

THE IRA AND IRISH NATIONALISM

Since the establishment of an independent State for the 26 counties of Southern Ireland in 1922, the aim of those who regard themselves as uncompromising Republican nationalists has been the ending of partition and the incorporation of the six counties of Ulster into the Irish Republic. The Provisional IRA seeks to end partition by force, leading to the overthrow both of the government of Northern Ireland and what it regards as the equally illegitimate government of the "partition State" in the South. This view is overwhelmingly repudiated by most nationalists and Republicans in Northern Ireland and the Republic and by their elected representatives.

THE IRISH REPUBLIC

Although Eamon de Valera, the late Irish President, is regarded as a traitor by the IRA for splitting the movement and entering constitutional politics in the Irish Free State, Fianna Fail, the party he founded, has been in office longer than any other. De Valera often took a hard line on partition, but his basic commitment to the principle of consent is illustrated in the record (released in 1972) of the private sessions of the Second Dail in 1921, where he is reported as saying that:

"... the Dail had not the power and some of them had not the inclination to use force with Ulster. He did not think that policy would be successful. They would be making the same mistake with that section as England had made with Ireland...."

(Private Sessions of the Second Dail, Stationery Office, Dublin).

In September 1969 the Fianna Fail Taoiseach, Jack Lynch, reaffirmed that "the unity we seek is not something forced upon

of those living in Ireland based on mutual respect and tolerance". In March 1983 the leader of Fine Gael and present Taoiseach, Dr Garret FitzGerald said:

"... we have made it a fundamental principle of policy ... that any change in the constitutional position or relationship between North and South could come about only with the consent of a majority in Northern Ireland."

Apart from Sinn Fein (the political wing of the Provisional IRA), there have been only two parties which have not decisively condemned the tactics of the Provisional IRA: the Independant Fianna Fail Party and Aontacht Eireann, a party formed in 1970 but which wound up after a disastrous performance in the Irish general election of 1977.

Legislation against terrorism

Successive governments in the Republic have maintained firm legislation against the IRA. The Offences Against the State Act dates from 1939, and there have been two periods - during the Second World War and from 1957 to 1959 - when internment has been used to combat IRA campaigns. In 1971, the Forcible Entry Act was introduced which was designed mainly to combat new tactics, such as squatting, employed by the Official IRA in its social agitation. In 1972 part five of the Offences Against the State Act, which allowed cases involving terrorist offences to be tried in a Special Criminal Court by a judge sitting without a jury, was implemented. Further measures introduced in November under the Offences Against the State (Amendment) Act included a provision for senior Garda officers to testify that the accused were believed to be members of illegal organisations. By early 1973, John Stephenson and Rory O'Brady, the leaders of the Provisionals' military and political wings, had been convicted.

The legal problem concerning terrorist who cross the border and avoid extradition by arguing in the Republic's courts that their offences were

politically motivated has also been tackled: under the Criminal Law (Jurisdiction) Act which came into force on 1 June 1976, suspects can be tried in the Irish Republic for a wide range of crimes of violence committed in Northern Ireland. Section 4 of the Act provides for prosecution for explosives offences committed outside the Republic and in July 1982 Gerard Tuite, who was largely responsible for an IRA bombing campaign in London in 1978 and 1979, was found guilty of possessing explosives in London (Tuite was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment at the Special Criminal Court in Dublin: in May 1983 his appeal against sentence was dismissed).

Irish Governments have also had to combat the efforts of the IRA to influence institutions and aspects of national life not directly concerned with security. In October 1971, Gerry Collins (Fianna Fail), then Minister for Posts and Telegraphs, issued a directive under the Broadcasting Act to prevent the national broadcasting body, RTE, from broadcasting material on behalf of "illegal organisations"; this ban remains in force (in the general elections in 1982 and 1983 the Government banned Sinn Fein candidates from giving any party political broadcasts from RTE).

NORTHERN IRELAND

Among Roman Catholics in Northern Ireland, where they constitute about a third of the population, the overriding political issue has remained the border.

Nationalist party candidates successful in Northern Ireland elections took their seats at Stormont from the 1920s and finally agreed to constitute an official Opposition in the improved climate of North-South relations in the mid-1960s. From 1955, however, there was collusion between the nationalists and Sinn Fein, despite their differences over entering parliaments requiring them to take an oath of allegiance to the Crown. In 1969/70 the "Official" IRA and its political wing, "Official" Sinn Fein, renounced violence and

announced its intention to pursue its aims through constitutional politics (including contesting Dublin, Westminster and Stormont elections). Rejecting this policy, the hardline republicans formed the "Provisional" IRA and "Provisional" Sinn Fein (now known as Sinn Fein - "Official" Sinn Fein is now called The Workers Party).

Sinn Fein

Today, for the Provisionals there is no ambivalence in conducting simultaneously terrorist and "legitimate" political campaigns; they see the one as reinforcing the other ("We go forward, an armalite in one hand, a ballot paper in the other" - Danny Morrison, SF Publicity Officer at the 1981 annual conference).

In the Northern Ireland Assembly elections on 20 October 1982 Sinn Fein secured 64,191 of the valid first preference votes cast, 10.1 per cent of the total, and won five of the 78 seats in the Assembly. In two of the multi-member constituencies (West Belfast and Fermanagh/South Tyrone), Sinn Fein's share of the vote was larger than that of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) (the main moderate nationalist party) and Sinn Fein candidates topped the poll. In another constituency (Londonderry), a Sinn Fein candidate who was beaten into second place by the SDLP leader John Hume MEP was still elected on the first count.

This was the first time since it emerged in 1970 that Sinn Fein had ever contested an election in Northern Ireland. In recent years, as Sinn Fein has sought to harness popular support for causes which complemented the terrorism of the Provisional IRA, it has supported candidates running in other colours. In 1979 Bernadette McAliskey (nee Devlin) got 5.9 per cent of the first preference votes in the direct elections to the European Parliament, when she ran with Sinn Fein support with the promise that she would raise the "H block" candidates with Sinn Fein support won 7.7 per cent of the first preference votes cast in the 1981 local government elections, and 1981 also saw successive by-election victories for the "H block" parliamentary candidates,

Bobby Sands and Owen Carron, in Fermanagh/South Tyrone (it was the same Owen Carron who topped the poll there for Sinn Fein in the 1982 Assembly elections). Encouraged by these election successes, Sinn Fein at last decided to run under its own colours for the first time. The strategy was made acceptable to those members of Sinn Fein who still opposed the idea of even conditional participation in the electoral process by a continuing emphasis on the importance of the Provisional IRA's terrorist campaign.

The existence of a hardline republican vote has been a feature of Northern Ireland politics for a long time, although the abstentionist or boycott policies of hardline republican parties has meant that this vote has seldom been registered. Set in its historical context, the 1982 Sinn Fein vote is less impressive than previous manifestations of republican support. In the UK General Election of 1955 Sinn Fein candidates got 152,310 votes and returned members from Fermanagh/South Tyrone and Mid-Ulster. That support may have been influenced by the fact that the IRA was not involved in violence at the time and by the weakness of the alternative moderate nationalist party. But even after the start of a new terrorist campaign in 1956, Sinn Fein polled 63,915 votes in the 1959 General Election.

Social Democratic and Labour Party

In August 1970, seven Opposition members of the Stormont parliament, representing four separate groups, formed the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP). Although anti-sectarian, the new party was clearly intended to appeal primarily to the Catholic minority through its advocacy of eventual re-unification. Other aims include the more equal distribution of wealth and the extension of civil rights, reflecting the democratic Socialist background of some of the founders as well as their earlier involvement in the civil rights movement.

The SDLP regards cooperation and understanding between North and South, with the consent of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland, as the only

path to unity and from the outset it condemned IRA and extreme "Loyalist" violence.. SDLP leaders have condemned the Provisional IRA as "the most mindless set of masochists in recent history". At the same time SDLP reflected nationalist opposition to the old Unionist-dominated political institutions and to some of the policies of the security forces.

After the introduction of direct rule from Westminster, the SDLP supported the search for new political institutions representative of both sections of the community. It provided four of the 11 members of the short-lived Executive and two of four non-voting members of the administration which took over the government of Northern Ireland on devolved matters from early 1974.

The size of the Sinn Fein vote in the 1982 Assembly elections did not indicate a shift within the Roman Catholic community from the moderate SDLP towards extremism. In recent years the electoral support of the SDLP has remained steady at 18-20 per cent (18.8 in 1982).

The Irish National Liberation Army/
The Irish Republican Socialist Party

The Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP) was formed at the end of 1974 when a group of dissidents broke away from Official Sinn Fein. At first it disclaimed violence, but soon acquired a military wing, the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), which is still actively pursuing a terrorist campaign. The IRSP is an avowedly Marxist party. It is also, in contrast to Sinn Fein, not abstentionist, being willing both to stand in elections and in principle to take any seats won. It is not well-known abroad in its own right, tending to be subsumed in the non-specific "IRA" formula.

Independent Socialist Party (ISP)

In 1975 Mrs Bernadette McAliskey (formerly Bernadette Devlin) and 10 supporters left the IRSP because INLA's military aims had come to dominate it; they formed the ISP. The party is Trotskyist and aims to establish a 32-county "democratic socialist State". But it is small and almost without

influence apart from the person of Bernadette McAliskey (who now tends to run under People's Democracy colours).

Irish Independence Party (IIP)

The Irish Independence Party was formed in 1977 by a group of nationalist local government councillors to challenge the SDLP's role as the main spokesman for the Roman Catholic minority in the north. The IIP's policy is to seek "British withdrawal" through non-violent means (although some of its members are former PIRA activists) and an "equitable distribution of Ireland's wealth".

People's Democracy (PD)

PD is an ultra left-wing group formed in 1968 in Belfast and prominent in the 1968-70 civil rights demonstrations. In 1978 it merged with the "Movement for a Socialist Republic", a Trotskyist organisation. It aims to end partition and establish a Workers' State. It rejects violence and is non-abstentionist.