

Sinn Féin paper (Strand 1) 9 February 1998

Irish Language Rights

Sinn Féin supports and works actively on the promotion of the Irish language and culture. Irish belongs to all the people on this island, regardless of religious or political beliefs.

The Irish language is the national language of Ireland. Irish has been spoken in this country for over 2,000 years and was the most widely spoken language throughout the island well into the 19th century. Its decline came about as a result of discrimination, suppression and state sponsored neglect.

At the time of partition, census returns showed the existence of Irish speakers in every one of the Six Counties. Small gaeltacht areas were still in evidence in counties Armagh, Tyrone and Antrim and the disappearance of these areas is undoubtedly one of the failures of partition. Following the setting up of the Stormont Parliament in 1920, the unionists removed the question about the language from the census. Official policy from that time was that the Irish language community did not exist.

Nationalists in the Six Counties view Irish as the national language, and this is not confined to those who speak the language fluently. Furthermore there is recent evidence that some unionists would wish to learn Irish, although they come to it from a different perspective. According to the 1991 census returns, the first census since partition to include a question on the language, 142,000 people, 10% of the population, have some knowledge of Irish and 6% possess all three skills of speaking, reading and writing the language. There are now 30 nursery schools, 12 primary schools and two secondary schools in which children are educated solely through the medium of the language. Irish is also taught as a language to both adult and secondary level pupils. It is in this context that we stress the need to have equal treatment for those who wish to live their lives through the medium of Irish and for those who seek access to their language whose usage declined as part of the legacy of colonialism. Equality for the Irish language community is not and should never be seen as discrimination

against English speakers.

Sinn Féin believes that demands for cultural rights and the expression of cultural identity are valid aspirations. Britain's denial of cultural rights and freedoms in the Six Counties treats the Irish language community and those who wish to promote the language as strangers in their own country.

We put forward this document as an indication of steps that need to be taken to overcome the legacy of inequality and division and to move forward to a situation of equality and national reconciliation. The proposals contained here are only the first steps in attempting to achieve equal treatment for Irish culture and identity. What is necessary is the creation of an infrastructure which will allow for the development of the Irish language and of the Irish-speaking community. It is essential that Irish can be used, seen and heard in all situations, be they public or private. The Irish language community must enjoy parity of esteem with English speakers.

Media and the Arts

A modern language needs expression through the live as well as the print media to survive, yet there is no adequate service provided in Irish on either radio or television. The British government gives an annual grant of over £60 million to Welsh language television programming and £10 million towards Gaelic television programmes in Scotland. There is no equivalent funding in the Six Counties. Nor have they availed of the excellent opportunity provided by the provision of Teilifís na Gaeilge in the Twenty-six Counties. Funding for Welsh and Gaelic television programming has been underwritten in the Broadcasting Act, but this is not the case for Irish in the Six Counties. The British government should act immediately to ensure that Teilifís na Gaeilge can be received throughout the Six Counties without the need for extra equipment in individual homes. They should also fund the establishment of a comprehensive Irish language radio and television service.

The language is a central part of our culture. This needs to inform policy on the development of the arts, as happens in Scotland, in Wales and in the

Twenty-six Counties. This will entail raising the profile of the language and providing increased funding in the areas of music, drama and literature in particular. Funding should be directed in particular to projects which promote Irish as a living language rather than one with a certain historical interest.

The Arts Council also has an important role to play in the promotion of Irish culture and the British government should ensure that an adequate proportion of the the money which they make available to the Arts council is spent on Irish language arts and cultural activities.

Education

Education through the medium of Irish (Irish medium-education) has experienced a considerable growth over the past number of years. Yet this initiative has come from parents. It is not the policy of the British government to promote the Irish language and this is reflected in the approach taken by the Department of Education and all of the Education and Library Boards. Again this contrasts with the situation in Scotland, where local authorities receive some £2 million under a specific scheme which has seen the establishment of over 50 Gaelic-medium primary school units. In Wales it is government policy not only to promote Welsh-medium education at primary and secondary level, but official funding is also made available for the Welsh nursery schools movement, in contrast to the situation here.

The Department of Education has at no time established an Irish-medium school, and schools which were established privately have experienced great difficulty in securing grant recognition. The Department's attitude appears to be one of grudgingly making piecemeal changes in response to political pressure or public campaigning rather than the positive promotion of Irish-medium education. This needs to change.

Irish-medium education should be available as of right at all levels for those who wish to avail of it. This right should be enshrined in law and the necessary resources and facilities made available to ensure that right

becomes a reality. In the immediate term, an all-Ireland Education Board should be established on a statutory basis and with adequate powers and funding to coordinate the promotion and provision of Irish-medium education throughout the island. Gaeloiliúint should have official recognition and funding as the Council for Irish medium Education. This would require changes to the 1989 Education Order. All existing Irish-medium nursery, primary and secondary schools should receive official funding, as should those who have already applied for official recognition for the coming year. The viability criteria for primary and secondary schools were raised this year from an annual intake of 15 pupils for primary and 60 pupils for secondary schools to 25 pupils for primary and 100 pupils for secondary schools. These criteria are too high. There is a need for greater flexibility. The present teacher-training structure is also inadequate to meet the needs of Irish-medium schools and this needs to be addressed. Third-level education should be provided through the medium of Irish, particularly in view of the number of pupils who will complete secondary education through the medium of Irish in the coming years.

The teaching of Irish in English-medium schools is also central to the rights of Irish people to have access to their language. Not only should students be free to choose Irish to fulfil the modern language requirement in the curriculum but schools should be free to make the same choice. Furthermore there should be a strategy for promoting and supporting the teaching of Irish in all English-medium schools. This will include the provision of resource material, in-service training, training in Irish language teaching for prospective primary teachers and department advisors to help existing teachers promote the Irish language on an ongoing basis.

Administrative authorities

The Irish-speaking community should be able to deal with all levels of government and local government administration in their own language, as in the Twenty-six Counties or in Wales. It is essential that Irish speakers be able to use the language in their dealings with rates and tax offices, local authorities, health and education boards, the new police service and all central government departments. An Irish-language version of all forms in

regular use by the public should be provided if the forms are not already bilingual. Official documentation in widespread use should be produced bilingually as is presently the case in Wales.

An ombudsman should be set up with power to accept and prosecute complaints from members of the Irish speaking community.

Public authorities should be required to adopt a bilingual approach to public signs as happens in the Twenty-six Counties, in Wales and in parts of Scotland.

The Department of the Environment (DoE) has already recognised the value of existing communities as being central to planning decisions. In preparing structure and local plans, the needs of the Irish language community should be taken into account.

Judicial system

In all dealings with the courts it should be possible to use the Irish language, even if the person is not a monoglot Irish speaker. A mere knowledge of English should not be used as an excuse to compel a member of the Irish language community to give up the right to use the Irish language.

The British government should promptly introduce all necessary legislation to afford Irish equal status before the courts with the English language.

While daily practice with regard to the use of Irish by prisoners has improved in recent years, prisoners do not have a statutory right to use the language in correspondence on visits or amongst themselves or to receive material in the the language. This should change.

Job Creation

As part of the necessary infrastructure for the development of the Irish language community, the Department of Economic Development (DED) should establish an investment fund for Irish language enterprises, both

large and small. Its staff should have the necessary economic expertise to provide advice and training for those in the Irish language community who wish to start up a new business and to provide grants to those who demonstrate business potential.

Official Status

Not only has Irish no official status, but in 1992, when announcing proposals to change the law prohibiting street names in Irish, the then British Secretary of State, Sir Patrick Mayhew, insisted "We have no plans for a bilingual society". The lack of any official status makes a nonsense of any claim that there is equal respect for the language. The Irish language should be given official status and this status should be reflected in appropriate legislation which enshrines the right to deal with administrative authorities through Irish, the right for all including prisoners to use the Irish version of their names, the right to be taught Irish and to receive education through the medium of Irish, and the obligation to promote the Irish language in the area of broadcasting.

Conclusion

Throughout the existence of the Six-County state, British government policy towards the Irish language has ranged from outright hostility to, at best, official neglect. We have argued throughout this paper for a far more positive attitude towards the language on the part of this British government. Years of neglect need to be replaced by special measures in favour of Irish. This would be in keeping with international standards.

The British government should sign the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and move to bring about a position of equality for Irish and English speakers within the Six Counties.

Cáipéis Sinn Féin (Sraith 1) 9 Feabhra 1998

CEARTA TEANGA DON GHAELIGE

Tacaíonn Sinn Féin le chur chun cinn na Gaeilge agus an chultúir Ghaelaigh agus oibríonn muid go dícheallach ar a son. Is oidhreacht í an Ghaeilge agus an cultúir ag muintir uile na hÉireann, is cuma faoi pholaitíocht nó chreideamh an duine.

'Sí an Ghaeilge teanga náisiúnta na hÉireann . Tá an Ghaeilge á labhairt sa tír seo le breis is 2,000 bliain anuas agus ba í an teanga í ba mhó a bhí á labhairt ar fud an oileáin isteach go maith ins an 19ú aois. Chuaigh sí i meath de thoradh coilíneachais, eisimirce agus an Ghorta mhóir. Ag aimsear na críochdheighilte bhí cainteoirí Ghaeilge i ngach ceann de na Sé Chontae ó thuaidh. Bhí Gaeltachtaí beaga le feiceáil in Ard Mhaca, i dTír Eoghain agus in Aontrom agus tá sé soiléir gur theip glan ar chríochdheighilt maidir leis na ceantair seo. I ndiaidh gur cuireadh Parlaimint Stormont ar bun i 1920, bhain na haontachtóirí an cheist ar theanga amach as an daonáireamh. Dar leis an pholasaí oifigiúil ó shin i leith nach raibh pobal Ghaeilge ar bith ann

Is í an Ghaeilge teanga náisiúnta na hÉireann dar le náisiúnaithe an Tuaiscirt, agus ní bhaineann an dearcadh seo leo siúd amháin a bhfuil Gaeilge líofa acu. Ina theannta sin, tá fianaise ann gur mhaith le haontachtóirí áirithe an teanga a fhoghlaim chomh maith, cé go bhfuil meon difriúil acu i dtaca léi. De réir daonáiríamh 1991, an chéad cheann ó 1920 a raibh ceist ann a bhain leis an Ghaeilge, tá 142,000 duine sa Tuaisceart, sin 10% den phobal, a bhfuil eolas éigin acu ar an teanga agus tá 6% ar féidir leo an teanga a labhairt, a léamh agus a scríobh. Tá 30 naíonra ann, tá 12 bhunscoil agus 2 mheánscoil agus Gaeilge ar fad mar mheán múinteoireachta iontu. Tá Gaeilge á foghlaim ag daoine fásta maille le daltaí sna scoileanna Bhéarla chomh maith. Tá sé de cheart acu siúd ar mhaith leo a saol a chaitheamh trí mheán na Gaeilge go gcaithfí leo ar an dóigh chéanna le lucht an Bhéarla. Tháinig meath ar úsáid na Gaeilge de thairbhe an chóilíneachais agus ba chóir go raibh fáil uirthi acu ar mhaith leo é. Ní ionann cothromaíocht do phobal na Gaeilge agus leatrom ar lucht an Bhéarla agus ní ceart go bfeictear air mar sin in am ar bith.

Creideann Sinn Féin go bhfuil sé de cheart ag daoine a dteanga féin agus a gcultúr féin a bheith acu. Is ionann an dóigh a gcaitheann rialtas Shasana le pobal na Gaeilge sna 6 Chontae atá ag iarraidh a gcearta agus a saoirse maidir le cultúr de agus coimhthigh a thabhairt orthu ina dtír féin.

Cuirimid an cáipéis seo chun tosaigh le taispeáint cad iad na céimeanna is éigin a glacadh má tá le héirí le hiarrachtaí an míchothromas agus easaontas sa chuid seo den tír a sharú agus cothromaíocht agus athmhuintearas a chur ina n-áit. Níl sna moltaí thíosluaite ach na céimeanna tosaí is éigean a chur i bhfeidhm mar iarracht chun cothromaíocht i ngnaithe cultúrtha agus féinaitheantais a bhaint amach. Tá géarghá le hinfrastructúr a cheadóidh forbairt na Gaeilge agus pobal na Gaeilge. Caithidh an Ghaeilge a bheith i bhfeidhm, agus socloiste agus sofheicthe achan áit, go poiblí agus go príobháideach. Caithidh pobal na Gaeilge bheith ar aon leibhéal amháin le lucht an Bhéarla.

NA MEÁIN AGUS NA HEALAÍONA

Má tá le héirí le teanga nua-aimseartha is éigean di bheith ar fáil beo. Ní leor go mbeadh sí ar fáil i gcló amháin. Níl seirbhís cheart raidió ná teilifíse ar fáil. Tugann rialtas Shasana £60 milliún do theilifís na Breataine agus £10 milliún do theilifís Gaeilge na hAlban. Níl a leithéid ar fáil sna 6 Chontae. Níor thángthas i dtír ar an deis iontach a chuir Teilifís na Gaeilge sna 26 Chontae ar fáil ach an oiread. Tá cosaint dlí ag Breatainis agus Gaeilge na hAlban maidir le maoiniú do chlár teilifíse faoi an Acht Craolacháin ach ní hamhlaidh an scéal maidir le Gaeilge na hÉireann sna 6 Chontae. Ba chóir do rialtas Shasana Teilifís na Gaeilge a chur ar fáil gan mhoill sna 6 Chontae ar fad gan duine ar bith bhleith i dtuilleamaí treallimh ar leith. Ba chóir go maoiníodh siad seirbhís raidió agus teilifíse uilegabhálach chomh maith.

Is cuid lárnach dár gcultúr í an Ghaeilge. Ba chóir go gcuirfí seo san áireamh agus polasaí a dhéanamh maidir leis na healaíona, mar a tharlaíonn in Albain agus sa Bhreatain Bheag agus san 26 Chontae. Le seo a chur i gcrích is éigean próifíl na teanga a ardú agus níos mó airgid a chur isteach i gceol, i ndrámáíocht, agus sa litríocht ach go háirithe. Ba chóir maoiniú a chur isteach i bhfontair a chuireann an Ghaeilge chun cinn mar

theanga bheo in áit teanga a bhfuil stair amháin ag baint léi.

Tá ról tábhachtach ag An Chomhairle Ealaíon i gcur chun cinn na Gaeilge agus tá sé ar rialtas Shasana deimhin a dhéanamh de go gcaitear cuid réasúnta den airgead a chuireann sí ar fáil don Chomhairle Ealaíon ar fhiontair a bhaineann le cultúr agus le teanga na Gaeilge.

Oideachas

Tá borradh millteanach faoi oideachas lánGhaeilge le roinnte blianta anuas. Na tuismitheoirí amháin a ba chúis le seo, áfach. Níl cur chun cinn na Gaeilge ina chuid de pholasaí rialtas na Breataine agus tá seo le feiceáil in ndearcadh an Roinn Oideachais agus na boird oideachais agus labharlainne uilig. Arís eile ní amhlaidh an scéal in Albain, áit a bhfaigheann na húdaraí áitiúla £2 mhilliún faoi scéim áirithe a bhí freagrach as corradh le 50 aonad bunscoile lánGhaeilge. Sa Bhreatain Bheag ní amháin go bhfuil sé ina pholasaí oideachais Breatnais a chur chun cinn san bunscoileanna agus sna meánscoileanna, ach cuirtear maoiniú ar fáil do na naíonraí Bhreatnaise chomh maith. Ní amhlaidh an scéal anseo.

Níor chuir an Roinn Oideachais scoil Ghaeilge ar bun riamh, agus scoileanna ar bith a cuireadh ar bun go príobháideach bhí deachrachaí acu uilig maidir le maoiniú agus le aitheantas oifigiúil a fháil. Dealraíonn sé gurb é dearcadh na Roinne ná athruithe beaga a thabairt isteach nuair a chuirtear iachall air de thairbhe brú pholaitiúil nó feachtais phoiblí in áit cur chun cinn dearfach d'oideachas Ghaeilge. Cailidh seo athrú.

Ba chóir go mbeadh oideachas Ghaeilge ar fáil do dhuine ar bith ar mhaith leis é, cuma cad é an leibhéal. Ba chóir go mbeadh an ceart seo ina dhlí agus go gcuirfí na hacmhainní agus na deiseanna ar fáil le go dtiocfadh sé ar an saol. Go díreach, ba chóir go gcuirfí rannóg oideachais uile-Éireannach ar bun a mbeadh an cumhacht ann maille leis an mhaoiniú le comhórdú a dhéanamh ar oideachas lánGhaeilge ar fud na hÉireann. Ba chóir go dtabharfaí aitheantas oifigiúil agus maoiniú do Ghaeloiliúint mar Chomhairle um Oideachas lánGhaeilge. B'éigean athruithe a chur i

bhfeidhm ar Ord Oideachas 1989 le seo a chur i gcrích. Ba chóir go mbeadh maoiniú oifigiúil ag na naíonraí, ag na bunscoileanna agus ag na meánscoileanna uilig, chomh maith leo siúd a chur isteach air don bhliain atá amach romhainn. Ardaíodh na critéir inmharthana i dtaca le bhunscoileanna agus meánscoileanna i mbliana ó 15 de dháltaí úra sna bunscoileanna agus 60 sna meánscoileanna go dtí 25 sna bunscoileanna agus 100 sna meánscoileanna in aghaidh na bliana. Tá na critéir seo ró-ard. Tá gá le tuilleamh solúbthachta. Níl na struchtúir oiliúna d'ábhar múinteora maith go leor san am i láthair le dul i ngleic i gceart le riachtanais na scoileanna lánGhaeilge. Caithidh an easpa seo a leasú. Ba chóir go mbeadh oideachas tríú leibhéal ar fáil trí mheán na Gaeilge, go háirithe agus méid na ndaltaí a bheas ag críochnú a gcuid oideachais dara leibhéal as Gaeilge sna blianta amach romhainn san áireamh.

Tá múineadh na Gaeilge i scoileanna Bhéarla ina chuid lárnach de cheart mhuintir na hÉireann fáil a bheith agus ar a dteanga féin. Ní amháin gur chóir go mbeadh mic léinn ábalta Gaeilge a roghnú mar theanga nua-aimseartha éigeantach, ach ba chóir go mbeadh an rogha céanna ag scoileanna Bhéarla. De bhreis air sin ba chóir go mbeadh stráitéis ann chun tacaíocht a thabhairt le Gaeilge a chur chun cinn mar ábhar scoile i gcoitinne sna scoileanna Bhéarla. Ina measc seo ba chóir go mbeadh, ábhair acmhainne, traenáil inseirbhíse, traenáil i dteagasc na Gaeilge d'ábhar múinteoir bunscoile agus comhairleoirí ón Roinn Oideachais ar fáil le cuidiú a thabhairt do mhúinteoirí an Ghaeilge a chur chun cinn ar bhonn seasta.

Údaráis Riaracháin

Ba chóir do phobal na Gaeilge bheith ábalta déileáil le gach leibhéal den rialtas agus den rialtas áitiúil ina dteanga féin mar atá sna 26 Chontae agus sa Bhreatain Bheag. Tá sé riachtanach go mbeadh Gaeilgeoirí ábalta an teanga a úsáid agus iad ag plé le oifigí cánach agus rátaí. le húdaráis áitiúla, leis na boird sláinte agus oideachais agus rannógaí stáit lárnach ar fad. Ba chóir go mbeadh leagan Ghaeilge ar fáil de na foirmeacha a bhíonn in úsáid go rialta ag an phobail mura bhfuil siad dátheangach cheann féin. Cáipísí oifigiúla a bhíonn in úsáid go forleathan ba chóir go mbeadh siad ar

fáil go dátheangach mar atá sa Bhreatain Bheag.

Ba chóir go gcuirfí *ombudsman* ar fáil a mbeadh an chumhacht aige géaráin a ghlacadh, agus caitheamh leo de réir dlí, ó phobal na Gaeilge.

Ba chóir go mbeadh ar údaráis áitiúla dearcadh an dátheangachais a bheith acu maidir le comharthaí poiblí mar is amhlaidh sna 26 Chontae, sa Bhreatain Bheag agus in áiteanna in Albain.

D'aithin Roinn an Comhshaoil cheana féin go bhfuil tábhacht le háit lárnach a bheith ag pobail sheanbhunaithe agus cinneadh ar bith á dhéanamh aige. Ba chóir go cuirfí dearcadh phobail na Gaeilge san áireamh agus struchtúr agus pleananna áitiúla a dhéanamh aige.

Córas Dlí

Ba chóir go mbeadh sé de cheart ag duine ar bith ar mhaith leis é plé leis na cúirteanna as Gaeilge fiú amháin murab í an Ghaeilge an t-aon teanga amháin aige. Níor chóir go gcuirfí iallach ar dhuine ar bith de chuid phobal na Gaeilge plé leis na cúirteanna as Béarla cionn is go dtuigeann sé Béarla.

Ba chóir do Rialtas na Breataine dlíthe úra a thabhairt ar an saol sa dóigh go mbeadh an Ghaeilge ar chomhchéim leis an Bhéarla maidir leis na cúirteanna.

Cé gur tháinig feabhas ar chúinsí a bhaineann le labhairt na Gaeilge sna príosúin, níl cead ag cimid, de réir dlí, an Ghaeilge a úsáid i litreacha, ar chualrteanna nó ina measc féin, nó ábhar a fháil isteach sa teanga. Ba chóir go n-athródh seo.

Cruthú postanna

Mar chuid den infrastructúr atá riachtanach d'fhorbairt phobal na Gaeilge, ba chóir go gcuirfeadh Roinn na Forbartha Eacnamaí ciste ar bun d'fhiontair Ghaeilge, idir mhór agus bheag. Ba chóir go mbeadh an saineolas eacnamaíochta ag an fhoireann le go mbeadh siad ábalta

comhairle agus oiliúint a chur ar fáil dóibh siúd sa phobal Ghaelach ar mhaith leo gnó nua a bhunú, agus deontais a sholáthrú dóibh siúd a léiríonn cumas gnó.

Stádas Oifigiúil

Ní amháin nach bhfuil stádas oifigiúil ag an Ghaeilge, ach i 1992, nuair a chuir Patrick Mayhew, Rúnaí Stáit an Tuaiscirt de chuid Rialtas na Breataine, a chuid moltaí in iúl maidir leis an dlí a athrú i dtaca le comhairthaí sráide as Gaeilge dúirt sé "Níl pleananna ar bith againn do shochaí dátheangach". Is amaidí bheith ag caint ar mheas cothrom don teanga nuair nach bhfuil stádas oifigiúil ar bith aici. Ba chóir go dtabharfaí stádas oifigiúil don teanga agus go mbeadh an stádas seo infheicthe i reachtaíocht chuí. Mar chuid de sin bheadh sé de cheart ag daoine, príosúnaigh ina measc, leagan Ghaeilge dá n-ainmneacha a úsáid, de cheart ag daoine oideachas a fháil trí Ghaeilge agus Gaeilge a fhoghlaim, ó airgead poiblí, agus go mbeadh cúram ar na húdaráis chraoltóireachta an Ghaeilge a chur chiun cinn.

Deireadh

Ó cuireadh an stát ar bun sna 6 Chontae, bhí rialtas Shasana naimhdeach don Ghaeilge id dtaca le polasaí de, agus rinne sé neamhionatas di. Tá ráite againn sa cháipéis seo gur chóir dearcadh i bhfad níos dearfaí bheith ag an rialtas Sasanach seo. Is éigeán beartas atá i bhfách leis an Ghaeilge a thabhairt ar an saol leis an neamairt a rinneadh san am a chuaigh thart a chur ina cheart. Bheadh seo ag cloí le caighdeáin idirnáisiúnta.

Ba chóir do rialtas Shasana Cairt na hEorpa um Teangacha Réigiúnda agus Mionlacha a shíniú agus oibriú i dtreo cothromaíocht a thabairt ar an saol idir cainteoirí Ghaeilge agus Bhéarla sna 6 Chontae.