**SINN FÉIN AWAY DAY – 15 9 16**

Go raibh míle maith agaibh a chairde,

Táim lán sásta bheith libh anseo inniu, roimh téarma nua in dTeach Laighean atá ag tosnú an tseachtain seo chugainn agus téarma nua sa Tionól.

This year was a busy one for all of us.

Since we last met in this format we have fought elections north and south.

Across the island there are now over 300 Sinn Féin elected representatives in local councils, in the Oireachtas, the European Parliament, the Assembly and elected to Westminster.

A strong, vibrant, enthusiastic team of representatives, ably supported by experienced and committed activists.

We have grown from a relatively small party of several thousand activists a few short years ago into a party of over twelve thousand members.

Agus níl anseo ach an tús.

As you all know our party – from the grassroots up – is currently putting in place a plan for the next ten years.

This success and growth is down to the hard work of all of you in this room and our party in all 32 counties.

The big test, let me reiterate, is how we use this increased strength to deliver for citizens in their daily lives; to bring about a United Ireland, and to build a republican alternative to conservatism across this island.

Breathnaímis ar na páirtithe eile agus iad ag titim isteach is amach ón rialtas leis na deicheanna anuas.

What have other parties, in and out of government, for decades, achieved on these big issues.

Precious little except look after their own interests.

The success or failure of Sinn Féin can only be judged in how we use our political strength; in how we influence and shape the political agenda to the benefit of citizens.

That is the test for everything Sinn Féin does.

In this centenary year of 1916 the big challenge for democrats and progressives remains.

It is to build a real Republic.

**Brexit**

In the upcoming period all politics and economic and fiscal policy will be affected by the outworking of the vote in Britain to leave the European Union.

While that is a decision for the people in Britain there is a very direct effect on our affairs because the British government is insisting that the North must leave also.

Sinn Féin remains highly critical of the EU, and the absence of democratic accountability at its core.

We are for a social Europe; one which vindicates the rights of member States and which puts citizens at its centre.

We will continue to pursue those goals.

However, the fact is that one part of our island is in danger of being dragged out of the European Union whilst the other part remains in.

No one should be surprised by the British government and the unionists arguing for the maintenance of the United Kingdom.

The British, and particularly English politicians, are arguing in their national interest.

The Unionist leaders who lectured us for decades about ‘the majority’ are ignoring the majority in the North who rejected Brexit.

Unionism is led by the nose by little Englanders.

The rest of us have to rise above all this.

The Irish government in particular must argue in the national interest of the people of this island.

The consequences of Brexit are unknown, and unprecedented across Europe, and will create massive challenges.

It also presents enormous opportunities that need to be harnessed.

It is vital that the Irish government explore ways in which the north can remain a part of the EU.

The Taoiseach is duty bound to do this.

It is the only way to avoid the re-emergence of an economic border.

And while Sinn Féin is resolutely opposed to partition in any form there is a common interest, North and South, within the business and commercial sectors, agriculture, civic society and other sectors in defending the interests of the island of Ireland against the imposition or restrictions relating to a physical border, the common travel area, trade, North/South co-operation, the peace process and human rights.

It is disappointing that the Taoiseach has not brought forward any proposals so far on the all-island Forum which Sinn Féin proposed in June and which he agreed to.

Tá sé ríthábhachtach go mbeadh deis ag na glórtha ó na earnálacha uilligh againn le himpleachtaí Breatamach a phlé.

While it would be better if political unionism attends, the DUP leader’s dismissal of this proposal cannot be elevated to a veto.

The Taoiseach must be decisive on this fundamental issue.

**Partition**

The massive implications of Brexit are of course heightened by the fact that we still live on a partitioned island.

And despite the flip-flopping of Enda Kenny and Micheál Martin in the aftermath of Sinn Féin’s call for a unity referendum, they remain wedded to partition.

We remain absolutely focussed on ending it.

Cinnte, tá an chríochdheighilt sáite go láidir i gcroílár bunaíocht an Deiscirt.

Sin is cúis le ceannaireacht Fhianna Fáil agus Fine Gael.

The British establishment is also opposed to the emergence of the type of Ireland we envisage.

All those interests act to thwart us.

That’s why we need to work harder than our political opponents.

**Irish unity**

That means reaching beyond our traditional base of support to advance our all-Ireland agenda; our equality and human rights objectives; and our desire for economic democracy.

Do not for a second underestimate how difficult this will be.

It means convincing an undefined, but not insignificant section of unionists that a new Ireland is in their interests.

So we need a real debate; a real battle of ideas about the future constitutional position of Ireland; with cogent arguments that can convince the largest number of people that a reunited Ireland is to their benefit.

And not least in relation to the economics of a United Ireland.

We need a programme for this nationally and internationally.

Arguably, there will not be a united Ireland unless an Irish government is part of the process of achieving it.

By definition that means Sinn Féin in government in Dublin.

This is a huge challenge.

Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael will not easily surrender that ground.

Politics in the South are also realigning on ideological grounds.

And that is the context in which the coming term will play out.

Our job is to convince more citizens that their interests lie with Sinn Féin.

**Budget 2017**

In the next weeks we will also be challenging the government’s Budget plans.

Sinn Féin, as we do every year, will produce a fully costed alternative Budget based on fairness and equality.

Given that Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil ratcheted up public expectations by making uncosted promises and exaggerating the “fiscal space” during the general election, citizens will reasonably expect increased spending.

And so they should.

Nonetheless, Sinn Féin’s alternative Budget will be a prudent package and will be produced within the current fiscal parameters.

It will deliver increased investment in public services, promote fair taxation and go some way to tackling the cost of living crisis facing citizens at this time.

**Repealing the Eighth Amendment**

The coming term will also see increasing public focus on the repressive Eighth Amendment of the Constitution as the Citizens Assembly established by the government to deliberate on the issue will begin its work next month.

Sinn Fein believes the Eighth Amendment prevents doctors from providing proper care to women.

It should be repealed. Sinn Féin will campaign for this.

Beimid gníomhach go poiblí chun é a bhaint den Bhunreacht.

**Water charges**

The “expert” Commission on water charges, appointed in June, will also report their recommendations to the Oireachtas in this term - we’re told by the end of November.

Sinn Féin have been a leading voice to scrap water charges.

That is what we did in the North.

And unlike others, we won’t settle for anything less.

Fianna Fail are also now for the abolition of water charges, but it’s not a U turn says Micheál.

He’s right. It’s a four-point turn.

On Saturday the Right2Water campaign is holding a major rally in Dublin this Saturday at 2pm.

I would urge you all to be there.

Let’s ensure the charges are beaten, once and for all.

The fact is that water charges would by now have been scrapped if Fianna Fáil had stuck to its manifesto commitment.

And the Commission of Investigation into the sale of NAMA’s northern loan book, announced yesterday, would very likely have been established months ago but for Fianna Fáil backing Fine Gael and blocking it in the Dáil.

This week’s u-turns by Fianna Fáil on these issues is a cynical political manoeuvre.

It is Fianna Fáil recognising where the public mood is on these key issues and clearing the decks for any general election contest.

It makes a mockery of any assertion of new politics.

To their shame Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael and Labour provided political cover for those who robbed the people through illegal and improper NAMA transactions.

They can’t say they didn’t know.

Sinn Féin has raised NAMA at least 34 times in the Dáil.

Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Labour voted against a Commission of Investigation.

I spoke personally to the Taoiseach and Micheál Martin.

I wrote to the Fianna Fáil leader.

He never replied.

But now he has moved in one graceless manoeuvre to the Sinn Féin position.

All of this is in keeping with Fianna Fáil’s repositioning on water charges; on bin charges; on the National Monument in Moore Street; on rent certainty; and their support for not taking the Apple billions.

The general election in February saw the Fine Gael and Labour government stripped of their mandate to govern.

Having said he wanted to get rid of Enda Kenny, Micheál Martin entered into a deal with Enda Kenny to prop up a minority government for the next three years.

He did so cynically because he believes this is in Fianna Fáil’s interest.

It has nothing to do with the common good, of putting the country first or new politics.

A number of former independents – who had sought votes in the general election on the basis that they wanted to get rid of Fine Gael – also u-turned on that commitment.

They moved from being independents to implementing Fine Gael policies, including water charges, the NAMA cover-up and rejecting the Apple billions.

**Shaping the Agenda**

In this state the issues raised by Apple’s deal with successive governments go to the very core of the government’s attitude to citizens; to public services; to tax justice here and internationally; to fairness for our business sector; and to corporate social responsibility.

There can’t be one set of rules for some and different rules for others.

Nor should we forget that Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael foisted €64 billion of private banking debt onto the people of this state.

Now they reject €13 billion plus billions more in interest of tax money owed by Apple.

It’s scandalous.

Sinn Féin will continue to demand that the Apple billions are used in the interests of Irish citizens.

And in the Dáil we will continue to be the real voice of opposition.

Our record is clear.

On the resumption of the Dáil earlier this year it was Sinn Féin that proposed the establishment of the Dáil’s Housing and Homeless Committee.

We also forced the government to deal with the issue of children in receipt of domiciliary care allowance who were not in receipt of medical cards.

And our Seanad team forced the government to back down on pushing through hikes in bin charges.

Sinn Féin introduced sixteen pieces of legislation in total – more than all of the other groups combined – on important issues like rent certainty, ending zero-hour contracts, providing housing and NAMA.

And when the Dáil resumes Sinn Féin will provide focussed, principled leadership on the budget, on Brexit, on Apple, on NAMA and other important issues.

**The Fresh Start Agreement**

In government in the North Sinn Féin secured free prescriptions for every citizen.

Our Health Minister Michelle O’Neill ended the so-called ‘gay blood ban’.

Marriage equality is still banned in the North.

Sinn Féin is committed to changing that.

Táimid tiomanta fosta d'Acht na Gaeilge agus go chearta do lucht labhartha na Gaeilge, go háirithe an ceart chun oideachas a fháil trí mheán na Gaeilge.

The reality is that the political institutions set up by the Good Friday Agreement are unique and experimental.

They are an attempt to build bridges and connections between political parties and ideologies that are fundamentally different.

Tá Sinn Féin ar son Éire Aontaithe. Tá an DUP agus hAontachtóirí ina aghaidh seo.

Sinn Féin is also opposed to austerity measures and conservative politics. The DUP embrace these.

They are also extremely conservative on equality and social issues.

Sinn Féin opposed Brexit. The DUP voted for it.

This is a serious fracture in northern politics, with implications for the Good Friday Agreement and for relationships on the island.

But despite all the difficulties, including opportunistic calls by Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil for the suspension or the adjournment of the north’s political institutions, under Martin McGuinness’s leadership, we successfully concluded the Fresh Start Agreement last year.

It has helped to deliver for citizens in the face of the worst of the Tory Party’s austerity policies.

Táimid tiomanta do bheith ag tógáil ar seo.

Díreach mar atá muid tiomanta don pháirtí agus do pholaitíocht poblachtánach a thógáil ar fud an oileáin.

Seo an gnó atá idir láimhe againn.

Ar aghaidh linn chuige seo.

Go raibh maith agaibh.