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This is the Second Edition of a Policy first published in 1973. The New Preface was written in 1979.

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THE QUALITY OF LIFE in the NEW IRELAND



A SINN FÉIN POLICY DOCUMENT

THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE NEW IRELAND

Preface to Second Edition 1979

It is now almost six years since we first published our "Quality of Life" policy document as part of the continuing process of Republican education and debate on the issues which affect the lives of the Irish people. Since then many significant changes have taken place in Ireland, and in the world. As most of them confirm in concrete fashion the issues which we raised in the May, 1973 edition of the policy we have decided to re-print it now, as we get ready for the 1979 electoral test, with no additions or amendments, apart from this introduction.

The year 1973 is significant in itself in international terms, because in the autumn of that year Europe and the Western World in general was faced with what came to be known as "the oil crisis". There followed a period of severe economic recession, the effects of which are still with us. These factors have already changed the way most of us look at the world though they have not as yet been sufficiently severe to alter our life-styles fundamentally. They do however bring into sharper focus the policy issues raised by Sinn Féin in its document of May, 1973 — before the crisis broke and environmental issues began to creep into the vocabulary of the establishment political groupings.

Let us be clear what the "oil crisis" was all about. It marked the first major rebellion in the post-1945 era of the primary-producing nations against the exploitation of Western multinational capitalism — one of the main causes of poverty and economic imbalance in the world and the system which produced a situation where six per cent of the world in one tiny corner of the globe consumed over 40 per cent of the energy and consumer luxuries of the world.

The Middle Eastern Arab states suddenly realised that they could, by sticking together and demanding a fairer share of the wealth for their natural resources, achieve real results in shifting the balance of world affluence and world power. One may not agree with the rather limited approach they adopted and certainly Sinn Féin does not agree with the use some Arab leaders have made of their new wealth to appreciate the underlying reality. The rich Western nations, and the multinational corporations will continue to exploit as long as they are allowed to do so. The only language they appreciate is their own language — that of the hard bargain, if not the no-option "choice".

The lesson for other primary producers was also obvious, even where the products produced were not as scarce or as essential to the Western economies as oil. You could bargain for fairer prices. You could get together to ensure an increase of wealth for those who rightly deserved to be paid for their natural resource production.

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It was possible to ensure that more of the wealth derived from the toil of third-world countries stayed in those countries. Since then the call has gone round the globe. The Third World, the poor majority of mankind is showing a new militancy which is on the increase with each passing day.

Specifically on the Irish scene the same five years have seen a sad fulfilment of many of the predictions of Sinn Féin in this and in other policy statements. The EEC has not brought the land of milk and honey promised by politicians in Leinster House. Butter does cost £1.00 per lb. today, if expensive subsidies from hard-pressed P.A.Y.E. tax-payers are considered. The Regional Fund has proved to be largely an illusion while the recent EMS controversy has made it clear to all that there is going to be no real transfer of resources from the rich to the poorer states even within the relatively affluent EEC group of nine.

Leinster House has surrendered whatever control they had over the development and exploitation of our natural resources — fish, minerals, off-shore oil — and we have seen our traditional industries based on native resources and basic needs — like footwear and textiles — go into serious decline.

There is of course no scarcity of EEC money to search for uranium in Ireland. For this mineral if found, would be useful to NATO military strategists. We have not been forced into NATO — just yet. But there is a lobby hard at work and Ministers of both Coalition and Fianna Fáil persuasion have asserted that in the next war "Ireland will play her part". They do this without defining the enemy, failing to point out that the decision to go to war would almost certainly be taken by others and ignoring the reality that the only army at present in occupation of this country, regularly and systematically torturing and harassing our people is the British Army in the Six North-Eastern counties of Ulster. Nor can we ignore the increasing centralisation of coercion under the EEC umbrella, computer-coordinated police work on an international scale and an obviously unified foreign policy.

One temporary benefit to derive from the past five years of EEC membership has been in the agricultural sphere, but this has been a very uneven benefit loaded in favour of the large farmer while food costs have soared for all. Meat and other traditional parts of the Irish diet have largely disappeared from the tables of many Irish people as regular items.

Even small farmers' families as well as urban workers' families no longer consume butter on the scale that they used to — while good Irish dairy products and butter are sold off the U.S.S.R. for 25p a lb! Farm incomes in some parts of Leinster and Munster have risen by 50 per cent. But there has been no rise in farm incomes in Connacht on average. The regional imbalance which is typical of the EEC structure in general is reflected with a vengeance

within the island of Ireland itself. Worse still, the artificially high prices which are given for some limited ranges of agricultural commodities under the C.A.P. are being gradually eroded. The farm bonanza is also over with no effort having been made to develop a planned and permanent agricultural base with provision for the processing of Irish agricultural products in industries and farm cooperatives here at home. The C.A.P. is under constant attack and will continue to be watered down in the decade ahead. We will have no control over this trend and no real bargaining cards because all of these — from fish to mineral resources — have already been bartered away.

The EEC in an attempt to ease public anger, and not just in Ireland, have now embarked on a massive brain-washing campaign, assisted by huge advertising and promotional campaigns, to pretend that this system is in some way democratic. They intend to hold direct elections to a "European Parliament", which is neither European (in that it represents only 9 states) nor a Parliament. It is hoped that by allowing people to send a handful of highly-paid delegates to what has been rightly termed "a most expensive talking-shop", with no real legislative powers, the illusion of democracy will be created. This, it is suggested, will bring about a "new European spirit" — in other words people will hopefully grin and bear the EEC burdens because they have been allowed to vote for the members of the talking shop who have to date been nominated.

When you consider that the EEC deliberately held back direct elections for two decades you have some idea of the lack of importance which this "Parliament" possesses (significantly it is called only an "Assembly" in the Rome Treaty) and the lack of interest in real democracy in these matters. Power will remain in the hands of the non-elected Brussels bureaucracy and the increase in the numbers which are sent to the "Parliament" will make no real difference.

It is for this reason that Sinn Féin will have no part in the "European Elections" and will be actively organising a boycott campaign. The only thing the EEC hopes to gain from the election is a fairly large turn-out which will then be presented as proof of popular enthusiasm and support for them and the status quo. We must try to ensure that this confidence trick does not succeed, that the sham is exposed — and not simply in Ireland only. In the meantime Sinn Féin will be actively contesting the 26-County local elections, educating the people in its federalist *Éire Nua* policies and ensuring that the maximum amount of power and decision-making is retained by the people in their own local areas.

Sinn Féin led the genuine opposition to EEC entry in the early 1970s. We still oppose the EEC, not only in Ireland's interest but also because it is detrimental to the development of a fair, balanced

and just community of European communities — not a sordid power-game between nation-states. Significantly, groups like the Labour Party, who stated their opposition to the EEC structures in 1972 are now participating in the “European elections” and — even more amazingly — advocating an increase in the power of the centralising authority of that system.

The EEC is the most obvious manifestation of the international power problem which affects Ireland and which we highlight in this document. We see the need for a new international order and said so even before there was an oil crisis or economic recession. We reject monopoly capitalism, Western-style consumer society as well as State Capitalism (Communism) under the guise of the “Socialist” tag. We advocate a third way forward, and we see our place in the international order as a member of the non-aligned states struggling to free ourselves and mankind from the curse of all types of colonialism, imperialism and exploitation of people by people. This too has become clearer in the past few years and the wide range of contacts which the Republican Movement has established with liberation movements around the world confirms the wisdom and the righteousness of our stand.

There are important sections in the 1973 statement about control of technology and the activities of multinational companies. These two have been in the news since 1973 — the latter mainly because of the corruption in which they have been involved almost everywhere but especially in the poorer post-colonial countries. We cannot afford to forget the lessons of Chile. Nor can we overlook the tactics to thwart the democratic process in cases such as these than we can in the case of the persecution of writers, intellectuals and independent-minded political activists in Soviet Russia.

As for the control of technology, the greatest threat in Ireland today perhaps is the attempt to entangle us in the network of international nuclear plants even at a time when most of the countries engaged in this type of activity are trying to opt out. But it is not sufficient to be anti-nuclear. We have to propose positive policies for energy and environment, for pollution control and balanced development as we have done in this document. We have also stressed the need for our own independent means of evaluation in these areas — a disgracefully neglected area in Ireland as the recent Whiddy Island disaster showed — and have laid down the principles which we feel should govern the introduction of new, heavy or untested industrial processes into our country.

Our general policies on planning, community government, local control, balanced environment in every sense of the word, and a preference for the needs of people rather than property and big business, are well known. They are spelled out here and are

actively pursued by our elected representatives on the various local bodies throughout the 26 Counties.

Sinn Féin stands for the restructuring of these bodies in a logical and planned fashion so that they have more local power and a greater democratic element. We are particularly concerned about the trend towards centralisation in almost every area, a process facilitated and accelerated by the new financial restrictions which the Dublin Department of the Environment is seeking to impose on all local authorities since the last General Election. This must be resisted.

Finally, Sinn Féin outlines in this policy statement its proposals on consumer protection, advertising and related matters including the commercial control of the broadcasting services. These were not very live issues when we spoke in 1973. They have become more urgent in accordance with trends which we predicted. And while some fashionable and trendy statements have been made on these issues by other groupings in recent times, we still feel our basic policies are best. That is why we now re-publish what we said in 1973.

The first edition of this pamphlet also included the Republican proposals for structures in a New Ireland, as proposed in June, 1972, and a critical comment and rejection of the British White Paper on the North, published in March 1973. A lot of water has flown under the bridge in the six years since then just as there were many changes in positions in the previous five years from 1969 to 1973. Yet in all the decade of turmoil the basic Republican position on the North, and on the Irish national question remains the same. It is based on the twin principles of a rejection of Britain's right to interfere in any part of Ireland and on the inalienable right of the whole Irish people to decide their own destiny.

It is possible to offer a three-point summary.

1. *A British declaration of intent to disengage totally from Irish affairs.*
2. *The right of the Irish people as a whole to determine their own future.*
3. *An amnesty for all political prisoners in Ireland and abroad arising from the national struggle.*

This is, we suggest, the only recipe for peace, real peace on this island and between Ireland and her nearest neighbour. We said so ten years ago. We still say so and would suggest that the failures of all the other attempts to patch up what is essentially a corrupt status quo over the past decade adds to the conviction. We welcome a growing acceptance in several quarters not only that the days of British rule in Ireland are numbered but a gradual conversion to the doctrine of British disengagement in several quarters. Several groups and prominent people are now articulating

various versions of a "Brits Out" policy, however muted where they cast scorn on our stand in the not too distant past. However, in view of their past record on the national issue and their continuing failure to do anything constructive about the policy or even to spell out the implications of what they see as being inevitable, we have to retain doubts about the bona fides of some who seem to wish to retain a British disengagement slogan as long as they are sure it ensures their political survival.

To those genuine, if belated converts to our fundamental position on this crucial question, which must colour so much of all our other political thinking, we say: Welcome! But please work for your stated aim and in particular please spell out the structures of government and the broader political policies you would pursue in a post-British Ireland. Sinn Féin will continue to pursue its own fundamental political objectives while at the same time developing the guidelines of the type of New Ireland it would like to see as soon as national independence is won.

THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE NEW IRELAND

The Republican aim of creating an independent Ireland of self-governing communities derives from the fundamental belief of Sinn Féin that people should have real and effective control over their own lives at all levels. The development of "alienation" in the population at large, that terrible sense of helplessness and hopelessness which is so common in the large cities and also in the declining rural areas of the world today, can best be tackled, we believe, by the creation at local level of real decision-making bodies with real powers.

This problem, which is the crucial one in modern society — and which is seen most clearly at the two extremes of what is really the same problem, rural decline and urban congestion, is inevitably tied up with the development and control of technology and with the protection of the environment. It is frequently referred to also as the debate about the "quality of life" — a phrase of great importance but which has fallen into misuse. The "quality of life" issue usually leads to long discussions by politicians but rarely to any action. The politicians offer few constructive ideas on how to tackle the problem in a realistic fashion and in a manner in which the citizen feels he has a part to play.

The Republican movement is concerned with the "quality of life" in Ireland and all over the world and seeks to tackle the problem in a radical, fundamental way, based on an analytical examination of the root causes and on policies which fit in with the traditional aspirations of Irish Republicanism and the aspirations of anti-imperialistic peoples everywhere.

The Third World

In this respect the Irish people have an especially important role to play. It was Ireland which began the revolution against the greatest empire the world had ever known in this century. Ireland should be to the forefront of the struggle of the "Third World" in this as in other matters. Sinn Féin intends to give the Irish people the leadership that is necessary in this case.

Sinn Féin believes that the "quality of life" struggle which faces mankind, and the underdeveloped world in particular, is more fundamental than the arguments about the relative merits of the Communist/Capitalist, East/West systems. The present situation transcends these issues; it is larger and more urgent than either of them. Sinn Féin believes that both systems have failed to solve the problem and have not really tackled them at the root. Sinn Féin proposes not a compromise between the two but an alternative third solution which is especially relevant to Ireland and to the neo-colonial world.

Fundamental to Sinn Féin thinking in these matters is a belief in the devolution of power from the top to the bottom, from the

centre to the peripheral areas, from the "in-groups" to the "have-nots". Sinn Féin proposes that there should be a restoration in the balance of power and prestige, between area and area, between country and country, and between the "developed" and "developing" parts of the world. In particular, within each country there will have to be a redistribution of the balance between declining rural areas and over-crowded urban areas — to the mutual benefit of both.

The basic imbalance in the development of modern society has brought with it gigantic problems on all sides — economic, social, psychological and sociological, cultural and religious. But the most obvious evil result of this imbalance can be seen in the disruption of nature — of the very environment itself.

Sinn Féin aims to tackle this vital issue of life today in the creation of the New Ireland. Its proposals, and its proposed method of action, we feel, set guide-lines which are valid for many other parts of the world.

Control of Technology

One cannot discuss the "quality of life", the danger to the global environment and associated questions without reference to one of the immediate causes of the trouble. This is the growth of technology, or more accurately, the failure to control technology in the public interest. Technology, of itself, is not necessarily bad. It has brought many benefits to mankind and has relieved those in a position to use it of huge burdens of labour and toil. But technology and especially its side-effects have to be controlled. Its adverse effects have to be anticipated and plans must be made to deal with them. Also, its fruits have to be shared by mankind, all mankind. And it must not be used by men or nations to exploit other men and nations.

Sinn Féin believes that the control of technology and the protection of the environment are already pressing problems in Ireland which have been greatly neglected by politicians North and South. It will seek to deal with these vital aspects of the "quality of life debate" by making them open political issues.

Sinn Féin feels that people are aware, in a general way, of the threat facing them. It will seek to explain this threat while continuing its own research into specific aspects of the situation.

Sinn Féin believes that we should learn from the mistakes that have been made already in some more technologically advanced nations. We should try to anticipate the problems of the environment in every sphere before they arise. We should closely examine all new technological developments, at home but particularly those from abroad. Even where innovations are found to be generally desirable they should be examined in the light of

Irish conditions and where possible modifications to Irish conditions, and in keeping with Irish traditions, should be made.

It is not possible in a policy document like this to propose solutions for all the problems that are involved. Our own lack of information on some aspects of the question is just another aspect of the failure of the present system in Ireland, which fails to provide information or to ask the questions, let alone provide the answers. It is possible to state however, that Sinn Féin is conscious of the problem and to outline the general lines on which to proceed in the New Ireland. The collection of information on the problems, and the placing of environmental matters and technology control on the top priority list, is the first plank of a general policy outline.

There are also some immediate issues, within the general outline, which, because of their urgency, need mention here. The most obvious of these, and perhaps the most urgent in some respects, is the growing number of "dirty" industries from abroad which are seeking to set up in Ireland. The feeble industrial development policy of the Dublin government, since 1958 in particular, has not only placed Irish destinies to an increasing degree in foreign boardroom control but has brought with it many of the characteristics of neo-colonial industrialisation — concentration to an excessive degree on some sectors such as textiles, lack of industrial initiative at home, lack of a broadly-based "mix" in industrial infrastructure and over-dependence on certain fluctuating markets. These trends are reflected in a more immediate way by the high proportion of women employed at low wage rates by the new industries and constant threats of wage freeze "to maintain our competitiveness in export markets".

It should be pointed out that most of these new industries gain huge grants from public funds under a system which can in certain cases place a plant costing £100,000 in the hands of international speculators for a private risk of only £17-20,000. This is a situation prevailing in the Gaeltacht at present where a grant of up to two-thirds is payable and state agencies can provide up to 50% of the remaining third as share-capital.

Multinational Companies

Added to these undesirable effects of the current industrial development policy there is now the threat from the international capitalists to our environment. This is not simply a question of failing to protect the amenities and our advantages of space, fresh water, etc. — one of the few advantages of the disaster which followed the potato famine in the 1840s and the failure of the Irish industrial revolution to get off the ground. The fact is that several countries in Europe have learned the hard way about

the environmental effects of certain types of heavy industry — smelters, oil refineries, chemical plants, and have either banned extra plants from being built or introduced regulations and controls, which, even where they may be inadequate, still eat into the profit margin of the big multinational corporations which operate these industries. Several concerns, which now find it difficult to operate with maximum profit in Holland or Sweden now see Ireland as an "ideal EEC base" (the phrase promoted by the IDA, and Mr. Lynch in the *Wall Street Journal* on 1/1/73) for their operations. Not only do we try to get the dirty outcasts of European industry to come to Ireland. We pay them large grants to come. We have totally inadequate pollution control standards, and we are prepared to allow the construction of such technological time-bombs in the most beautiful and scenic parts of our country.

Sinn Féin says that the prostitution of the environment and the amenities of Ireland in this manner must be resisted. This prostitution derives from the lack of any real national industrial policy based on Irish initiative. Industrial development, though vitally necessary, must be controlled, and the side-effects of any such projects must be evaluated in terms of the grave damage that can result from them. Sinn Féin is not against industrial development and fully appreciates the short-term attractions of some of these projects for people in areas starved of development opportunities. But the full *short term and long term* implications of such developments must be placed before the people. We cannot allow the capitalists of Europe and North America to unload the filth, which is no longer tolerated in their own countries in many instances, on our door-step in return for jobs which it would be the duty of any proper Irish government to provide in the first place.

The greatest danger in the present situation is ignorance. The greatest failure of the Dublin government has been the failure to inform itself and the public of the implications of this new trend. The most urgent necessity is to spot the trend (six planning applications for oil refineries around Ireland in the past year), introduce a proper pollution law code, and to initiate genuine cost-benefit studies on all projects planned for Ireland, at present.

Sinn Féin's Proposals

1. The first priority of a Sinn Féin government would be to draw up a proper Environment Control code for Ireland, based on the experience of other countries and aimed at setting a model for other developing countries facing the same threat in the neo-colonial era.

2. A Ministry of the Environment would be established to engage in research, the collection of information, and to ensure that proper standards prevailed. At present several conservation and environmental duties are placed as addenda to several departments, with no really effective control and responsibility. The Ministry of the Environment would also engage in cost-benefit analysis so that the public would have knowledge of the real costs involved in development proposals which would arise. The cost arising from industrial pollution in all its forms would be analysed and industry would be made bear the burden of any damage it caused.

3. Environmental matters have a bearing on a very wide range of government functions and it would be the duty of the Minister for the Environment to ensure that the overall aim of ensuring the general good was borne in mind in the other departments. This is particularly true of Physical Planning where *all the factors* involved in a given course of action would have to be considered in forward planning. Special attention would be paid to developments in other countries with an older industrial base and/or a more advanced system of technology. Research would be encouraged at home and abroad on these matters, in particular research which took the contribution of the social scientists into account, but always allowing for specific Irish conditions. In short, we should try to learn from the mistakes of others.

The Local Communities

4. While much research and coordination, including common standards, would be a matter for the national government, and while general environmental problems would be decided in the interests of the nation as a whole, the operation and implementation of such matters would, in accordance with the Sinn Féin policy, be left to local authorities. These could draw from international expert knowledge collected by the central government but would be free to adapt to suit local needs.

5. It would be a basic part of Republican policy to restore the balance within the different regions of the country and between cities and rural areas. Planning would aim at relieving over-growth in urban areas and at restoring a genuine community identity within the cities. At the same time the life of rural communities would be strengthened through economic development and the provision of basic community services. Centralised planning would be drastically reduced and this would be reflected in the environmental content of the physical plans for the different areas.

6. It would be a fundamental aim of Republican policy to give each local region not only real political power over its own affairs but also a "mix" of functions and services in relation to planning, so that the rights and the welfare of the local community always took precedence over the demands of those not normally resident in the area in question. Thus there would be no "special" areas e.g. "tourist regions" with an over-emphasis on one type of development and a general imbalance where other forms of development are concerned. True, areas of unique scenic beauty should be preserved, but the main aim would be to enable the people who have always lived in those areas to enjoy the amenities *and a normal quota of social services and employment opportunities as well*. There should be no areas in virtual control of outside affluent classes, visiting the areas in summer only, and caring little for the year-round welfare of whatever population of "natives" are allowed to remain on.

Overgrowth of Cities

7. EEC membership and the imbalance in the environment in Western Europe generally will increase the pressure on Ireland's amenity areas. Sinn Féin will resist the "cheque-book invasion" and a Sinn Féin government will ensure that the West of Ireland does not become a play-ground retreat for European big business. Any attempt to destroy the Irish coast-line as has already happened in the case of much of the Mediterranean coast-line will be resisted. The rights of the local community must come first and the rights of the community in general before private profit. This policy is as valid for our cities and historic towns as it is for Connemara or the Glens of Antrim.

8. In the sphere of industrial standards and consumer protection national control of new products and technologies, from whatever source, will be improved and coordinated. In particular, advance warning systems will be established to keep a constant watch for possible ill-effects arising from new developments. The Thalidomide experience must never be repeated. In all cases the good of the community and the protection of the citizen must come before private profit.

9. Information collection, as mentioned previously, must become a function of the state in its own right and the lessons and mistakes of other countries must be learned and noted. Urban planning is an obvious area where lessons can be learned. Sinn Féin is opposed to the over-growth of cities. It aims at balanced development, strong local government and a nation-wide dispersal of population. This, it is hoped, would enable the maximum

number of citizens to enjoy the benefits of urbanisation and country life, to keep commuting to a minimum and to encourage the growth of real community life in town and country. Sinn Féin will seek to eliminate the neglect of rural areas and the horrors of concrete jungles.

10. In its policy on transport Sinn Féin recognises the advantages of the motor car but aims to eliminate the disadvantages. In the context of environmental protection it would aim to eradicate the threat of the car to our cities and towns by supporting public transport. Dublin, Belfast and perhaps Cork apart, Ireland is still relatively free from the battle of the motorist versus the urban environment. Special measures are necessary in these larger cities. A start would be made by officially supporting the growth of a larger number of cooperative taxis at cheaper rates — one of the more rational experiments to emerge in the self-governing "No-go areas" in Derry and Belfast in recent years. In the case of the smaller cities and towns Sinn Féin will support similar experiments in cooperative public transport, based on maximum use of a minimum number of cars, before everybody is forced, due to an inadequate public transport system, to buy a car — which can then be used only with growing discomfort! In short, Sinn Féin will provide transport for the ordinary citizen first and not tackle the traffic chaos, only when it has already developed due to inadequate planning and a failure to consider the environmental consequences of transport policies. Here again, Sinn Féin will try to learn from the excesses of technology as experienced in more advanced countries.

11. Generally, Sinn Féin will opt for long-term advantage in environmental planning. No one generation has the right to ruin the beauty of the world no more than one generation can sell the right of a nation to its freedom and independence. Community interests will be placed before private interests. Monitoring systems and advance warning techniques will be developed. Special attention will be paid to the activities of outside speculators and multi-national companies. Sinn Féin will strive to ensure a balanced development of technology, at home and internationally. Efforts will be made to standardise the technological capacity of the country, to reduce the rate of obsolescence and over-reliance on any one supplier. Products which eliminate waste and have a cyclic capacity will be encouraged. The needs of the third world will be borne in mind, not only through support on international bodies concerned with these problems but also by a conscious national decision to slow down the technological "rat-race" e.g. in air-transport, by refusing to change to "the latest model" except where these are genuine improvements suited to the functional needs of the mass of mankind as opposed to "prestige" items.

An Advertising Code

12. A vast educational programme on the control of technology, the dangers to the environment and related topics will be conducted on radio and television and in the schools. This will not consist of brain-washing or pious platitudes, but will be an important part of a civic education programme on consumer protection aimed at enabling the ordinary person to learn of his rights and to air his grievances. It will aim to make citizens consumer conscious and to allow them to evaluate issues not only in terms of money but in terms of overall cost and value. The aim will be not only to inform citizens about the choices presented by technological advance but also to allow them to judge developments according to the entire Irish value system and not in terms of economic benefit alone.

13. Sinn Féin recognises that advertising has a role in a free society but a Sinn Féin government would eliminate the many abuses in current advertising practices. Sinn Féin believes in advertising as a means of informing consumers as opposed to promotional advertising by various gimmicks which the consumer has to pay for in the end. A strict advertising code would be drawn up for the various media. Outdoor billboard advertising of other than local products and services would be restricted. Control would be a matter for local and regional authorities, who could best interpret the values and sensitivities of the different communities in Ireland. In no case however, would amenities, beauty spots or surroundings be placed at the mercy of even local advertisers. Advertising boards on roadsides likely to distract motorists would be discontinued.

Consumer Protection

14. Consumer information and education would have a special place in radio and television programming. Sinn Féin believes in independent public service broadcasting financed directly by licence fee or where necessary, from public funds. Because the listener or viewer is not able to escape from radio or television advertisements in the same way as one can skip the advertising content of newspapers, radio and television advertising would be of a public service, informational nature, if at all.

15. Apart altogether from issues of taste, positioning, etc., Sinn Féin would insist that all advertising, in whatever media, would have to comply with truth and reality. Advertising which made outlandish claims, failed to point out the "catch" in offers, bargains or special prices, etc., or which is designed to exploit the passions of youth, would be forbidden. The development of

an Irish advertising tradition, emphasising information and facts and reflecting Irish values, would be encouraged.

16. Sinn Féin regards the development of consumer consciousness and of the Irish people's ability to evaluate issues in economic and also in other terms as a desirable aim in the New Ireland. Sinn Féin welcomes the growth of consumer associations and watch-dog groups in the fight against not only rising prices but also against the cheque-book take-over of Irish commercial life and the growing damage being done to our environment by the "rat-race" system. The Sinn Féin programme of economic resistance and the promotion of the *Comhar na gComharsan* philosophy are in the wider meaning of the term, consumer movements — but with national revolutionary direction. Sinn Féin will continue to promote such developments.

17. A Sinn Féin government would encourage the public to participate in consumer protection through the methods outlined at 12-15 above. It recognises, however, the need for public, legal and governmental protection also.

The main aim of any consumer protection system is to ensure that the customer gets value for money. Having examined the situation in several countries, we are convinced that, as in so many other matters, effective consumer protection lies not in the myth of "local competition" but in strong local administrative machinery to deal with grievances. Customers need not only protection in law. They need an effective redress locally. Sinn Féin believes therefore that consumer protection in law should lie in the first place with effective local government machinery. Too often the dissatisfied customer has to "write to Dublin" to rectify an injustice — and lose more time, energy and money in the process than the original article or service cost. Consumer protection units would form part of the local government structure. A special "Consumer court" would operate locally to resolve cases quickly, efficiently and cheaply.

Sinn Féin agrees with the concept of the public sector being responsible to the citizen for consumer satisfaction where services are rendered. Public bodies would have to compensate for injustices — including delay in payments to which a citizen was entitled. Citizens' Advice Bureaux would be established as part of the federal government system and these would advocate the case of aggrieved citizens. These would also change the belief of some people at present who approach public representatives to gain "favours" to which they as citizens are entitled in any case. (Sinn Féin already operates some Citizens' Advice Services on a voluntary basis). It should be pointed out however that the decentralised, more flexible, more humane system of government

proposed by Sinn Féin should lead to a considerable decline in bureaucratic malpractice in any case.

People Before Profits

This document began with a general consideration of the quality of life, the environment and technology. It may seem odd to some that we have linked these problems, and others — including advertising and consumer protection — together. We have done so because we believe that they are really all part of the same problem — a problem which effects each and every citizen at different times and in varying degrees, often without the citizen being aware of the links we see between them. We have, as in the case of all other national issues, set out the Republican policy on these matters and outlined the general approach a Sinn Féin government in a 32-County New Ireland would have to them. *We believe in people before profits.* We believe in public control for the common good while recognising the rights of individuals to hold personal property. And we believe in local control to restore dignity and a sense of involvement to the individual citizen. If people before profits, public control for the common good, are Socialists' ideas, then we are Socialists. But we are *democratic* Socialists. We serve neither King nor Kaiser, but Ireland only.

Title: The Quality of Life in the New Ireland

Organisation: Sinn Féin

Date: 1979

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