

Olltoghchán • Tuaisceart Éireann General Election • North of Ireland

TIME FOR COMMON SENSE TÁ SÉ IN AM DON CHIALL



Foreword by Aontú Deputy Leader, Gemma Brolly

This election offers our communities the chance to send a message to London and to Belfast that the current cycle of austerity, cuts and mismanagement of our key public services will not be tolerated, no matter from where they originate.

We've had promises from parties that they would invest £1 billion into our ailing health service, yet at the first opportunity, they did the complete opposite and cut our services. They told us they urgently wanted to get back to work, yet the Assembly has passed only two pieces of legislation – but were able to award themselves a pay rise after only eight weeks back work.

We are now witnessing the continuation of a policy from Executive parties that mismanages our money and our services, and simply blames London when it comes to light.

Aontú is proud of its roots of accountability, integrity and community service. We will have no truck with political spin. We will work on the ground to campaign for better services such as in the SOS Causeway and SOS Daisy Hill Hospital campaigns. We will continue to stand up for the most vulnerable in our society, starting with the unborn. We will never stop in our demand for justice, regarding the Bill of Shame, regarding Fiona and Noah Donohoe, regarding anyone who is suffering at the hands of the state.

Building capacity in our communities that will call out the truth about failure wherever it originates without fear or favour, establishing accountability at the heart of our public services and those who are elected to serve and spearheading a renewal of our collective community spirit are at the heart of what we offer.

On July 4, vote Aontú X

GEMMA BROLLY

Aontú Deputy Leader

EAST DERRY

Brollach le Leas-Cheannaire Aontú, Gemma Uí Bhrollaigh

Sa toghchán seo tugtar deis dár bpobail teachtaireacht a sheoladh go Londain agus go Béal Feirste nach nglacfar a thuilleadh le timthriall reatha na déine, na gciorruithe agus leis an mhíbhainistiú ar ár bpríomhsheirbhísí poiblí, is cuma cé acu Westminster nó Stormont atá freagrach ina leith.

Thug páirtithe gealltanais dúinn go ndéanfadh siad £1 bhilliún a infheistiú inár seirbhísí sláinte atá ar an dé deiridh. An chéad deis a bhí acu, áfach, a mhalairt ghlan a rinne siad gur ghearr ár tseirbhísí. Thug siad le fios dúinn go raibh siad ar bís le filleadh ar an obair sa Tionól, agus gan ach dhá phíosa reachtaíochta rite acu go nuige seo – ach iad fós breá ábalta ardú pá a bhronnadh orthu féin i ndiaidh ocht seachtaine ar ais i mbun oibre.

Is é atá romhainn anois ná an seanscéal - míbhainistiú á dhéanamh ag páirtithe an Fheidhmeannais ar ár gcuid airgid agus ar ár seirbhisí, agus an locht á chur acu ar Londain nuair a thagann sé seo uilig chun solais.

In Aontú táimid brodúil as ár bhfréamhacha maidir le cuntasacht, ionracas agus seirbhís phobail. Ní suim linn bolscaireacht pholaitiúil. Oibreoimid ar an talamh i mbun feachtasaíochta ar son seirbhísí níos fearr, mar shampla feachtas SOS Causeway agus feachtas SOS Daisy Hill. Leanfaimid linn ag seasamh ar son na ndaoine is soghonta inár measc, ag tosú leis an leanbh sa bhroinn. Ní staonfaimid dár n-éilimh chun ceartas agus cóir a bhaint amach, ina measc An Bille Náire, Noah agus Fiona Donohoe, duine ar bith atá ag fulaingt mar gheall ar an stát.

Cuid dhílis dá bhfuil á ofráil againn ná acmhainn a thógáil inár bpobail chun an fhírinne a dhéanamh gan faitíos gan fabhar faoi aon teip is cuma cé atá freagrach ina leith, cuntasacht a bhunú i gcroílár ár seirbhísí poiblí agus ina measc siúd atá tofa chun seirbhís a dhéanamh don phobal, agus a bheith ar thús cadhnaíochta chun ár spiorad pobail comhchoiteann a athnuachan.

Ar 4 Iúil, vótáil Aontú X

GEMMA UÍ BHROLLAIGH

Leas-Cheannaire Aontú

DOIRE THOIR

Executive Summary

- 1. It was Aontú who first proposed that Stormont must be reformed to prevent any one party crashing the institutions or stopping them being formed after an election. The Alliance Party has followed suit and now support our reform. The Tánaiste and the Taoiseach under pressure from Aontú has also expressed support for our reform. This reform must be implemented in this Westminster Parliament term.
- 2. Public services in the north are on their knees. The elephant in the room is that this state does not have the budgets to provide proper housing, health, education, local government, or decent wages. Aontú is a party of economic ambition. We want to end the dependency of the North of Ireland. We want to grow our economy to benefit our society. We seek the devolution of Corporation Tax, Excise Duties and Fuel Tax to the North of Ireland.
- 3. The Immigration crisis has caused major challenges for both Ireland and Britain. Aontú wants to see the development of an Irish Sea Border for people whilst protecting the Common Trael Area. The Ireland of Ireland should be considered a unit in terms of immigration and those who seek asylum on either island should do so at ferry ports and airports north and south. Aontú opposes border checks along the north south border.
- 4. Aontú opposes elements of the Bengoa Report and the policy of hospital centralisation. This policy was signed up to by the 5 main Stormont parties. It is leading to the closure of hospital services right through the north which is causing massive damage to people's health. Health services should be delivered on the basis of need.
- 5. Aontú seeks a New Ireland Forum, where all of political and civil society north and south are invited to participate in discussions in how best to develop an All-Ireland Economy and All Ireland Institutions.
- 6. Aontú has raised the Legacy Act more than any other party in the Dáil. We also put significant pressure on the Irish Government to take the British Government to the European Court of Human Rights. Aontú seeks the repeal of the Legacy Act immediately.
- 7. Poor mental health and addiction continue to plague the North. We want to see the expansion of the Mental Health Support Fund, an agreed plan to reach the funding targets for mental health services outlined by the Mental Health Champion, a detox centre in the North West and the extension of the Challenge Fund to the North of Ireland.
- 8. Aontú seeks an overhaul of the archaic Housing Executive points and allocation system which fails to account for complex changes in communities and families over the last few years.
- 9. We have stood by communities who have said that environmental protections that are already in place for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, our drinking water and the Sperrins are being ignored. Lough Neagh is just the latest catastrophe in a long line where these protections have failed. We want to see a full-scale public inquiry on the Lough, and an Independent Environmental Protection Agency created.

- 10. Raising a family in the North is becoming increasingly difficult. Childcare is a particular burden for many young families who cannot afford the astronomical costs. Aontú wants to see the taxfree childcare cap increased to a minimum of 25% and the abolition of the two-child cap on child benefit.
- 11. Right now, 400 children with SEND currently have no school for September. We have children sitting on waiting lists for assessment lasting a minimum of 1 year, whether that be for CAMHS or for ASD assessment. The current system is failing these young people and their families. We want to see an all-island educational body in collaboration with the respective Education and Health departments to avoid duplication and promote best practice.
- 12. Aontú is a proud promoter of the Irish language. We believe in developing our native language at every opportunity. We believe in equality of provision of resources and assessments through Irish especially with regard to SEN resources and assessments available in Irish, at the same age.
- 13. We support a peaceful two-state solution in Palestine. We have met the Palestinian Ambassador and raised money for medical aid during the recent conflict and we will continue to support and end to the violence.
- 14. We want to see a comprehensive strategy for women's health in the North with both capital and resource monies allocated. The fact that this is the only part of these islands without a mother and baby unit to offer support to mothers suffering from conditions such as post-natal depression is outrageous.

The Border

The border on this island remains the single biggest obstacle to cohesion, trade and economic justice. As a Republican party, we want to see the removal of the border and the triggering of a Border Poll as soon as possible. The unity of all the people on this island whether they be Catholic, Protestant or Dissenter is at the core of Aontú's ethos.

In seeking to address a chaotic migration system administered by Dublin, and a destructive laissez-faire migration system from London, Aontú is advocating for an Irish Sea Border for people.

It is incredible that the administration in Dublin cannot tell where a person entering the State has come from, or how they entered the country. Equally, the Tories are satisfied that Brexit has now caused a push factor that may ease migration in Britain.

We want to see every person who enters this island having travel documents checked, proper checks conducted on their history and their forward migration. Where a person seeks international protection or asylum, that system should be speedy, compassionate and based on common sense. Where they do not seek assistance, they should leave.

We oppose any checks on the border by the PSNI or Gardaí. This is contrary to the Good Friday and Common Travel Area Agreements. Incredibly Sinn Féin flipped on this issue in

recent weeks and have gone from opposing any border in Ireland to supporting checks for people coming north and south.

As Republican activists, we have been and will continue to participate in conversations about Irish unity. Our 'Francie Brolly' Bill – named after one of our founding members, has been submitted to the Dáil to give Northern MP's speaking rights in the Dáil as a practical and realistic demonstration of our principles. We seek Northern MPs having the right to participate in Dáil committees and votes for citizens in the north in the Irish Presidential elections.

We welcome the establishment of the Shared Ireland Unit within the Department of the Taoiseach, and we will continue to support initiatives that improve cross-border services and projects in the North that can inspire confidence in communities about their place in a united Ireland.

Ireland's relationship with the European Union is important for many people on this island, especially in the North where citizens have been removed from the EU against their wishes.

EU funding via the SEUPB and the Regional Development Fund have been critical for projects in the North such as the upgrade of major roads, infrastructure projects and social cohesion. Aontú wants to see the Dublin Government use its influence in Brussels to identify mechanisms to continue such financial support with appropriate oversight.

Health

Our health service has lurched from crisis to crisis now for far too long. We have a health service that is underfunded, disjointed, overmanaged and understaffed. Without the goodwill of doctors and nurses during the pandemic, the health service in the North would have collapsed.

Our health workers are paid less than their counterparts in other parts of these islands yet carry out the same work, and that is not something Aontú is prepared to stand over or accept at any time. Pay parity must be the very basic principle of remuneration for our dedicated staff.

Our mental health services are in many cases not fit for purpose, and despite the fantastic work of the first Mental Health Champion and the longstanding call for adequate funding, a fraction of what has been identified as essential has been allocated by Stormont. The Mental Health Support Fund must be expanded and targeted at demographics served by charities and voluntary organisations.

Addiction services, particularly in the west are piecemeal. Tier 4 detoxification services in Omagh are expected to serve the entire West, leaving Derry without a service we have long campaigned for which must be delivered. Charities are being expected to address caseloads that are overwhelming whilst fighting for funding that just keeps the doors open. This needs to change.

Aontú wants to see the extension of the Challenge Fund to the North to enable many people who have mental health conditions to stay in work with appropriate supports. This funding should be devolved and ringfenced.

Our acute hospital services are constantly overstretched, and yet key services are under threat. Acute services in Daisy Hill hospital, Causeway maternity services and access to specialist services across the North are at some stage of closing.

Aontú opposes the outdated fashion of hospital centralisation. Aontú opposes the Bengoa Report. Aontú is determined to see accessible services with enhanced services aligned with medical workforce planning, multi-year budgets and manageable waiting lists. Aontú wants to see hospitals such as Daisy Hill and South West Acute Hospital service their hinterlands in the south of Ireland also. We support southern funding to allow this to happen.

Aontú seeks activity-led funding where hospitals are funded on the basis of every operation, consultation, treatment and patient engagement. This will redirect funding from nonproductive middle management to front line services.

Recent statistics show 32% of women aged 35-44 suffer depression. Aontú recognises the urgent need for increased support services in the North for baby loss, post traumatic distress disorder, post-natal depression and education and support around menopause. Too many men and women feel they have no option but to remain silent.

We will hold those to account those who promised £1 billion for the health service to gain votes yet have cut the Health Department budget at the first opportunity.

Housing

Housing waiting lists across the North are rising. Simply put, not enough social homes are being completed, and this year, only 400 social homes will be built – a huge drop of nearly 75% on previous years. Stormont parties will be careful not to highlight that figure.

Whilst social home building has slowed to a crawl, rents are steadily increasing across the North, forcing many families to move out of long-term accommodation to try and find affordable rented accommodation.

Aontú wants to see Westminster properly fund house building in the North through funding to the Reinvestment and Reform Initiative.

Further to the problems of actually finding an affordable home, far too many people are faced with substandard accommodation, particularly in temporary Housing Executive properties. Black mould, damp and neglect are widespread, and many tenants are forced to live in these conditions for too long because of the lack of movement on the housing list.

Aontú representatives have seen serious cases were the health of tenants, and in particular small children, are being affected due to these problems.

We want to see a significant standalone investment in Environmental Health in Councils from Westminster that will ensure homes are brought up to an acceptable standard, and that checks can be carried out by Environmental Health Officers to ensure compliance by landlords, whether they provide temporary accommodation to the Housing Executive or are in the private market.

The allocation and points system utilised by the Housing Executive is now archaic. It fails to take into consideration the composition of modern families, health issues and personal needs of many applicants and needs an urgent overhaul.

Aontú will immediately bring forward legislation that will bring Housing Associations into the purview of the Freedom of Information legislation. It is ludicrous that the huge organisations have little scrutiny on the services they provide which are largely funded by the public, especially when widespread concerns are raised, as they have been by our representatives on issues like maintenance.

People who abuse their home or their neighbours in public accommodation must face stricter sanctions. Both Housing Executive and Housing Association policies in relation to anti-social behaviour by tenants is not fit for purpose. Decent, hardworking neighbours are being tortured by people who simply don't care about their behaviour and are eventually moved from place to place. There must be real consequences and real action from housing providers.

The Environment

For far too long, the health of the environment in the North has come under pressure from private interests, official neglect and political ignorance.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty have been subject to huge planning applications for windfarms with little protection in place based on the reason for the AONB designation in the first place.

We are committed to ensuring that these areas are fully protected, and that residents and farmers have the ultimate say on any planning applications in those areas. The days of large private business dictating the use of these precious landscapes is over.

We now know that the blue-green algae crisis at Lough Neagh has arisen due to a lack of oversight and a political 'nod and wink' approach to environmental protection. It is one of the worst environmental disasters to have ever effected Ireland. The Farm Nutrient Management Scheme in the north provided funding for animal waste storage. The scheme cost over £200 million.

Aontú has seen internal documents from the Department of Agriculture in the north, in particular an email which was sent by former Minister Poots in March 2020 where he confirmed that a mere 700 on site interim inspections were conducted of the tanks in question, out of nearly 4,000 tanks installed.

There was a court judgement on the case. It stated that it is still unsure whether the limited inspections that did take place were in fact complied with the regulations. The Agriculture Ministers in charge of this project included Arlene Foster, Gordon Lyons, Michelle Gildernew and the current First Minister Michelle O'Neill.

Aontú wants to see a full-scale enquiry into how this situation has developed over many years with the acquiescence of officialdom at Stormont.

The Mobuoy super dump outside Derry is an environmental catastrophe. Again, environmental protection was an afterthought and now many years after its discovery, there has been no work undertaken to address the massive amount of waste in the ground that is a threat to Derry's drinking water.

The potential destruction of the Sperrin's by mining is something that Aontú will not accept. It is clear again that big business has put the ramshackle protections for our landscape to work for them and have either been encouraged behind closed doors by elected representatives despite public protestations or have simply sought to bamboozle local residents and farmers over their rights.

We want to see the immediate establishment of an Environmental Protection Agency with appropriate funding, staffing and powers to simply do what it says on the box – protect our environment from whatever source damage may come.

Policing & Crime

Aontú has long been a lone voice for real accountability for the PSNI. Parties that have signed up to specific provisions including the primacy of MI5 in intelligence in the North, which we oppose, cannot now be seen to go back on their commitments and so meaningful accountability on very serious cases and issues for communities have been ignored.

Some policing structures have simply been transformed into another funding stream for some community groups under the watchful eye of Sinn Fein and the DUP. Independent members of Policing and Community Safety Partnerships are now increasingly members of political parties and coupled with the elected representatives of their parties on Councils, hold a majority over decision-making. This is not what anyone envisaged with the creation of these bodies, and the fact that any haven't had public meetings in years should demonstrate why Aontú wishes to see them reformed to be truly focussed on accountability for the police, not for political ends.

The use of Public Interest Immunity certificates by the British Secretary of State to protect intelligence sources is surely one of the worst hangovers from the conflict. To add insult to injury, the use of these draconian measures in cases such as the Noah Donohoe case does nothing but raise genuine fears and suspicions about the focus of the PSNI – are they focussed on real justice or in protecting state secrets.

Militaristic policing in areas such as Derry, Belfast and Lurgan in 2024 is unacceptable. The use of stop and search legislation on a whim in these communities serves only to reinforce mistrust and anger. The ability of the PSNI to saturate areas with police resources for home searches for example, whilst not being able to conduct 'ordinary' policing is a demonstration of the skewed priorities of a police service that should be working every day to build relationships with communities.

The idea of an impartial police service refusing to give information to inquests, tapping journalists' phones and standing by whilst 'shows of strength' by criminal gangs is abhorrent to us, and the vast majority in a civilised society.

We absolutely oppose the shameful Legacy Act imposed by the British Government to deny families and survivors of justice. We pushed the Irish Government to take London to the European Court and we will continue to use any influence to push for its repeal.

The case of Noah Donohoe causes many people, and Aontú, deep concern. We have sought the intervention of the Taoiseach to ensure that every available resource on this island is utilised to deliver open justice for his family.

Aontú recognises that every society needs a police service, but it must be focussed on addressing crime, avoiding politics and not doing the bidding of unaccountable state security apparatus.

Education & Childcare

Childcare is a huge issue for families in the North - especially young families. Cost of childcare is forcing many young mothers out of work and having a detrimental effect on the workforce.

The North is the only part of these islands which doesn't have a childcare Strategy in place despite years of promises from Stormont parties who had it within their power to deliver.

Aontú wants to see the tax-free childcare cap increased to a minimum of 25% and an abolition of the two-child cap on child benefit.

Childcare providers receive no government support, and many are at the brink of closure. The pulse survey also found that almost half of childcare providers (46%) describe their financial situation as "struggling" or "distressed" indicating the precarious state of the sector, which is so critical to our economy and society. This figure rises even further to 60% of day nurseries who are either focused on survival over the next 12 months or at immediate risk of closure.

Our school estate is in a dire state across the North. Far too many students are still being taught either in crumbling buildings or aging temporary classrooms that have been anything but temporary. For too long the Stormont parties have put politics and division ahead of basic provisions for schools. Too many schools were secured under the term of Education Ministers as PPP/PPI buildings locking them and the public purse into years of contracts that are hugely lucrative for private companies.

We want to see a fund from Westminster that can buy out these contracts immediately and give school back to their communities. The savings produced by these buy-outs can fund meaningful maintenance and progression of school estate improvement.

The provision of Special Educational Needs in the north is nothing short of medieval. At present we have 400 children with SEND currently with no school for September. We have children sitting on waiting lists for assessment lasting a minimum of 1 year, whether that be for CAMHS or for ASD assessment.

Social and emotional wellbeing challenges have sky-rocketed in the last five years, with more than double the number of children now placed on the Special Educational Needs Register. Anxiety-based school avoidance is a major issue affecting almost every school across the North. The system is so overwhelmed.

Aontú wishes to see the creation of an All-Ireland education body which will develop best practice, beginning with the implementation of permanent learning support in the North as in the South. We will also push to see a collaboration with Health and Education in order to avoid duplication of assessment or support services.

Aontú has found that over three times the amount of young people were deregistered from the education system in 22/23 than the previous four years, with the main reasons cited being failure to facilitate educational and social and emotional needs or refusal to engage in education which does not endorse parental communication and approval. Aontú stood strong against the implementation of RSE as we believe parents are the chief educators and always should be. We will never condone a parental state.

Aontú is the only party that supports the implementation of the recommendations of an Royal Irish Academy report into the future of Magee and its transformation into a standalone cross-border University. Whilst we will eagerly await the report of the Taskforce established by the Department and will scrutinise its recommendations, it is clear the Ulster University have failed to make sufficient progress that is acceptable to the people of Derry on 10,000 students in the North West.

The Irish Language

Tá Aontú tiomanta do chur chun cinn na Gaeilge. Tá Gaeilge ag cuid mhaith dár mbaill. Creidimid go gcaithfimid ár dteanga dhúchais a fhorbairt le gach deis. Creidimid go bhfuil comhionannas de dhíth de réir gach roinn de réir an teanga freisin, msh. Go mbeadh acmhainní agus measúnaithe SRO ar fáil trí mhean na Gaeilge, ag an aois céanna agus atá ne cinn eile.

Shínigh Aontú conradh 'Gaelvóta 2024' agus déanfaimid ár ndícheall le gach píosa a thacú I ngach aon dóigh.

Aontú is fully committed to the Irish lesson. Many of our members have Irish. We believe in developing our native language at every opportunity. We believe in equality of provision of resources and assessments through Irish especially with regard to SEN resources and assessments available in Irish, at the same age.

Aontú has signed the 'Gaelvóta 2024' pledge and will continue to our best to support each step, as best we can.

Cost of Living

The rise in the cost of living following the disastrous budget of Tory Prime Minister Liz Truss, her predecessors and successor will be of no surprise to many in the North. The needs of working people have never been a focus for the party of the wealthy and privileged, however, the sight of Stormont parties walking in lockstep with the Tories on raising our bills and breaking their promises to take on austerity is now a reality for many.

Across Councils now run by Sinn Fein and the DUP, rates have risen year after year despite promises before elections to do the opposite. Public services such as Translink are forced to put up prices and older people are now forced to pay to apply for their 60+ travel cards.

Stormont parties will eventually impose extra charges on people by stealth to address the hole in finances their mismanagement and politically biased funding has wrought on the public purse.

We believe that historic underinvestment in public services and infrastructure lay at the door of London, however we will not continue to put our hand out to Westminster. If we truly want to manage our own affairs, getting more control of taxes and income in the North is the next logical step.

The Industrial De-Rating Grant which gives a 70% discount in rates for manufacturing space costs the public £71.5m a year benefits many large manufacturing businesses and we believe that money could be better spent invested in public services, and we will work to see it scrapped as it was in Britain in 1995.

The huge decrease in the Rate Support Grant by the Department for Communities overseen by the larger parties at Stormont has drastically reduced the ability of Councils with lower incomes to manage their services and keep local rates down. We refused to put up rates and we will refuse to do so in the future until Stormont address the deficit in the RSG and the general income of Councils.

Aontú is committed to the return of economic sovereignty to Ireland. Aontú is a party of economic ambition. We oppose the policy of dependency that permeates through the Stormont parties. We seek the equalisation of Corporation Tax with the south to turbo boost our economy.

We seek the devolution of fuel taxes and excise in order to protect businesses along the border. Scotland raises 22% of its income through local tax control. Wales raises 9% of its income through local tax control. In the north of Ireland its only 5%. This has to change.

It suits the Stormont parties to be able to blame London for their mismanagement, yet when pet projects are floated, millions of pounds can be found for them. Decisions that are truly made locally and are accountable to local people are better decisions.

Political Reform

The dysfunction of Stormont is not for your benefit, it is for the benefit of the parties in it. When Stormont is pulled down under the auspices of broken promises, public services continue to suffer, yet MLAs continue to be paid – something you would never be allowed to do.

Just eight weeks after returning to Stormont, MLAs gave themselves a pay rise. The First and deputy First Minister now earn more than £120,000 a year. Despite a PR campaign that told the public they wanted to get back to work urgently to solve our many problems, only two pieces of legislation have been passed in Belfast.

We were the first to advocate that MLA's should be paid the minimum wage when Stormont was not functioning. Every political party we put this to sidestepped the issue and would

not commit to implementing it. During the collapse, the Speaker and other officials continued to be paid huge salaries despite their job requiring none of its functions apart from welcoming dignitaries.

The removal of the veto and the ability for one political party to collapse the institutions was another Aontú demand, one that has mysteriously not been discussed by Stormont since it came back to life.

Political institutions on this island are not the property of political parties. The ability to disfigure and amend the basic operation of a representative body because it suits your party would be met with anger anywhere else in Europe, yet here we have it happening on a regular basis.

Right to Life for Everyone

Aontú supports the human right to life for everyone. We believe that all human life should be protected. The British government has introduced draconian abortion legislation that has resulted in the ending of the lives of over 7,000 unborn children here. The British law was supported by SF and the SDLP leadership.

Only Aontú stood with the majority of people who believe that this issue needs to be decided by the people of the North, not the British government.

