



Moving On

A Policy for Lesbian, Gay and Bi-Sexual Equality

SECTION 1: OVERVIEW

Lesbian, gay and bisexual people suffer from discrimination and harassment in every aspect of their daily lives. Whether in the social, political, economic or cultural spheres, they are denied equality of rights and opportunities. There is no logical or rational defence for such exclusion. Only ignorance and indifference enable such a denial of basic fundamental rights to continue.

Republicans are only too well aware of what it means to be treated as second-class citizens. Our politics are the result of decades of resistance to marginalisation and discrimination. Self-determination is our core demand, not only as a nation, but also as diverse communities within that nation.

When confronted with experiences which are similar to our own (such as those of ethnic minorities, Travellers, women etc) it should be automatic for us, as republicans, to understand and actively express that understanding through solidarity. The denial of justice from one section of this nation is a denial of the rights of us all.

So it is imperative that Sinn Féin plays an active role in securing equality not only for the nationalist community, but also all those other sections of our society that have been denied the right to play a full and equal part in determining the course of this island.

It is also important to remember that lesbian, gay

and bisexual people are not a community set apart from the heterosexual population. In every community, in every locality and in every political party, there are lesbian, gay and bisexual people who are denied equality on the grounds of their sexual orientation. Sinn Féin has a responsibility to ensure that within its own ranks and the wider community it represents, that second-class citizenship is not acceptable, and that the rights of lesbian, gay and bisexual people are not negotiable.

At a time when the inequities of the society within which we live are so readily observable, we must rise to the challenge and confront all forms of exclusion, discrimination and marginalisation. It is time we moved on and made our position crystal clear - there is no room for discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation in our party, in our community nor in our country.

SECTION 2: LEGISLATIVE REFORM

It is widely recognised that in order to secure full equality in any society, equality before the law is essential. It is also argued that in order to redress the impact of decades of marginalisation, specific proactive legislative measures are required in a wide range of areas. While recognising and welcoming the many advances made by the Dublin government in recent years, Sinn Féin endorses the following proposed legislative reforms as integral parts of any comprehensive strategy for securing equality:

- As a matter of urgency the Dublin government should introduce the Employment Equality Act and the Equal Status Bill, accepting amendments supported by the lesbian, gay and bisexual representation groups;

- Anti-poverty and exclusion programmes at European and national level should recognise the lesbian and gay dimension of the problem and actively seek and resource a partnership with the lesbian, gay and bisexual communities;

- The Community Development Programme of the Department of Social Welfare (26 Counties) should include the lesbian, gay and bisexual community within the overall programme and provide for specific projects to address lesbian, gay and bisexual issues;

- The Department of Social Welfare, the Department of Health and other relevant departments (26 Counties) in developing policies and programmes to combat the discrimination and disadvantage detailed below should establish a programme to promote lesbian, gay and bisexual community initiatives and voluntary social services;

- The National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) (26 Counties) should address disadvantage in the lesbian, gay and bisexual communities;

- The European Union should recognise the lesbian, gay and bisexual dimension to social exclusion and commission action research projects in all member states similar to those proposed here and in a similar partnership manner;

- Lesbian, gay and bisexual social service, in a similar way to other voluntary services, should receive state support from the Department of Social Welfare (26 Counties);

- The Department of Equality and Law Reform, the Department of Social Welfare and other relevant departments (26 Counties) should consider action research projects in a number of areas, including homelessness among young gay people, tackling harassment and discrimination in the workplace and in education, the experiences of gay people living in rural areas, gay people from the Travelling community and gay people with disabilities;

- A public information and education campaign to challenge prejudices against various groups and to

promote social solidarity should be considered. Utilising all available mechanisms for communications, the Department of Equality and Law Reform and the Department of Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht (26 Counties) which has responsibilities in relation to RTÚ and IRTC would be important in this regard.

Sinn Féin also endorses the recommendations regarding Family and Youth, Education and Training, Employment and Unemployment, Services, Health, Harassment and Violence and Emigration, in the recent report Poverty, Lesbians and Gay Men, the Economic and Social Effects of Discrimination, produced by the Combat Poverty Agency in conjunction with the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network and Nexus Research Cooperative.

With regard to legislative reform in the Six Counties, while Sinn Féin does not recognise the legitimacy of the British statelet, it is mindful that any improvement in the provisions for lesbian, gay and bisexual equality within the current constitutional arrangements is to be encouraged. Sinn Féin, recognising the movement in the 26 Counties towards greater lesbian, gay and bisexual equality believes that legislators for the Six Counties should look southwards seeking unity in the eradication of inequality.

SECTION 3: INTERNAL EDUCATION

While demanding legislative change is central to securing equality for lesbian, gay and bisexual people, Sinn Féin's role in achieving such change is minimal.

However, much work can be undertaken both within Sinn Féin and by the countless party activists across the country. With this in mind, Sinn Féin commits itself to undertake the following educational measures in order to advance the struggle for equality within and beyond the party.

- Within a six-month period from this Ard Fheis, education and training sessions will be made available for all electoral representatives at both national and council level. The training will provide general awareness of the issues relating to, and concerns of the lesbian, gay and bisexual

communities and the role that elected representatives can play in combating discrimination and securing equality;

- Within a nine-month period from this Ard Fheis, education and training sessions will be made available for all advice centre workers. The training will provide a general awareness of the issues relating to, and concerns of the lesbian, gay and bisexual communities and the role that advice centres can play in combating discrimination and securing equality;

- Within a 12-month period from this Ard Fheis, all full-time activists will have a general education and training programme made available to them dealing with general lesbian, gay and bisexual equality awareness issues;

- Before next year's Ard Fheis, a comprehensive briefing document will be produced and circulated to all cumainn for the purpose of informing the membership and generating discussion and debate at cumann level;

- Within the next 12 months arrangements will be made with all Sinn Féin book shops to facilitate the stocking of lesbian, gay and bisexual-related newspapers, magazines and books;

- The Ard Chomhairle will appoint one of its members to oversee the implementation of the above through the structures of the Six/26-County Comhairlí.

SECTION 4: CAMPAIGNS

Sinn Féin is a political party whose roots are firmly placed within the communities we represent. Our politics places grass-roots, community campaigning at the centre of the political processes within which we find ourselves. Like many other movements working towards radical social, economic and political change, we recognise the value of 'bottom up', community-led; approaches to achieving our goals. With this in mind, Sinn Féin commits itself to assist the struggle for lesbian, gay and bisexual equality in the following ways;

- To support local, national and international campaigns whose aim is to further the struggle for lesbian, gay and bisexual equality. Such support would involve a wide range of possibilities from

joining in marches and street protests to lobbying and picketing. Campaigns such as Pride, International HIV/AIDS Day, anti-'queer-bashing' and others should be supported actively from Ard Chomhairle level right down to individual cumainn;

- AP/RN, as the official newspaper of the Republican Movement should become more proactive in promoting lesbian, gay and bisexual equality is needed. This could be achieved through establishing links with lesbian and gay newspapers and organisations in order to keep informed of the current issues affecting lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Publishers with lesbian, gay or bisexual-related reading lists should be encouraged to send publications for review to the reviews editor;

- A commitment from the publicity departments to respond to current issues affecting lesbian, gay and bisexual equality. A Sinn Féin spokesperson on lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) equality should be made available for publicity purposes. The responsibility for responding to such issues of concern should not be placed on the LGB spokesperson alone. A commitment from the Ard Chomhairle to release occasional statements on behalf of the leadership is also required;

- Sinn Féin activists should be encouraged to make contacts with lesbian, gay and bisexual activists in their areas in order to facilitate the above measures as well as further mutual understanding. Every effort should be made to attend events and meetings organised by LGB groups and to extend invitations for Sinn Féin meetings and events to LGB activists where possible.

CONCLUSION : RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

None of the ideas in this document are original. They are the product of decades of effort and ingenuity on the part of lesbian, gay and bisexual activists whose collective action has made the LGB movement into a powerful force within Irish politics.

There is no denying that there is much work still to be done if equality is to become a reality for all the people of this island. While Sinn Féin is a party with stretched resources we must not let this get in the way of furthering the goals we have set for ourselves. There is no room for discrimination of

any kind in the 32-County democratic socialist republic to which we aspire, and so there can be no room for such discrimination in the movement which we believe can bring us to that future.