the long-term housing needs of a growing population.

Corruption and Exploitation

The realisation of the scale of corruption uncovered in local government planning shows how vested interests were able to control the supply of private housing. In Dublin, developers were allowed to drip-feed houses onto the market, driving up prices and reaping huge profits.

Even now the attempts to control developers and builders in the Planning and Development Act are floundering. The 20 per cent target for social housing in new developments is not being met, nor are the two-year planning deadlines.

Demographic Change and Social Planning Even at times of population decline, successive governments have failed to house all of our citizens. There has been a sustained population growth in Ireland for the past 30 years. The failure of governments to recognise this level of change or to develop strategies house the tens of thousands of new households being formed is shameful.

For years the Government ignored the need to plan long-term to house its own citizens. Emigration hid the worst excesses of this social planning failure and then, in the 1990s, when migration flows reversed, we "suddenly" had a housing crisis.

Government ministers and TDs should have seen the housing problem coming from a long way off if they really are the efficient and competent economic managers they claim to be.

Under-funding There were unmet housing needs at the start of the 1990s and each year they grew because of government cutbacks. We need now at least a decade of substantially increased spending to redress the problem.

The State is spending over euro140 million this year subsidising private rented accommodation. This is an unrecoverable investment. It shows the short-term view of governments who have wasted hundreds of millions of euros rather than develop a long-term housing strategy.

The Government's Record of Shame

House Prices Average house prices have risen by 90 per cent during the lifetime of this

government. The average price for a house in Dublin in January 2002 was c234,079; for a house outside Dublin, the average cost was c158,730.

Waiting Lists

140,000 people waiting 53,955 households 35 per cent rise between 1999 and 2000

Focus Ireland has estimated that 140,000 people are waiting for housing. Up to November 2001, the number of households on local authority waiting lists stood at 53,955.

Between 1999 and the end of 2001, there was a 35 per cent rise in the number of households on the local authority lists.

Housing lists more than doubled in counties such as Waterford, Westmeath, Monaghan and in south Cork between November 2000 and November 2001.

Waterford County Council had a 118 per cent increase on its waiting list between 2000 and 2001. Westmeath recorded a 104 per cent increase. The number of households on Monaghan's waiting list increased by 102 per cent.

Cork City's waiting list stood at 4,129 households - a 44 per cent increase on 2000 - while 1,301 households were waiting for housing in Galway City, an increase of 76 per cent.

Some 7,477 households were waiting for housing in the Dublin Corporation area.

Rents

The Institute of Auctioneers and Valuers of Ireland predicted rent rises of 18 per cent for 2001.

There was a 250 per cent increase in the numbers facing illegal evictions from private rented accommodation in 2000.

There was a 50 per cent increase in the number of people facing rent increases.

Homelessness

It is estimated that there are 6,000 people homeless in the State, 75 per cent of whom live in Dublin. The Government announced a c228 million strategy to tackle homelessness last year.

The plan does not envisage successfully tackling homelessness until 2010. As with housing waiting lists, a much shorter time frame is needed to tackle the problem.

Planning and Development Act 2000

The Planning and Development Act 2000 proposed two key measures:-

- 20 per cent of land zoned for housing development to be earmarked for social housing schemes.
- A two-year limit on planning permission to stop developers maintaining artificially high houses prices.

The reality in the current housing market is that neither of these two measures is being implemented. Proposals for the withdrawal of tax breaks for owners of multiple dwellings were never brought forward, and last year's Budget brought back mortgage relief for owners of second homes.

In 2001, despite claims to the contrary by the Irish Home Builders Association, the number of new house completions rose to nearly 52,000, a 4 per cent increase on 2000.

Peter Bacon, author of the three Government-commissioned housing reports, has said that these figures raise "a political issue". Bacon adds: "If the Government claims credit for having delivered in excess of the magic figure of 50,000 completions for the second year in succession, somebody will ask why Charlie McCreevy reintroduced mortgage relief. Bacon concluded: "Aggressive lobbying may have panicked the Government."

What the figures and the Government's u-turn on taking away special incentives for property developers and investors show is that vested interests still have the power to dictate government housing policy.

Despite the exposure of planning corruption and undue political influence on government by developers, nothing has changed.

Private Rented Sector

Despite establishing a Commission on the Private Rented Sector, the Government has been unwilling to offer more protection for tenants through rent control, minimum accommodation standards or requiring landlords to offer longer leases to tenants.

Infrastructure and Planning

There is also a need to recognise that housing provision does not happen in a vacuum. Substantial investment in infrastructure such as roads, sewerage, public transport, local health and education facilities is needed. Serious consideration needs to be given to the issue of where new housing stock should be located.

The first step is recognising the planning blight caused by the never-ending suburban sprawls outside our larger towns and cities. There is a danger that measures used to speed up planning applications could also create the environment where in haste bad planning decisions are taken with serious long-term consequences.

This need for extreme care is all the more important as the scale of housing projects needed over the next ten years could easily lead governments back to the short-term quick fixes of the past which end up as huge planning blunders. Planning should be holistic and include provision for community facilities and public utilities. In other words for the development of urban villages.

Sinn Féin's Plan of Action on Housing

Housing is a Basic Right

Sinn Féin believes that proper accommodation is a basic inalienable right and we support enshrining the right to housing in the Constitution.

Tax Incentives and State Support

While many home owners benefit from mortgage interest rate relief, first-time buyer's grants, shared ownership schemes and other tax provisions, there is a pressing need to re-evaluate the role of government in subsidising or defraying housing costs. At the core of this re-evaluation should be the need to ensure equality of treatment in how the State disburses tax incentives and other supports into the housing market. Sinn Féin believes that the present system is riven with inequality

The present state support system inflates the profits of financial institutions rather than targeting State support at lower income householders.

Capital Gains Tax should be restored to its 1997 level of 40 per cent. There should be an increase in Capital Gains Tax on speculative owners of multiple dwellings. Such a tax would be introduced on a phased basis over two years. There should be a review of the Seaside Resort Tax Incentive Scheme.

Land Issues & Developers

The hoarding of land to inflate house prices is a deplorable and anti-social act. Sinn Féin supports the control of land prices, with a statutory ceiling on the price of land zoned for housing to stop speculation and reduce soaring house prices.

Sinn Féin also supports the use of Compulsory Purchase Orders against speculators sitting on land banks and derelict property.

The indirect benefit conferred on developers by State investment in infrastructure needs to be established and a code of practice implemented to ensure that private developers are not profiting from the development of infrastructure by local and/or central government.

Time Scales

In every decade of the last century there has been a housing shortage which successive administrations have failed to resolve.

Sinn Féin believes that housing policy throughout the island should be directed towards an elimination of local authority waiting lists.

There should be an immediate target of supplying suitable accommodation within two years for 70 per cent of applicants.

State Funding

While not being the sole barrier to private home ownership, high purchase prices and mortgage costs are undoubtedly a serious obstacle. A State-run financial institution or partnership between the Government and the more progressive financial institutions such as local credit unions could provide an effective means for lower income households to purchase their own homes.

A Housing Strategy and a Housing Agency While provision of housing should be planned and organised at a local level, there is a strong need for a State Housing Strategy to be co-ordinated by a Housing Agency. The Housing Agency would maximise the efforts of local authorities throughout the island by focussing funding and expertise where housing need is greatest.

Such a body must not be a top-down organisation but would instead constitute the shared knowledge and experience in Ireland and use it for dealing equitably, effectively and efficiently with the housing problems that afflict communities throughout the island.

A Housing Agency would co-ordinate public, private, co-operative and shared ownership housing schemes.

Planning

Bad planning and bad housing provision in the past have meant that governments have had to demolish and rebuild housing projects. The Ballymun and Divis Flats complexes provide a stark reminder of the scale of these planning failures.

Community involvement in the planning process must be a basic starting point of any development plan, whether local government or private developers lead it.

Sinn Féin believes there should be much more focus on developing brown field sites and that housing projects should not be built independent of the necessary social amenities such as schools, health facilities, retail outlets and an adequate, accessible and affordable local public transport infrastructure. This integrated approach should be enshrined in planning legislation.

There is a need to establish best practice on issues such as housing mix in new developments, as well as dwelling size, size of green and common areas, and overall environmental impact.

Voluntary and Community Housing

The full potential of the voluntary and community sector's contribution to resolving the supply of housing in Ireland has never been established.

Sinn Féin believes there is a need to provide resources for developing the best possible models of voluntary and community housing schemes.

We believe there should be one streamlined funding scheme with simple procedures for running these schemes.

Private Rented Sector

While private home ownership is the most common form of housing provision in Ireland today, a significant part of the population is, often unwillingly, living in private rented accommodation.

Sinn Féin deplores the lack of protection under law offered to tenants, particularly in quality of accommodation, length of leases and rent increases.

Sinn Féin supports a system of rent control linked to year of purchase and investment in a dwelling. Tax-evading landlords must be pursued. There must be minimum standards of accommodation and inspection units accountable to local government to ensure implementation of quality control.

The achievement of proper targets for the reduction of housing waiting lists would reduce the wasteful expenditure of hundreds of millions of pounds on subsidising private rented accommodation through the Rent Supplement Scheme.

Homelessness

Sinn Féin supports the demand for the full implementation of an integrated strategy on homelessness.

Local Authority Homeless Action Plans should be placed on a statutory basis.

We support the call for specific targets for the reduction of the absolute numbers of homeless people based on 2002 figures. On the basis of equity, this should aim at 70 per cent reduction within two years.

There should be an immediate process of consultation with all the relevant voluntary and statutory agencies to target youth homelessness and to develop and implement an Action Plan on Mental Health among homeless people.

Housing Commission

Sinn Féin supports the establishment of a Housing Commissioner's Office. Its function would be to:-

- Protect the rights of home owners.
- Support new home owners to enforce snag lists.
- Monitor the implementation of housing and planning legislation.
- Ensure an end to gazzumping.
- Monitor house price changes.
- Monitor the hidden cost of auctioneers' and solicitors' fees.
- Establish a legally enforceable code of practice for house builders and vendors.

Special Needs

The supply of housing is often portrayed in simplistic terms, where all that is needed are more dwellings built as quickly as possible. However, for a wide range of groups the provision of housing is a much more complex problem. Groups such as Travellers, refugees, asylum seekers, women at risk, the elderly, and the homeless all need and have a right to suitably tailored housing provisions.

Sinn Féin calls for the repeal of the sections of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2002 which criminalise trespass, gives sweeping new powers to the Gardaí and is aimed principally at Travellers. Given the failure of the majority of local authorities to provide the Traveller accommodation to which they are committed, this legislation can only be seen as a draconian response which also has wider implications for civil liberties.

There should be full provision of good quality and appropriate accommodation for Travellers as recommended in the Task Force Report of 1995. We need Government action to ensure that all local authorities fulfil their obligations in this regard. We also call for an independent review of the

operation of Traveller Accommodation Act of 1998. **Sinn Féin proposes:-** Enshrining the Right to Housing in the Constitution.

A National Housing Strategy and a National Housing Agency to co-ordinate all aspects of housing provision.

State-led initiatives in partnership with progressive financial institutions such as credit unions to allow lower-income earners to purchase their own homes.

Increased and sustained funding of local authorities to provide housing with a target of supplying suitable accommodation within two years for 70 per cent of applicants on the waiting lists.

An increase in Capital Gains Tax on speculative owners of multiple dwellings, introduced on a phased basis over two years.

A statutory ceiling on the price of land zoned for housing to stop speculation and reduce soaring house prices. Compulsory Purchase Orders on landowners sitting on land banks and derelict property.

Direct community involvement in planning for housing. Legislation to ensure that social needs are incorporated in all housing schemes from the earliest stage.

A single streamlined funding scheme for voluntary and community housing.

Rent control in the private rented sector and enforcement of enhanced legislative protection for tenants.

The establishment of a Housing Ombudsman's Office.

Full implementation of an integrated strategy for homelessness with a target of 70 per cent reduction within two years.

A Government fund to provide capital loans for universities and third-level institutions to facilitate the development of purpose-built student accommodation.

Suitably tailored housing provision for those with special needs such as people with disabilities, women at risk, asylum seekers, Travellers, elderly people and the homeless.

SOCIAL INCLUSION

A Socially Inclusive Ireland Sinn Féin advocates the right to social, economic, gender and cultural equality. This encompasses equality for all, irrespective of race, age, marital or family status, sexual orientation, physical or mental capacities, ethnicity, social origin, political or religious affiliations, or membership of the Travelling Community.

Creating the conditions for establishing an equal society means recognising that many diverse groups and sections of Irish society need enhanced protection from the State. We must tackle the trend to blame a person or group for their exclusion from society.

It is the same mentality that leads to the isolation of people who are old, handicapped and disabled. We need to recognise that Ireland and Irish society is the sum of its parts and there is no rationale for excluding any group. **Human Rights** Sinn Féin calls for the full implementation and continuous monitoring of the effectiveness of equal status and employment equality legislation. We call for the establishment on a proper working basis of the Human Rights Commission in the 26 Counties as provided for in the Good Friday Agreement. **Racism** In Ireland today, where the gap between rich and poor is ever greater and the provision of social services is clearly inadequate, there are those who complain about asylum seekers and immigrants as being partially responsible for the housing problem and for hospital waiting lists. This is wrong. We had a housing problem and a health service in crisis long before we had immigrants; and we will still have these problems unless the basis on which we allocate resources is fundamentally changed.

Sinn Féin believes that the response to racism must be built at a community level. Whether racism

exists institutionally or attitudinally, it afflicts human beings and represents a violation of fundamental rights. The challenge to racism needs to have local communities to the forefront in actively campaigning to advance the equality agenda.

Sinn Féin proposes:-

- The inclusion of anti-racist education as a component part of the curriculum in primary and secondary schools throughout Ireland.
- That the Irish Government signs and ratifies the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.
- The establishment of a multi-agency task force that will aid the positive integration of immigrants into Irish society.
- The work permit scheme for immigrants to be reformed so that permits are granted to employees and not to employers
- Provision of resources to ensure speedier processing of claims for asylum.
- The right to work or study for asylum seekers while their claims are being processed.

Supporting People with Disabilities

Sinn Féin believes that the rights and needs of people with disabilities must be a Government priority. People who suffer disability need more resources invested in them and their families to ensure equality of access to education, health, transport services and to the workplace. The State must recognise that everybody has the right to a dignified standard of living and general life experience.

Sinn Féin Proposes:-

- An Independent Living Fund for people with disabilities.
- Direct payments to people with disabilities and their personal assistants.
- Increased and secured financial support for those providing services including day resource centres and personal assistance services.
- Introduction of a cost of disability living allowance as recommended by the Commission for Status of People with Disabilities.
- Increase in the Mobility Allowance.
- Financial support for full-time carers through the increase of the Carer's Allowance and an end to the means test.
- Funding to continue progress in cutting waiting lists for people with mental handicaps or intellectual disabilities. **Rights of Children** The experience of abuse and exploitation suffered by generations of our children is entirely unacceptable. These abuses were possible because some of the most powerful and unaccountable institutions in our society were given control over vulnerable children, the least powerful in our society.

All those involved in such abuse must be charged, prosecuted. Those who were involved in the covering up of or deliberate neglect of children in their care must also be made accountable for this fundamental denial of an individual's right to safety and well-being, both physical and mental.

The necessary steps to ensure that such systematic abuse can never happen again must be implemented by the newly elected Dáil.

There is a clear need to enshrine in the Constitution and in legislation the rights of children to grow and live in a safe secure environment with equal access to health education and other vital services.

Sinn Féin proposes:-

- The appointment of a Minister and Department of Children.
- The Department of Children to have responsibility for childcare and all aspects of children's rights.
- Full disclosure by the State, the churches, and all other relevant institutions of information in relation to abuse cases.

Older People

The desire for independence, respect and involvement in the decision-making process are important factors for older people.

Sinn Féin commends the efforts of the Senior Citizens' Parliament in pursuing the interests of its members.

Sinn Féin proposes:-

- A rights-based culture where old age pensioners' social insurance contributions during their working lives are linked to inflation. The insurance-related pension should be at a level to give a sufficient standard of living.
- Retrospective pension credits for those who spent their working lives caring for others.
- Statutory funding for voluntary agencies such as Meals on Wheels.
- Support for local services at a community level, including day centres and day care centres, with transport available.
- Well resourced health care for older people.

JUSTICE AND THE COMMUNITY

Introduction

It is the State's responsibility to ensure that every citizen feels safe in their own homes and in their own communities. It is also the right of every citizen to expect that public servants and elected representatives carry out their obligations in an impartial and objective manner.

At present,, the Irish legal system focuses on some examples of socially harmful behaviour and ignores others. It is aided and abetted by an enforcement system that devotes more resources to the pursuit of some types of law breaking - such as public order offences, for example - than to others, such as tax evasion or corruption. The inevitable result of this system is a criminal population which contains a disproportionate number of those who are poor, less educated and unskilled. **Crime Statistics** To facilitate an informed debate on how the criminal justice system may be reformed, and how resources can be most effectively targeted, we need to look at how crime statistics are compiled. There is also a pressing need for accurate empirical data on the courts' sentencing practices and for detailed analysis of the rate of recidivism of the Irish prison system. Sinn Féin proposes:- To initiate a review of how crime statistics are gathered, involving representatives of the An Garda Síochána, criminologists, communities, agencies working with victims (e.g. the Rape Crisis Centre, etc.) and other interested parties. **Criminal Justice** Our criminal justice legislation is in need of radical reform. The continued use of the non-jury Special Criminal Court and the emergency legislation are ongoing concerns. It is unacceptable that citizens can be denied the right to a trial by jury without the prosecution having to so much as give a reason, much less establish prima facie grounds for the transfer.

Sinn Féin Proposes:-

- The abolition of the Special Criminal Court and the restoration of the right to a trial by jury of one's peers.
- A system of proper recording of court proceedings and judicial decisions at District Court level.

- An increase, in accordance with the principle of equality of impact, in the maximum fine for corporations to take account of the fact that a corporation, unlike a human person, cannot be imprisoned.
- The appointment of district court judges to be taken out of the hands of the Minister for Justice. District court judges should be appointed on the recommendation of the Judicial Appointments Advisory Board, as is currently the practice with Circuit Court, High Court and Supreme Court judges.
- The establishment of a Legal Ombudsman's Office to ensure that citizens receive a proper service from solicitors and barristers.
- A review of the Family Law Courts, including practices, resources, customer care and facilities for adults and children attending courts and associated services. People (primarily women) compelled to use the Family Law Courts should not feel intimidated or be caused added stress by an ill-equipped service nominally dedicated to family welfare.

The Prison System There needs to be a re-evaluation of the use of imprisonment in the system. Many of those in prison may not need to be there, while there is a shortage of places for hardened criminals. We need to ensure that imprisonment is used to protect the community not only by removing offenders but by seeking to ensure they do not reoffend in the future. The recent announcement that the Central Mental Hospital in Dundrum is refusing admissions due to staff shortages is a disgrace. It means that people with serious psychiatric problems will remain housed in outdated and totally unsuitable prison conditions. Furthermore, it is a source of considerable concern that young persons who are being held in custody pending trial are housed in an adult prison. This situation presents the courts with an invidious choice: to let them go or to house them in conditions which are totally inappropriate. **Sinn Féin proposes:-**

- The provision of proper facilities to detain young people who are on remand.
- The extension of provision of detoxification programmes to all prisoners seeking to deal with their drug addiction.
- The allocation of resources to ensure that proper medical treatment for those within the prison system is available.
- A review of the law on insanity and the introduction of an appropriate statutory definition of insanity on foot of such a review.
- A review of the practice of imprisonment to ensure that fines and forms of sanction other than imprisonment are used where they are appropriate.
- The effective incorporation of the European Convention of Human Rights into Irish law.

An Ghaeilge sa chóras dlí choiriúil

Article 8 (1) of the Constitution states: "is í an Ghaeilge an teanga náisiúnta is í an phríomhtheanga oifigiúil í." In the English version: "The Irish language as the national language is the first official language." The Courts Service and the Department of Justice have consistently acted in deliberate breach of this provision. Sinn Féin proposes:-

- The provision of simultaneous translation facilities in the courts.
- The introduction of facilities to produce accurate transcripts of proceedings conducted through Irish.
- The bilingual publication of Bills and bilingual enactment of Acts of the Oireachtas and Statutory Instruments.
- The publication of authoritative Irish versions of the Rules of the Superior Courts, Circuit Court Rule and District Court Rules.

- The provision of Irish-language training facilities for judges, registrars and district court clerks.
- The treatment of the Gaeltachtaí as a distinct circuit and as a distinct district for the purposes of court administration, in both criminal and civil matters.

Delays in the court system

Sinn Féin is concerned at the backlogs in the court system. Delays in the hearing of criminal trials can result in increased anxiety for victims or witnesses (who may live near the accused person) or the accused persons who have charges hanging over them. It can also result in longer periods in detention for accused persons who are refused bail and who may subsequently be acquitted.

The increasing number of judges who are involved in tribunals of inquiry into corruption, the Hepatitis C and child abuse scandals has added to delays in the system. Sinn Féin proposes:-

- The compilation of up-to-date and accurate statistics on delays in the court system.
- A review of the administrative needs of the court system with a view to identifying and dealing with bottlenecks that cause backlogs and delays.
- The appointment of additional judges at District Court, Circuit Court and High Court level.
- A major refurbishment programme for the State's courts to bring them up to safe standards for people to work in and for the public attending court.
- A complete review of the Children's Court.

Community

Dealing with criminal and anti-social behaviour is a complex matter. It involves co-ordinating the work of the Gardaí and local communities. It involves identifying areas of need and directing resources to these areas. There is no simple solution. The confidence of local communities in the criminal justice system depends, to a large degree, on the willingness of An Garda Síochána to co-operate with those communities and to respond to their heartfelt concern about the issues which affect their areas. Sinn Féin will continue to work to foster greater co-operation between An Garda Síochána and the communities we represent. There is no alternative to such an approach. There is a direct correlation between social disadvantage and certain forms of anti-social behaviour just as there is a direct correlation between social advantage and other forms of anti-social behaviour. However, the vast majority of people in disadvantaged areas are decent, hard working people who want a civic accountable policing service. Sinn Féin Proposes:-

- Working with disadvantaged communities to identify their needs and provide the resources required to meet these needs.
- The institution of restorative justice schemes which give the victim, the offender and the community a say in the treatment of offenders.
- The provision, through the Judicial Studies Institute, of social awareness training for newly appointed judges who feel they may not have been exposed to the problems associated with social deprivation, during their practice as lawyers.
- The extension of the community policing resources in all areas.
- The formation of Community Policing Boards with representation from An Garda Síochána and from the communities they serve to formulate policies suited to both.

Victims

Under the adversarial system used in our courts, victims are simply witnesses and have no right to legal or other support. A crime, especially a violent crime, can have a lasting impact on the victim. One area where this inhibits people reporting crime is in the area of sexual assault or abuse. The trial in such cases can be a greater ordeal for the victim than for the accused.

The state should support those agencies with victims and provide counselling and other support services where needed. Often this can best be co-ordinated through the working with local communities. Community Restorative Justice programmes have a role to play in this. Sinn Féin proposes: The creation of a victim support unit working within the Department of Justice to co-ordinate the provision of services to victims of crime. For serious crimes involving violence, and especially in sexual assault cases, victims should be entitled to legal representation at a trial.

Drugs / Substance misuse The scourge of substance abuse - alcohol, solvent abuse, the misuse of prescription drugs and illegal drugs - continues to change and reach all parts of this island. In many communities alcohol has been identified as the major drug of misuse. No city or town has escaped the clutches of drug abuse and its associated problems. Many communities continue to be devastated with third generations of families now on drugs.

Sinn Féin has been to the forefront in dealing with the causes and consequences of drug abuse for over 20 years. We understand that nowhere has drug addiction been totally defeated but many communities, especially in the larger cities, have gained much experience. This experience needs to be shared with other parts of the country that are facing up to the nightmare of drug addiction. This experience also needs to be reflected in Government policy.

Substance abuse is a multi-faceted problem and requires a multi-faceted approach. This means that community, statutory, voluntary and Government agencies must operate as equals in putting together plans to reduce the demand for drugs in our communities.

Therefore a truly wide-ranging response is required, with the same priority and resources that were set aside to deal with the foot and mouth crisis. The extension of the Local Drugs Task Force model across Ireland would allow all those with the experience and expertise to work together in dealing with drug abuse.

One addiction that has been clearly identified and responded to is that of benzodiazepine addiction. This is a serious problem and needs addressing as a matter of urgency. **Sinn Féin proposes:-**

- The setting up of Local Drug Task Forces where the community has identified a need. These must be responsive to local requirements.
- Extending of the all-Ireland co-operation in tackling drug abuse.
- Adequate support and resources for community involvement in compiling and implementing any future Drugs Strategy.
- Extending funding to projects from one to five years and a clear commitment to fully fund a drug/alcohol strategy
- The promotion of community-based treatment and rehabilitation projects.
- A total review of methadone-based approaches to dealing with opiate addiction.
- The inclusion of benzodiazepine dependency in any future Drugs Strategy.
- Community involvement in drafting any future Government drugs policy.
- Greatly improved community policing to combat both drug pushing and anti-social crime associated with the drugs problem.
- Integration of the alcohol and drug strategies into one integrated, comprehensive plan.

An Garda Síochána

Every society needs a police service and every police service needs the support of the communities they serve. For that reason it is imperative that there is total transparency and trust between the police service and the communities. In many parts of the country this transparency and trust is not there. In recent times a number of issues have arisen which can damage public confidence in the Garda Síochána. The Abbeylara shooting, the McBrearty case in Donegal, revelations of fraud in

relation to contracts, and criticism by judges in relation to the giving of false evidence in court all damage the relationship between the Gardaí and communities they are meant to serve. It is imperative that all of these issues are thoroughly investigated and any disciplinary actions required are taken. It is also imperative that the investigations are seen to be independent and fair to all involved.

Sinn Féin proposes:-

- The setting up of a Policing Board
- The setting up of an office of a Garda Ombudsman, independent of the Gardaí, and with power to initiate independent investigations.
- The independent investigation, as matter of urgent priority, of allegations that conversations between detained persons and their legal advisers were routinely taped in Garda Stations.
- Mandatory use of video taping of interviews with suspects.
- Appointments to senior Garda positions to be dealt with by an independent board and not by political appointment.
- Human rights training for all Gardaí.
- A review of Garda equipment and procedures to ensure efficient policing in a modern environment.
- Decentralisation of Garda Siochána structures to ensure that the Gardaí are more accountable and responsive to local policing needs.

The Economy

Introduction

The last ten years have been a time of unprecedented economic growth. There is greater prosperity in Ireland and more people are working, but successive governments have failed to use economic growth to create equality. Not only did the Fianna Fáil/Progressive Democrats coalition fail to tackle the structural inequalities that warp our economy and damage our society, they actually worsened those inequalities and widened the gap between rich and poor and between men and women in every single budget over the last five years.

A United Nations report (July 2001) has found that we have the most unequal distribution of wealth of any industrialised state outside the USA.

A quarter of our children and a fifth of our adults are in households with less than half the average income. Women are over represented among those on the minimum wage and in the area of part-time work, which is economically undervalued.

There is a crisis in our health care system and a housing nightmare for the 54,000 housing units, representing 140,000 people in need of accommodation.

One in four women raising children, or managing households on their own experience poverty.

Sinn Féin's Vision of a Just Economy

Sinn Féin seeks to build an all-Ireland economy where everyone can have a dignified, productive and well-paid job and all can have a fair income and better quality of life.

We want an economy where everyone's contribution -whether in the workplace, the home, the school or hospital - is valued.

We need an economy growing not just in an environmentally sustainable way but in a manner that reverses the erosion of our environment in past decades and develops a better quality of life for us now and generations to come.

Managing the Economy Thousands of new jobs have been created over the last decade and considerable wealth has been generated. However, the economic experience of the last year has shown that the current coalition government and the larger opposition parties are unwilling to ensure that the wealth is shared and invested for the benefit of everyone in society.

They have left us in this new century with a nightmare health service and a road, rail and public transport network that is in crisis and verging on collapse. They have also left us with an under-funded energy system with no real long-term development strategy. The telecommunications network, one of the keys to our future prosperity, has been sold off to the highest bidders without any guarantees that the new owners are prepared to maintain the level of investment needed to ensure that Ireland can thrive in the emerging knowledge economy.

There are serious economic issues beyond the simple figure of how many jobs were created. Sinn Féin seeks an economy where those who work to generate wealth do so in the knowledge that they can afford housing and an economy where they don't have to be worried about the cost implications of being ill. Sinn Féin seeks an economy where parents can be assured that their children are getting the best possible education, no matter where they live or how much wealth their parents have.

The issues that need to be addressed include:

- Low pay
- Working conditions
- The role of the government in the economy
- Regional and rural under-development
- Developing the economy without creating more inequalities and divisions in society
- Lack of affordable childcare

Sustainable Economic Development

Inward Investment Over the past number of years inward investment has contributed the economic growth in the Irish economy.

However current government policy is over-dependent on inward investors. The last year has shown, once again, the impact that the closure of transnational companies can have on local economies. For example, the closure of General Semi in Macroom, County Cork, and the loss of 670 jobs has the knock on effect of tearing d38 million (£30 million) out of the local economy. This experience has been repeated again and again over the past 18 months. Communities in Donegal, Sligo, Mayo, Dublin, Louth, Offaly and Wexford have all had to come to terms with the downsides of economic dependency on international investors.

Nearly ten thousand fewer new Industrial Development Authority (IDA) jobs were created in 2001 compared to 2000.

Indigenous Enterprise The same quantity and quality of resources made available to inward investors should be made available to indigenous enterprises. The internationalisation of many industries, particularly food processing, has led to the shutting down of many smaller plants, often with dire consequences for the small towns and villages they are sited in. Local communities have found themselves powerless to prevent this.

We need an indigenous economic development strategy that focuses on overcoming this asset stripping of local and regional economies. Ireland needs a balance between inward and indigenous investment. We need to encourage both small and large-scale indigenous companies, with a research and development anchor. Although large-scale industries can drive the economy and will often develop and fund infrastructure.

We need to recognise that the bulk of employment in Ireland stems from small and medium-sized

business and to support those niche industries that have been created.

The State Sector State investment and State companies built the infrastructure on which recent economic growth has been based.

Sinn Féin deplores the moves in recent years to downgrade the State involvement in the economy. Sinn Féin is opposed to the privatisation of State enterprises. There is huge underdevelopment of State sector companies. Although we still have Aer Rianta, ESB, the CIE companies, Bord na Mona and Aer Lingus, employment in this sector has declined as a result of Government policy.

In a small economy like Ireland's we need to provide a sound economic base and infrastructure that is not dependent on the whims of international investors.

Social Economy and Small Businesses

As a society we need to move away from the notion that profit is the only reason for engaging in enterprise.

Social economy enterprises that fulfill a social need help make other businesses more profitable. We need to unblock institutional resistance in terms of funding and taxation in the social economy.

Funding should be made available for the establishment of community-based co-operative enterprises.

Rewarding Research and Investment

We need to support and reward indigenous industry when it engages in research and development strategies leading to long-term, sustainable employment.

Targeted and carefully monitored tax incentives have a role in developing business, safeguarding existing jobs and creating new ones. A creative corporate tax regime has an important part to play in funding and encouraging research and development by Irish businesses.

We need more financial support for research in universities and colleges and greater attention to building links between these institutions and industry.

Training

Training is an essential element of any regional development strategy. We need to target training in line with strategy, whether it is based on technology, agricultural, tourist, or other industrial sector.

There is also a need to redefine what makes up the skills pool. People bring different life-skills to the economy. We need to ensure that all contributions are recognised whether from the long-term unemployed, over-65s, lone parents, or mothers returning to work. These groups need to have the same access to training as those sectors of the workforce at whom most skills and educational investment is targeted.

A Knowledge-Based Economy

Creating new businesses and helping existing ones grow does not happen in a vacuum. It comes about in the context of the supply of skilled workers with access to transport and telecommunications infrastructures. The absence of any of these elements is a serious impediment to economic development.

In the modern international economy location is not a determinant to inward investment or employment opportunity. What matters is access to resources and infrastructure, especially in terms of the new information and communication technologies (ICT), as well as education, transport and energy. Access to ICT technology is a powerful force in creating a level playing field for future development and job-creation strategies.

The Western Development Commission has identified poor infrastructure as the main barrier to development in that region. But this infrastructural poverty is felt in varying degrees throughout the

economy and must be tackled on an all-island basis.

In the last decade, governments have addressed the need for a greatly improved infrastructure in a piecemeal and poorly planned manner. While the Fianna Fáil/Progressive Democrats 'National' Development Plan provides for many major projects, it continues the piecemeal and poorly planned approach. Already the delivery of projects is behind schedule. Serious deficiencies in infrastructure exist that will impede future economic progress.

We need an urgent reevaluation of our strategies in telecommunications, road, rail, energy, childcare, health and education. These strategies also need to be developed on an all-island basis. It makes no sense to develop strategies on a partitionist basis.

Secure Employment Strategies

In the field of new technologies, international companies lead much of the pace of development. However, a growing number of Irish companies have shown that they too can develop and successfully launch new products. The greater number of indigenous companies we create in the Irish economy, the better we can support the economy as a whole.

The downturn in the economy over the last year emphasises the need for a balanced approach in investment in indigenous and international companies.

Thousands of workers entered mortgage and other major life commitments in the belief that their jobs were secure in the long-term. With many of these workers losing their jobs there is a need at Government level to shoulder some of the financial responsibility now falling on families where key household members are now jobless.

We support the Irish Congress of Trade Unions demand for an increase in statutory redundancy from half a week per year of service to three weeks per year of service.

Sinn Féin Proposes:-

- **More support for Small Businesses.** Many people have small business ideas that are in the embryonic stage and need funding as well as expert guidance. These businesses can often generate small profits but a lot of local employment. They are often overlooked by the industrial development agencies.
- **Developing New Local Brands.** Many small businesses are not, in themselves, large enough to enter export markets. With the right guidance and support from Enterprise Ireland they could begin joint ventures to develop, produce and market products outside of Ireland. Tourism is marketed outside of Ireland as one common brand - surely this idea can apply to other goods.
- **Matching Funds for Local Business.** The industrial development bodies should provide the same level of support and funding for indigenous business as is currently provided to inward investment projects.
- **Long-term stability.** The IDA currently considers ten years to be the shelf-life of the companies it brings to Ireland. New local Irish companies should be given at least the same level of time to develop themselves. We need to take the view that long-term stability is more desirable than short-term erratic "boom and bust" episodes.
- **The inclusion of penalty clauses in all agreements with companies receiving government grants, in the event of the company pulling out.**
- **Support for enterprises in the Social Economy.** Many communities have ideas and plans for socially valuable local businesses.
- **Trade Union Recognition.** Sinn Féin will make grants to business conditional on acceptance of the right of employees to join and to be represented by a trade union of their choice.
- **Funding a Return to Education.** In some cases of job losses there is a need for retraining of

workers who will then be better placed to find other employment or perhaps start their own businesses. There needs to be a commitment to investing in education for all sectors of society now more than ever.

- Support for Agricultural Diversification. Funding should be made available to those farmers who wish to diversify their farm business. This will help to keep younger farmers on the land as well as create jobs in rural areas.

Infrastructure

The Digital Divide

We need to ensure that existing telecommunications networks, not just in this state but throughout the island, are developed and improved and that the new high-speed fibre optic networks are constructed under the principle of universal provision.

It is vital that all of the island's towns and regions, whether in isolated rural areas or neglected urban communities, have access to this new technology that is the basic building block of the knowledge economy.

The reticence of the private sector to invest in these services without state support or "partnership" shows clearly how vital it is to have public ownership of these utilities.

There is widespread recognition throughout Irish society of the need to invest in the new communications and computer technologies that have become the cornerstone of modern economies. What has not been recognised is the need for State involvement to ensure equity in how these communications resources are developed and accessed.

Sinn Féin proposes

- All telephone exchanges should be ADSL (Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line) enabled.
- An enhanced cable infrastructure throughout the State, enabling the deployment of new technologies to all communities and especially to schools.
- To guarantee that all schools are adequately funded and maintained so that they are in a position to actively tackle the literacy problems of nearly one quarter of Irish adults that effectively bars them from having any skills in the new technologies demanded in the modern workplace.

Energy

We need an environmentally sustainable and long-term strategy.

There is a pressing need for an all-island energy supply that is affordable, environmentally sustainable and nuclear free.

This industry should be in public hands to ensure efficient utilisation, distribution and equity.

Ireland enjoys a massive natural resource off our west coast. The government has failed to obtain the best negotiating terms from the multinational oil and gas companies. Just like Norway, we could have a thriving state-owned gas and oil exploration industry, creating thousands of jobs and generating significant growth in the Irish economy.

Instead we find that the existing government's negotiation position collapsed in the face of the multi-national oil and gas companies. The people of Ireland have been short-changed yet again. The abandonment of Ireland's 50% stake in discovery projects, of royalties and the introduction of massive write-offs for oil companies alongside the introduction of long-term Frontier Licences all mean that what the present government once described as the 'most significant development ever in the west of Ireland' may turn out to be the greatest lost opportunity in Irish economic history.

We must learn lessons from all of this. It is vital that we exploit the wealth that exists in Irish natural resources for the benefit of the people.

Sinn Féin proposes:

- The establishment of an all-Ireland state-owned gas and oil exploration industry to keep benefits and profits in Ireland.
- That gas is made available to as many people as possible by continuing to support an all-Ireland gas distribution network.
- That full environmental impact assessments are carried out and that their findings are at the core of all major oil and gas exploration, extraction and distribution plans.
- To ensure that major infra-structural developments reflect a combined strategy between the Assembly and the Dublin Government to develop all-Ireland electricity generation plans along with gas distribution proposals.

Roads

The planned development and proper maintenance of our road network is essential as part of an integrated transport strategy. A balance must be struck between development of new and improved roads and the development of a more extensive public transport network.

More efficient and effective public transport is the solution to urban traffic congestion.

In the regions outside the Greater Dublin Area and the larger cities it is inevitable that there will be much greater reliance on private motor transport. It is essential for social and economic development that the national roads infrastructure is upgraded and that planned projects are commenced and completed on time. The non-national roads are the responsibility of local authorities and are the lifelines of rural communities and small towns. They must continue to receive improved resources for upgrading and maintenance to make up for decades of under-funding.

Public Transport

Sinn Féin proposes to reverse the attempt by successive governments to fill as much road space with private cars as possible. Public transport can be the most efficient means of getting people and goods safely from A to B.

This State is suffering from decades of public transport infrastructure under-funding. Dublin remains one of the very few capital cities not to have a rail link to its airport.

Public transport is no longer the poor relation in our society. Support for public transport is dependent on adequate levels of support from Government. Only then will current motorists abandon their cars and take to bus and rail in significant enough numbers to improve everyone's quality of life, to cut road accident rates, to reduce commuting times, and to benefit business and the economy.

Sinn Féin proposes:

- That public transport is funded to at least the level of its counterparts in Europe. Without proper subsidy, an efficient public transport system will not emerge.
- A joint Roads and Public Transport Authority, with an all-island strategy. Ireland requires an integrated transportation plan that puts the overall needs of the economy and society before sectional interests and profiteering.
- A School Bus Authority, co-ordinated at local government level in both urban and rural areas.
- That an integrated ticketing policy be implemented as part of the public transport strategy.

Childcare

The emotional, physical and educational needs of children must be the guiding principles in all childcare provision.

The opportunities for women to work in paid employment outside the home has never been greater, however, due to a lack of affordable and properly regulated childcare many women are denied the opportunity to participate in paid employment.

The cost of childcare has more than doubled to about €190 per week in the period covered by the last five budgets. While the increase in Child Benefit is welcome, it does not address the issue of childcare.

The State has obligations and it is not enough to rely on the private sector to provide childcare. We support quality, affordable community childcare for all those who need it, Government-funded childcare facilities, the introduction of training schemes for child-minders in the informal sector, and after-school care funding.

We also support paid parental leave for employees who pay PRSI.

Sinn Féin proposes the establishment of a Childcare Agency, under public control, which will regulate the provision of funding and standards in this sector.

TAXATION

An equitable taxation policy A fair taxation system is essential to the building of 'An Ireland of Equals'.

Sinn Féin views equitable taxation as an essential tool with which government can help to create a better society.

Ensuring that the tax system is fair and effective is a difficult task. Taxes have to be collectable, transparent, fair and levied equitably.

In the debate on taxation, most of the focus is on two separate tax codes, the rates of income tax and corporation tax. Both of these tax rates have been lowered substantially in the last decade but Sinn Féin believes that this has happened in an inequitable way.

Sinn Féin believes that as a society we should:-

- Redistribute resources in a positive way, to invest in those parts of society suffering economic marginalisation and social exclusion, to redress inequality.
- Invest in social provision such as health, education, pensions and child welfare.
- Invest in economic development and facilitate business to grow sustainably, develop and make a positive contribution to host communities through increased employment and their input into a vibrant local and national economy.
- Build infrastructure that benefits all and is grounded in the guarantee of universal provision and access whether it is energy, roads, public transport, information and telecommunications, social, health or educational resources and facilities.

This is not an exhaustive list and in a democratic society we need to debate and discuss what role the tax regime and the spending of tax revenue should have in society.

Ending inequality in tax

Sinn Féin does not accept the mantra that universal tax cuts lead inevitably to a richer economy and a fairer society. The outgoing Fianna Fáil/Progressive Democrats Government has implemented tax cuts that have disproportionately benefited the wealthy. They have added to inequality within the existing flawed taxation code. They have failed to bring about much needed reform of that tax code.

Data from the Combat Poverty Agency has shown that, over the lifetime of the present government, 25 per cent of the value of Budget "give-aways" went to the richest 10 per cent. At the same time, the poorest 20 per cent received 5 per cent. The proportion of households suffering severe poverty and deprivation remained unchanged throughout the lifetime of the present government. Twenty per

cent of households live on half the average income.

Sinn Féin believes that the majority of citizens need and deserve better public services and want to see the tax they contribute used to provide an equitable and efficient health system, improved education, accessible childcare and viable public transport. Better public services mean a better quality of life for all. This just demand for better services, rather than the demand for tax cuts, must form the basis for the reform of taxation.

We have a taxation system riven with systematic inequality, where vested interests are pampered and protected. We have a system where a framework of tax avoidance has fed an unchecked culture of illegal tax evasion and fraud.

Amnesties for defrauders, Ansbacher accounts for tax evaders, active bank involvement in DIRT deception schemes - these are just some of the examples of the inequalities and inconsistencies of the tax system.

It is also a system where business enjoys one of the lowest tax burdens in the EU, but where workers are levied at a proportionately higher rate than most other European states.

It is a system where tax bands and rates are muddled by a battery of tax reliefs and loopholes, many of which help the already wealthy while offering nothing to the poorest in our society.

A Comprehensive Review

Sinn Féin believes that there is a need for a comprehensive review of the tax regime and that this review should be time limited to be finished within the first year of a new government taking office.

The purpose of the review should be to seek to establish a fairer and more equitable tax system. During this review period, Sinn Féin believes that income and Corporation Tax rates should remain unchanged, with the exception that those on the minimum wage should be taken out of the tax net.

Tax exiles

This is a complicated issue and needs to be addressed vigorously by the next government if we are to ensure that high-income tax cheats contribute proportionately to the public purse. Sinn Féin believes that all income generated in the State should be liable to general taxation irrespective of the residency of the individuals or companies concerned. There needs to be an immediate end to the status of 'Tax Exile'.

The enactment of this policy will require amendments to be made to the current double taxation agreements. An example of the grey areas which allow high-income individuals and companies to escape taxation, is the 'roll-over relief' where the relief is offered in the country where profit is made even in the case where funds are invested in another country. Sinn Féin would also require companies and individuals to keep profits and income from domestic and international sources distinct to ensure that tax is paid at the correct rate.

An Equitable Contribution for All

Many individuals and companies have been able to avail of a number of reliefs on income/profits eligible for taxation. In many cases this has been a positive factor in economic development. It has also been abused by those who wish to avoid paying their fair share.

It is to the continuing shame of recent governments that a large section of our high-income individuals have been able to pay tax at rates which are effectively below those of even the (lower) standard rate. This situation has come about due to the existence of a variety of exemptions, reliefs and residency policies which have been exploited in order to avoid making an equitable contribution to the public finances.

An example of this was produced by the Revenue Commissioners in December 1997. Their survey of the top 400 earners in the State found that some were paying little or no tax through the use of avoidance measures under tax legislation. One in five was paying tax at an effective rate of 20 per

cent a year and one in ten was paying an effective tax rate of less than 5 per cent.

These tax 'loopholes' are indicative of the dominant culture of tax avoidance in which wealthy individuals and companies have grown accustomed to paying less than their fair share.

Sinn Féin proposes to address both legal avoidance and illegal tax evasion as a high priority, confident in the knowledge that closing these gaps and effectively policing tax compliance will result in a dramatic increase in receipts taken.

In particular, Sinn Féin will ensure that the Revenue Commissioners are given whatever resources they need to carry out their work.

Corporation Tax and PRSI

Business in Ireland enjoys one of the lowest tax burdens in the EU. For example, an OECD report released earlier this year showed that employers' payroll taxes are the lowest in the EU and even below states such as Turkey and Mexico. At the same time, business has seen continual cuts in Corporation Tax on their profits.

Sinn Féin proposes to hold Corporation Taxes at their current rates pending a proposed review. We believe also that there is a pressing need to recognise the all-Ireland dimension in the tax system and propose that the incoming government must have tax harmonisation on the island for business and workers on the top of its tax reform agenda.

In the short term, Sinn Féin proposes returning the rate of employers PRSI to 12 per cent, the level at which it was before last December's budget. This could increase tax revenue by €347 million.

Capital Gains Tax

Capital Gains Tax was reduced by the outgoing government from 40 per cent to 20 per cent, a move impacting disproportionately in favour of the wealthy. In addition, this reduction created a 'grey area' between the identification of income as either Trading and Capital Gains - a situation where tax avoidance can occur.

This is particularly the case in the area of development land transferrals, where a beneficiary can avoid paying Income Tax of 42 per cent and opt for Capital Gains Tax of 20 per cent. We propose that, in order to close this loophole and to ensure a more equitable fiscal system, Capital Gains Tax should be returned to its original rate.

Sinn Féin's Seven-Point Plan for Fair Taxation:-

1. A major review of the taxation system with the aim of restructuring and reforming to achieve equity and that revenues are harnessed for social benefit. This review to be completed within a year.
2. Removal of those on minimum wage from the tax net.
3. No further reduction in Corporation Tax.
4. Capital Gains Tax to return to 40 per cent.
5. Return employer's PRSI to 12 per cent.
6. Immediate closure of identifiable loopholes for tax avoidance.
7. Continued support for culture and sport through tax relief measures.

AGRICULTURE

"Sinn Féin will work to protect jobs, animal health and the environment as part of our commitment to keep people on the land."

The Problem

The agriculture industry and the fabric of rural life in Ireland have been damaged by government, the EU and world economic policies to such an extent that it is a national disaster.

While governments have worked to maximise the gross amount of EU grant aid funding for farming, there has been little thought given to the inequities of how these funds are distributed or of their long-term impact on Irish farming and on rural communities.

It is estimated that well in excess of 100,000 people left farming between 1976 and 1998, contributing to rural depopulation and the damaging migration to the cities that has been the hallmark of the last 20 years. A further 20,000 farmers are expected to leave the land in the next ten years. A Government-commissioned report (Agrifood 2010) predicts that the number in farming will drop to just 100,000 in 2010 when, the authors of the report reckon, only 20,000 will be viable full-time farmers, 60,000 part-time farmers and 20,000 transitional. This steady draining has had negative knock-on social and economic effects in rural communities.

Primary producers are now receiving less for their produce in real terms than they were when we joined the EEC in 1973.

Draconian regulations from EU directives, unquestioningly rubber stamped into the country's domestic laws by current and previous governments, are grievously undermining whatever confidence farmers still in business might have. Concerns over falling incomes and wholesale uncertainty over the direction and future of the industry are also discouraging young people - sons or daughters of existing farmers - from embracing farming as a career or even taking over farm holdings to be worked on a part-time basis.

Sinn Féin is utterly opposed to the "cheap food from whatever source" approach to agriculture imposed by the EU. Imported foodstuffs are often produced cheaply without high standards with regard to quality and health. This confers an unfair advantage and has grave implications for consumer safety.

The effective control of the industry by the retail sector has played a major role in the diminishing returns farmers receive as they are continually forced to sell their produce at uneconomic prices.

Sinn Féin proposes:-

A return to a sustainable practice of local quality produce for local markets combined with support mechanisms to keep people on the land, create ancillary employment and prevent rural depopulation. At the moment, big business is running the show and farmers are at the mercy of, for example, the large beef processors and the big supermarket chains.

A simplification of the EU red tape that has Irish farmers plagued with over-complicated forms and regulations. Farmers are being asked to be vets, accountants, experts on soil nutrition, etc. There needs to be an Irish examination of EU laws relating to Irish farmers to curb and control Brussels bureaucracy. A massive €3.17 billion has been spent on the Bovine TB and Brucellosis Eradication Scheme in the effort to wipe out these diseases. Eradication of Bovine TB has been a 'priority' of the Department of Agriculture since the 1950s; nearly 50 years on, it is still rampant. This is a national scandal and Sinn Féin is demanding an independent public inquiry into the management of animal disease control in Ireland, to include TB, brucellosis, foot and mouth disease, BSE and E-Coeli 0157.

An all-Ireland strategy to promote animal health and consumer confidence in Irish products. There is an urgent need to protect the agricultural industry from future scares and restore confidence to what is a vital national industry. For example, many in the industry believe that BSE could have been prevented if the government had acted as it later did on the foot and mouth disease.

That local facilities should be used for animal slaughter. The policy of the processors to source goods where they are cheapest is detrimental to food safety. Local facilities will protect jobs, animal health and the environment as well as working to sustain local farming communities.

Future in farming

The principle of a fair economic return for a quality product is paramount. Not only must we assist

those who are currently engaged in farming but also those who want to enter the industry. There is a serious shortfall in the number of younger farmers.

Sinn Féin proposes:-

- Monitoring processor/retailer profit margins;
- Monitoring imported produce and labelling so consumers can be guaranteed that it is to EU standards.
- The maintenance of direct payments to farmers.
- Farmers be compensated for the EU, Department of Agriculture and Teagasc policy of encouraging destocking after decades of encouraging farmers to intensify.
- Smallholders who are currently excluded from all EU/state agricultural grants or payments for farm developments restored to eligibility for the full range of grants available to all other sectors of the farming industry.
- Partnerships and long-term land leasing initiatives (e.g 10-year leases).
- Access to long-term finance at reduced interest rates (e.g. 20-30 year loans).

The Environment

One of the side-effects of intensive food production is the negative impact it has had on the environment. Many farmers have dealt with these issues by investing heavily in pollution control, but farmers cannot be expected to carry the financial burden of protecting the environment by themselves.

Sinn Féin proposes:-

- Consultation with farmers on all aspects of new directives.
- There should be an improved partnership approach in relation to protecting the environment - the current REPS scheme is inadequate and ridden with red tape; farmers are being exploited because of their love for the land.
- Adequate grants for pollution control with long-term finance support.

EU Schemes and Framework

As farmers currently derive 56 per cent of their income from various EU schemes, it is vital to them that this income is received on time and with a minimum of red tape involved. Presently, the Department of Agriculture treats farmers as fraudsters for basic errors made in applying for monies to which they are legally entitled. All schemes must be streamlined and simplified.

Organic Food

The demand for organic food has been increasing to such an extent that supply cannot meet demand. Policies should encourage the development of organic farming and halfway measures towards it. Specialist advisory support should be provided by the State to help farmers in this regard.

RURAL REGENERATION

"It is vital that measures are taken to reverse rural depopulation and ensure that we have sustainable rural communities into the future."

The Problem

The perilous condition of the farming industry has consequences for the future economic shape of towns and villages, where business enterprises and the job they provide are dependent for survival on the rural hinterland. As well as this, rural infrastructure and various rural services obviously will be much the poorer where the farming population is hit or farm families are left with no choice

other than to move out. Already there is ample evidence of government and/or local authority neglect of countryside areas.

It is vital that all organisations and government bodies come together to firstly assess rural decline and then bring forward structures with proper financial assistance to reverse this trend.

The Solution

Sinn Féin believes that the core objectives of a rural development programme should be:-

Creating a co-ordinated programme linking agriculture, enterprise, environment, culture, health and education and social services strategies into a comprehensive integrated plan.

Keeping the maximum number of people on the land and preserving the fabric of rural life.

Creating the conditions where rural communities can rebuild their local economies.

Sinn Féin believes that the Government should bring about a national process to address the crisis in rural Ireland and promote rural development. Such a process must be organised on a truly participatory and representative basis so as to ensure the development of people centred strategies and rural policies.

Sinn Féin proposes:-

- An increase in LEADER funds for rural development projects.
- A rural housing strategy including a renovation grant for those who wish to refurbish or rebuild derelict dwellings.
- Reviewing planning laws with a view to encouraging more people into rural areas.
- The promotion of a return to co-operative projects should be vigorously promoted and supported.
- Greater support for local development projects - Enterprise Ireland, which is responsible for developing indigenous business, currently favours businesses with export potential, overlooking the vital community and social enterprise sector.
- The development of a services infrastructure and improved access to the Government-supported Rural Transport Initiative which is vital for the survival of rural communities.
- Life-long learning for rural-based people.
- Start-up enterprises suitable to rural areas in food and tourism.
- On-farm alternative enterprises.

WASTE MANAGEMENT

Towards Zero Waste There is a real waste management crisis. Landfill sites are overflowing, illegal dumping is widespread, and litter is out of control. The Fianna Fáil/Progressive Democrats Government has failed to implement a comprehensive and effective waste management system. Instead it has imposed plans for a network of waste incinerators around the State as the primary response to the crisis.

Although the FF/PD Government saw that there was widespread opposition to plans for waste incinerators it still forced the Waste Management (Amendment) Bill 2000 through the Dáil to take powers over waste management away from the elected representatives of the people on local councils. It thus made a nonsense of the supposed public consultation and local authority approval process for regional waste management plans.

The Government's policy has been driven by its unwillingness to make the main producers of waste pay their fair share and by the incinerator business lobby which stands to make huge profits from the establishment and running of a waste industry in Ireland.

Sinn Féin proposes:-

- A new Zero Waste Strategy that prioritises the reduction, reuse and recycling of waste.
- Halting plans for a network of waste incinerators. These will endanger human health and the environment and will require a constant stream of waste in order to operate, thus working against real waste reduction.
- Legally requiring the main industrial and commercial producers of waste to reduce waste production in a planned and targeted manner.
- A comprehensive strategy for agricultural waste, concentrating on biological treatment of waste in an environmentally friendly and sustainable manner.
- Establishing "recycling and reuse" enterprises on a community and commercial basis locally and regionally, providing employment and efficient waste management.
- Abolishing local authority refuse charges which penalise the householder. (Household waste accounts only for less than 10 per cent of all solid waste.)
- Reversing the privatisation of local authority refuse services.

The EUROPEAN UNION

Democratic Vote on Treaty of Nice Must Be Accepted

In June 2001, the electorate in this State rejected the Treaty of Nice. When that democratic decision was made, the Government was under a clear obligation to act. But they have not respected the democratically expressed will of the people. They have not asked the other EU states to halt the process of ratification of the Treaty of Nice. Nor have they notified them officially that the legislative process to implement Nice has effectively halted. The Government is continuing to move towards ratification of Nice as if nothing has happened

It is worth noting that while the Government is ignoring the concerns of the people, the EU Convention on the future of Europe has already taken on board many of the issues raised by the "No" side during the referendum campaign. These have become part of a new debate about where the EU is going.

Indeed, the Laeken Declaration said: "Citizens believe that the EU is behaving too bureaucratically. What they expect is more results, better responses to practical issues and not a European superstate. Citizens are calling for a clear, open, effective and democratically controlled [European] Community."

Neutrality, NATO and the EU Army

The Government's u-turn on NATO's "Partnership for Peace" was followed by its commitment of troops to the Rapid Reaction Force, the core of an EU Army.

The Treaty of Nice militarises the EU by giving it direct responsibility for the Rapid Reaction Force. It also allows for the setting up of the Political and Security Committee, the EU Military Committee and the EU Military Staff Organisation to run this force.

This is an army designed for war, an army to impose by force the interests of the EU or an elite within it. It will have 80,000 combat ready troops and 250,000 personnel in total ready to enforce EU foreign and security policy not just within the EU or on its borders but up to 2,500 miles outside of the EU.

EU military interventions do not and will not require a UN mandate either under the Treaty of Nice or the Amsterdam Treaty.

The Government's proposal at the recent EU summit in Barcelona to produce a declaration on Irish neutrality in advance of a re-run of the referendum is something which has no legal effect whatsoever. It does not change the Treaty of Nice one iota.

Sinn Féin proposes:-

- That Irish neutrality be enshrined in the Constitution
- That peace-keeping should be the sole responsibility of the United Nations.
- Withdrawing from the Rapid Reaction Force following the Treaty of Nice referendum result.

Applicant States

Sinn Féin welcomes the enlargement of the EU to include new member states if that is the wish of their peoples. But we want the applicant states to have the right to at least join the EU on the same terms as we joined.

The ongoing centralisation of economic and political power is a process independent of EU enlargement. When this state joined the then EEC, the process of economic integration was in reality only beginning and we joined on the same terms as the existing states. There was a power of veto and every member had at least one commissioner. There was no majority voting, no enhanced co-operation, and no economic and monetary union, even though the 1971 Werner Report had mapped out the principles of the single currency. Yes, there were the growing tentacles of the unelected EU bureaucracy, but not on the scale experienced today.

A Partnership of Equals, Not a Two-Tier EU

Since the formation of the European Monetary System in 1979 and the Single European Act in 1987, the clear direction of EU development has been towards the creation of a two-tier European state.

The EU Commission and the EU Council of Ministers have become more powerful and more unaccountable.

More and more democratic control has been taken away from people in this part of Ireland in relation to both domestic and international affairs. The Treaty of Nice attempted to accelerate this process and remove yet more democratic control from the hands of elected representatives in this state. Under the Treaty of Nice we will:-

Lose our right to a permanent Irish Commissioner.

Lose the right of veto of individual states in more than 30 areas of EU policy, moving away from the requirement for unanimity based on consensus.

See the voting weight on the Council of Ministers favouring the larger states with Ireland's strength decreasing.

Sinn Féin proposes:-

- Retaining the EU as a partnership of equals with everyone proceeding together on the basis of agreement.
- That each state continues to have an EU Commissioner
- That the right of veto should be retained.
- That no further powers be taken away from democratically elected parliaments in the member states.
- That member states be able to relate to the rest of the world on their own terms and not as part of a giant EU state.
- The ending of the democratic deficit.

International Affairs

Sinn Féin believes that the Irish Government should pursue an independent course in international affairs.

Irish military neutrality and independent foreign policy have been undermined by involvement in EU common foreign and security policy. But the Irish Government still has freedom of action and Sinn Féin urges it to pursue vigorously a policy based on international justice and peace.

Sinn Féin wants Irish governments to work in the interests of the majority of the world's people who are exploited by the large economic and military power blocs controlled by the wealthy minority on our planet.

Sinn Féin proposes:-

- The strengthening of the United Nations and its democratisation with the removal of the veto of the five permanent members of the Security Council. The Council should be replaced with a democratic executive.
- The cancellation of Third World debt.
- Freedom and justice for the Palestinian people as the essential foundation for lasting peace in the Middle East. Israel must implement UN Resolution 242, ending its occupation of all the Palestinian territories and allowing a real peace process to begin.
- No carte-blanc facilitation of NATO forces at Irish airports.
- The ending of sanctions against the people of Iraq which are responsible for the deaths of thousands of children through deprivation of medicines, and no extension of war to that country by the US, Britain and their allies.
- An end to the United States' embargo of Cuba.
- That the "Tobin Tax" - a proposed tax on international financial speculation with revenue - to be used to promote development in the poorer regions of the world.
- The Irish Government promote human rights and disarmament worldwide.
- An increase in Irish Government aid to the Third World.
- An international alliance for the closure of Sellafield.

MEDIA

Sinn Féin believes that the operation of the media should be as much in the public domain and under as much public scrutiny as the media itself demands of other bodies and institutions. Public access to information is a fundamental right.

Public Service Broadcasting

Sinn Féin supports public service broadcasting and views publicly owned and democratically accountable media, free from state or government control, as a mainstay of democracy.

In particular the legal obligation on RTÉ to provide a varied programme output, to promote the Irish language and to present news and current affairs in an objective, impartial and fair manner is a positive factor in Irish society. Despite our criticism of the effect of state censorship directed against Sinn Féin and its lingering effects on some RTÉ personnel, Sinn Féin is committed to support for public service broadcasting. We are for more public accountability and freedom and less state control over broadcasters.

It is clear that the amount of home produced programmes, employment levels and the development of a broadcasting skills base in this state is primarily a consequence of the existence of a publicly owned RTÉ. Highly successful innovations represented by Radio na Gaeltachta and TG4 would not have had any hope of existing in a market driven broadcasting environment.

The institution of Radio na Gaeltachta helped to give confidence to Gaeltacht communities as a rich and viable linguistic community. In addition music and culture in the Irish language was revitalised by Radio na Gaeltachta. This would not have happened, had the task been left to the market. The

advent of Telefís na Gaeilge, now TG4, has reinvigorated programme quality and brought new talent to Irish television, as well as bringing the language to a new generation. The democratic rights of an important linguistic community are safeguarded by this recognition of their informational and cultural rights and is supported by the vast majority of Irish people.

New technology

It is clear that there are new technological developments in broadcasting which will have little indigenous involvement if the market is allowed to dictate who will and will not be involved in the digital revolution in television. The winners will be multinational communications companies with their headquarters outside Ireland. The vast majority of programming will be sourced outside this country, with consequent knock on effects on employment and downstream broadcasting activity. There have been massive private sector failures in Britain and Germany recently, to the advantage of already dominant players such as News International.

Sinn Féin considers it essential that the origination of news & current affairs and the depiction and encouragement of elements of Irish culture in all their diversity, including the Irish language, are safeguarded by the continuation of public provision for broadcasting. If this provision is not forthcoming RTE will lose significant parts of its audience to broadcasters with greater programming and marketing budgets. This vicious circle could in turn undermine public support for RTE. Sinn Féin will vigorously oppose such moves and will support new innovations within the public service model and state provision for such innovations.

The Challenge of Change: Independent Productions

RTE must change; there is no doubt about that. It must be responsive to its statutory responsibilities, but it must also be flexible in its approach to innovation in programme making:

For example, Sinn Féin proposes that RTE's commissioning process for independent productions be financially and organisationally independent of the station itself. This will aid diversity in programming and will aid transparency in the commissioning of programmes.

License Fee

In the past ministers have used the license fee as a means of punishing RTE for being too "independent". We believe that RTE has made an adequate case for the level of financing required for preparation for digital television services and we believe that the Minister is withholding that increase for political reasons. Sinn Féin supports an adequate level of financing for RTE and believes that the decision on license fee levels should be taken out of the political domain. The level of the license fee should be set on an objective basis. Sinn Féin proposes:

- That License fee renewal be agreed on a five yearly basis by an independent panel comprised of representatives of the social partners, the Film Board, the Arts Council and Conradh na Gaeilge.
- That such a group also be empanelled to evaluate the future of television and to propose a level of capital funding required to prepare RTE for the digital age. The Minister's current forum on broadcasting is a delaying mechanism instituted by a Minister who is hostile to RTE.

Public Service Independent Broadcasters Sinn Féin proposes that such broadcasters make a biennial public report to the Broadcasting Commission at public hearings on their adherence to public service requirements in their licence and that the Commission make two yearly legally binding proposals to such broadcasters on the carrying out of their public service remit.

This proposal is in line with our view that those who run the media should run it in public, and not behind closed doors.

No more Privatisation of Culture Satellite broadcasting has bought access to major national and other sporting events, which were previously, free to terrestrial television viewers of public service television. This has distorted the market in sport, has raised the price for the consumer, and has enriched a few individuals. Despite an early commitment from the previous minister on this issue,

nothing has been done to ensure universality of access to these events.

Sinn Féin proposes the immediate designation of certain sporting events as having a statutory entitlement to universal audience access.

Print Media

There is increasing concern about the dominance of a small number of individuals and companies in the print media.

Sinn Féin proposes:

- A statutory 'right to reply' law for persons subject to serious allegations in print media.
- Severe curtailment of the current libel laws.
- That all privately owned media with an average yearly circulation above 20,000 audited sales per issue be governed by legally binding trusts that safeguards media professionals from pressure or interference from media owners. Editorial staff at senior level and representatives elected by journalists would have representation on the board of such trusts.
- A review of monopoly legislation to prevent any one media company having a monopoly position in any given media sector. Sinn Féin believes that such a regulation will lead to a more independent, robust and vigorous press. Under-regulated market driven print media leads to monopoly control and the stifling of real diversity.