Can Sinn Fein Policy Still Be Considered 'Republican'?

ABSTRACT

This thesis endeavoured to accurately gauge the extent to which modern Sinn Fein continues to adhere to the principles of Irish Republicanism in the modern age. This required an examination of the movement's origins and its development over time. Competing interpretations of Irish Republican history and ideology were analysed in an attempt to isolate those principles central to the movement, before a conclusion being drawn about the extent to which Sinn Fein remain truly 'Republican'.

In charting the development of the Republican movement and the extent to which Sinn Fein have moved away from previous, 'hard-line' positions, the thesis also tackled the issue of nationalist convergence in Northern Ireland. Provisional Sinn Fein and the SDLP were both founded at the start of the 1970s, both primarily representing the nationalist community, but were seen as focusing on wholly different political agendas. The thesis measured the extent to which this was the case after a series of policy alterations by both parties, as well as the likelihood of two large parties continuing to vie for electoral supremacy within Northern Ireland's smaller ethnic bloc.

The thesis also gave focus to the rising levels of 'dissident' activity in the wake of the Good Friday Agreement. This is a modern phenomenon and as such, has not attracted a great deal of academic scrutiny. The range of 'dissident' groups operative in the wake of the Good Friday Agreement were investigated with a view to pinning down their aspirations, tactics and particular grievances against the Republican mainstream as embodied by Sinn Fein. The levels of sympathy and support for such groups were also considered as part of the process of assessing Sinn Fein's Republican credentials.

Ultimately, the thesis was extremely successful in charting the evolving relationship between Sinn Fein and the SDLP over the forty years of their existence. Interviews with politicians and strategists and scrutiny of crucial policy documents revealed that each party has undertaken significant policy alterations over the course of their existences. Whilst a common perception is that Sinn Fein morphed from an extreme party into a moderate one emulating long-standing SDLP policies, in truth it was the SDLP that first underwent a significant change in approach. Originally participatory and primarily concerned with social democratic goals within the Northern Irish state, the party later employed abstentionism on occasion and became more 'green', demanding an Irish dimension to any political deal as a prerequisite for talks.

Ultimately a firm conclusion on whether Sinn Fein remains true to Republican principles could not be offered. Having spoken to a range of republicans of different ilk, it was concluded that elements above and beyond delivering Irish unity via an all-island plebiscite could be discarded as marginal, however popular amongst supporters, activists and representatives. Consequently, whilst the party continues to work towards that goal, any judgement on the legitimacy of its claim to represent Republican principles in a modern setting must be reserved. What was concluded, however, was that as of 2011 it remained unclear precisely how the party would be able to deliver on traditional goals.

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CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

32 CSM – 32 County Sovereignty Movement

DUP – Democratic Unionist Party

GAA – Gaelic Athletic Association

IICD – Independent International Commission on Decommissioning

INLA – Irish National Liberation Army

IPP – Irish Parliamentary Party

IRB – Irish Republican Brotherhood

IRSP – Irish Republican Socialist Party

MLA – Member of Legislative Assembly

NICRA – Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association

NILT – Northern Ireland Life and Times

NIO – Northern Ireland Office

OIRA – Official Irish Republican Army

PIRA – Provisional Irish Republican Army

PSNI – Police Service of Northern Ireland

PUP – Progressive Unionist Party

RIRA – Real Irish Republican Army

RUC – Royal Ulster Constabulary

RSF – Republican Sinn Fein

SAS – Special Air Service

SDLP – Social Democratic and Labour Party

TD – Teachta Dala (member of Leinster House)

TUAS – Tactical Use of Armed Struggle

UDA – Ulster Defence Association

UFF – Ulster Freedom Fighters

UUP – Ulster Unionist Party

UUUC – United Ulster Unionist Council

UVF – Ulster Volunteer Force

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INTRODUCTION

Following the formation of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) in December 1969, one of the 20th Century's most enduring conflicts was soon to begin; the Northern Irish 'troubles'. The PIRA quickly became the dominant element in the republican movement, effectively usurping the 'Official IRA' as *the* IRA. It was accredited with approximately half of all the killings committed between 1970 and 1997; almost 2,000 in total.

Both the PIRA and its political wing, Sinn Fein, argued that the use of force was necessary in order to achieve Irish self-determination and ensure the subsequent reunification of the island. One of the key reasons for the favouring of the use of force as a means by which the Irish could be 'liberated' was their take on the nature of the problem. That is, the North of Ireland was said to be under the control of a colonial aggressor; Great Britain. The PIRA argued that the only way to purge the country of British influence was to resist, citing examples from other countries from where the British had been forced to relinquish colonial control when faced with armed rebellion.

In supporting the PIRA's armed campaign, Sinn Fein operated from 1970 until 1986 under a policy of abstentionism. As an all-Ireland party, and with Northern Ireland remaining in the United Kingdom, it was theoretically eligible to contest elections and subsequently take seats in Dail Eireann, Stormont and the House of Commons since all came within the party's territorial coverage. However, it viewed entering any of the three as unacceptable. Britain, it was argued, was a foreign occupier and so to take seats at Westminster would be a hypocritical move. The two parliaments on the island of Ireland were seen as illegal,

'partitionist' institutions. Entering either would help copper-fasten partition and see two illegitimate states on the island in perpetuity.

Modern Sinn Fein, however, takes a very different stance on the key issues of violence and political participation. It no longer argues that the use of force is necessary in order to achieve a united Ireland. Following a lengthy ceasefire from July 1997 onwards, the PIRA formally abandoned its armed campaign and fully decommissioned its weapons in September 2005. The anti-colonial language of the mainstream republican movement, as embodied by Sinn Fein, has also been substantially toned down. Moreover, Sinn Fein now contests elections to the European Parliament, Dail Eireann, the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Westminster Parliament, taking seats in all but the latter. Even here the party does accept office facilities and expenses for its members at the House of Commons. Sinn Fein argues that entering the Dail and Stormont, combined with the cross-border bodies attached to them, is part of a long term transition from a partitioned to a unified Ireland. In order to continue the process of shifting the political focus away from London and towards the island of Ireland, the party has also recognised the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), a move which paved the way for the devolution of policing and justice powers to Northern Ireland.

So there have obviously been significant changes in many key areas of Sinn Fein policy. Interpreting reasons for these developments is crucial to this thesis. Detailed examination of the areas in question should make it possible to assess whether these alterations of policy and rhetoric are adaptations of traditional republican values to a modern setting, or actually an abandonment of core republican principles, as all that was once a matter of principle has become tactical.

Modern Irish republicanism and the problem of distinguishing it from Irish nationalism

This thesis will investigate what it means to be 'republican', initially in an international context and then focusing upon the specific situation on the island of Ireland. This will involve an exploration of republican ideological and tactical components. Amongst these ideological features are anti-monarchism, anti-colonialism, socialism, Gaelicism and national self-determination. The main tactical features of republicanism, armed struggle and abstentionism, are analysed. It will be necessary to examine the extent to which each element has been traditionally espoused by republicans abroad and in Ireland; whether in the particular case of Ireland it was considered an essential or dispensable part of republican thinking; and finally, whether Sinn Fein has adapted its stance on these issues or simply abandoned its supposed core commitments.

In seeking to determine the extent to which Sinn Fein is still a republican party, the thesis will also make a detailed comparison between Sinn Fein and the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP). The purpose of this is to examine whether (and if so, how) Sinn Fein has moved into a broader pan-nationalism, bereft of the fundamentalism of hard-line republicanism. Whilst traditionally Sinn Fein's republicanism has been marked by ideological difference from the SDLP's nationalism (in terms of aspects of co-determination and its political organisation) it is necessary to discover why this is the case and make an assessment as to whether earlier differences are still applicable today. The thesis will examine the origins of the parties and their respective positions from 1970 until the present day, and attempt to assess disparities between the two at various stages in time.

Whilst Sinn Fein backed the PIRA's armed campaign as part of a 'Brits Out' strategy, the SDLP strongly opposed violence and argued that an agreed Ireland was of greater realism than an enforced unitary, territorial state. The 'war' was argued to be immoral and counterproductive to the achievement of an agreed Ireland. The SDLP argued against the Sinn Fein contention that the Northern Irish problem was a simple case of forcing out the colonial power. Whilst the SDLP agreed with republicans that the British government must take historical responsibility for the difficulties in Ireland, it saw unionist opposition within Ireland as the main modern stumbling block to reunification.

The SDLP argued that Sinn Fein's dismissal of unionists as 'confused Irish' was ignorant and simplistic. Instead, they adopted a 'two traditions' approach. That is, there are two traditions on the island of Ireland; unionist and nationalist. To argue that unionists were tools of their imperial masters with no identity of their own was dubious enough, but as justification for an armed campaign it was wholly inadequate. Consequently, simply 'bombing unionists into submission' was not a viable option. If anything, those unionists who might consider reunification acceptable could be totally alienated by an armed campaign.

Instead, the SDLP favoured an 'agreed Ireland' as the outcome of national self-determination. An agreement laying out terms for a peaceful, democratic, non-sectarian Northern Ireland with democratic consent being the basis for future constitutional change, i.e. Irish reunification, was acceptable to the SDLP.[1] The party even claimed that forcing Irish unification upon unionists too early would be undesirable, since it would sour the

already fractious relationship between the two traditions. Sinn Fein ridiculed this concept, claiming all it amounted to was the acceptance of a unionist veto.

Despite episodic abstentionism, for example from the British government's experiment with rolling devolution from 1982-1986 after it became clear the 'Irish dimension' had not been considered, the SDLP has been a participatory party by instinct. This often led to fierce criticism from the abstentionist Sinn Fein and its supporters, who dismissed members of the SDLP as 'collaborators'. For example, former leader Gerry Fitt was labelled "Fitt the Brit" in West Belfast.[2] In turn, the SDLP saw Sinn Fein's evasion of participatory politics as backward-looking and counter-productive to the search for a political solution to the conflict.

The Research Questions

In summary, this thesis attempts to answer the main research question of whether Sinn Fein policy can still be considered 'republican' by asking and seeking out answers to the following sub-questions:-

- What, if any, are the core principles of Irish republicanism?

- On which ideological commitments has Sinn Fein overseen a significant change in the republican movement?

- Have the numerous changes in Sinn Fein policy over the years been an adaptation of republican principles to a modern setting, or has the republican movement merely embarked upon a quest for electoral success and power in which 'republicanism' is defined by what the party does?

- What is it, if anything, that distinguishes Sinn Fein from the SDLP today?

In order to address these questions it is necessary to consider firstly, whether there has been a fusion of the supposedly universal principles of Irish republicanism with a more discrete northern nationalism proffered by the SDLP; secondly, to explore the extent to which Sinn Fein shifted its positions as part of this fusion, if it has indeed occurred; thirdly, to assess the motivations for the changes in policy and, fourthly, to analyse what have been the implications for Sinn Fein as a 'republican' party in ideological and political terms.

If there has been some form of convergence of ideas, then it is important to establish whether this is primarily about changes in Sinn Fein policy, driven by the need for electoral and political adaptation to circumstances, or whether the SDLP has engaged upon a 'greening' process, taking stances much closer to those of Sinn Fein. A detailed look at the areas in which there has been convergence, as well as remaining divergent policies, should enable a conclusion to be drawn about the extent to which Sinn Fein remains different from the SDLP. Examination of the extent to which it is structural differences that mark the two out as different is necessary as part of this process.

This thesis is warranted for several reasons. The speed of change of Northern Irish politics means that much existing material on the republican movement has rapidly dated.[3] Recent years have seen Sinn Fein dominate the SDLP in terms of electoral competition, gaining more votes than its nationalist rival in all forms of elections. The reasons for, and implications of, this rapid and seemingly permanent electoral realignment require greater analysis.

Second, whilst there has been much written on the IRA, there have been crucial alterations in republican strategy in recent times, namely the disappearance of the PIRA and the decommissioning of its weapons and, as equally seismic, Sinn Fein's pledge of support for the 'civic policing' of the Police Service of Northern Ireland in 2007, following the St. Andrews Agreement. Furthermore, Sinn Fein shares power with former opponents in the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), along with the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) and the SDLP. Since events in all of these areas are recent occurrences, there has been little opportunity for academic scrutiny of them. As a result, investigation of them in this thesis will make for an important contribution to academia in terms of assessing the extent to which the changes in Sinn Fein policy reflect the party's revised ideological approach.

It is also true to say that whilst much has been written about Sinn Fein[4], the PIRA[5] and party leaders such as John Hume[6] and Gerry Adams[7], there is a dearth of analytical literature on the SDLP, its interpretations of nationalism, its competition with Sinn Fein and the respective influences both parties have had on each other. There are only three detailed works dealing with the SDLP. The first is McAllister's 1977 work, *The Northern Ireland Social Democratic and Labour Party*.[8] The second is Gerard Murray's *John Hume and the SDLP: Impact and Survival in Northern Ireland* of 1998.[9] The third is another book by Murray, this time written in collaboration with Jonathan Tonge and published in 2005, *The SDLP and Sinn Fein: From Alienation to Participation*.[10] Of the three, only the Murray and Tonge work of 2005 is recent enough to deal with some of the substantial changes in Sinn Fein policy, possible adaption of SDLP policies and electoral eclipse of the SDLP by Sinn Fein, clear gaps which require remedy. Even this work does not cover the period in which Sinn Fein recognised the PSNI.

The thesis is also important in its inspection of what the term 'republican' actually means conceptually. Various authors have made comment on the republican movement, particularly on the PIRA. These accounts vary; from sympathetic,[11] to balanced,[12] to scathing.[13] However, rarely do they tackle the issue of what it actually means to be a republican, and consequently whether modern day Sinn Fein remains true to overarching republican principles. The quest for clear definitions of the terms republican and nationalist will be an integral part of this thesis's investigation.

The thesis begins by examining broader conceptual definitions of republicanism, before exploring their historical applications in Ireland. In doing so it reveals the indispensable ideological tenets of Irish Republicanism; the desire for Irish territorial unity; the complete removal of the British government's presence in any part of Ireland. It also illustrates the ascending level of significance ascribed to other common strands of Irish Republican thinking such as Gaelicism, socialism and anti-colonialism. Having done this, the thesis then turns to an analysis of how Sinn Fein's modern strategy fits (or fails to) the ideological parameters of Irish republicanism.

A further benefit of this thesis will be the way in which it pays specific attention to the political implications of 'new' Sinn Fein. Whilst admittedly much media (and indeed academic) focus was on the abandonment of the PIRA's armed campaign, little attention has been paid to purely political consequences of this post-conflict era. This means several issues have not attracted the amount of scrutiny that might be expected; what compromise means for Sinn Fein in terms of political dynamics and party base; what the consequences

of electoral and office-holding republicanism are for the SDLP and Irish nationalism in general and the likelihood of and timescale for Irish reunification. Whilst a small number of works have paid some attention to these issues,[14] this is still an area that is underrepresented in the literature on the republican movement. The lack of focus on republican ideology and political consequences of republican change are key reasons for the importance of this thesis.

The thesis also examines the validity of having two parties representing the same ethnic bloc in Northern Ireland. With the two parties representing less than half of Northern Ireland's 1.8 million people, and with there arguably having been some degree of political convergence between the two, this thesis will examine the extent to which two nationalist parties is sustainable or necessary given their apparent ideological and political convergence.

The Structure of the Thesis

The thesis begins in Chapter One with a framework by which changes in republicanism can be measured; a methodological structure. The concepts associated with republicanism, both universally and more specifically the development and application of Irish republicanism, will be examined in order to formulate some sort of working definition of republicanism. This definition enables an accurate assessment as to the significance of Sinn Fein policy changes later in the thesis.

Chapter Two gives a comprehensive review of the existing literature on the republican movement. It points out differing interpretations of Sinn Fein development, with some

authors claiming Sinn Fein and the SDLP have always been similar,[15] whilst others argue there has been some form of convergence but have interpreted this in different ways.[16] It will also look at the various interpretations of Irish nationalism and republicanism.

Having explored the theoretical constructions of Irish republicanism and nationalism and their influence upon the political approaches of Sinn Fein and the SDLP, in Chapter Three there is an investigation of Sinn Fein and the SDLP's policies in the 1970s. This involves examination of the reasons for each party's foundation, and the divergent strategies employed by the two parties in relation to stated goals and the methods by which these goals were to be achieved. In particular it looks at the seemingly integral nature of armed struggle with republicanism during this period, and the demands for complete British withdrawal from Ireland within the lifetime of a British parliament. It assesses the salience of principles of federalism within the construction of Irish republicanism and examines the apparent paradox of republicanism as a universal entity but one which struggled to recognise and accommodate different traditions on the island of Ireland.

Chapter Four involves an examination of the notion that, from the start of the 1980s, there were the beginnings of a process of political convergence between Sinn Fein and the SDLP. This involves paying particular attention to Sinn Fein's new-found interest in elections following the by-election success of Bobby Sands and thereafter the party's 'armalite and ballot-box' strategy. It will also look at the dropping of the federal ideas of 'Eire Nua' and later Sinn Fein's recognition of the Irish Republic in an attempt to gain political representation at Leinster House. The chapter also considers the differing interpretations of the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement. Whilst the SDLP saw the Agreement as an important step on the road to their 'agreed Ireland', Sinn Fein criticised it as a way of copper-fastening

partition. Nevertheless, republicans still claimed that any benefits from the agreement should be put down to the 'successes' of the PIRA's armed campaign.[17] It culminates with examination *Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland*, Sinn Fein's most nuanced policy document since its foundation in 1970.[18]

Chapter Five contains an investigation of Sinn Fein's continued political evolution in the period from 1992 until the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. This includes a particular focus on issues such as co-determination as a legitimate form of Irish self-determination, the abandonment of the PIRA's armed campaign and the decision to participate in a Northern Irish Assembly despite previous assertions that Northern Ireland was an illegitimate statelet. It will also examine the extent to which the Good Friday Agreement represented advancements for republicans when compared to the Sunningdale Agreement on offer almost 25 years earlier.

In Chapter Six the electoral and political fortunes of the revamped Sinn Fein from 1998 are examined. This includes an analysis of the scale of the improvement in electoral performance, the constituencies from which new votes have been garnered, the potential for continued growth in both Irish jurisdictions and the overall significance of attracting a greater share of the vote and winning a larger number of seats. It also seeks to explain the reasons, ideological and structural, for the party's overtaking of the SDLP as comfortably the largest nationalist party in Northern Ireland. The chapter assesses how the pursuit of votes and political office has shaped policy preferences for the party.

Chapter Seven focuses on Sinn Fein's attempts to portray itself as the embodiment of modern Irish republicanism, which has obliged a dismissive approach towards 'rejectionists' unhappy at the scale of the party's compromises. The chapter assesses the contributions to republicanism made through the emergence of so-called 'dissident' Republicanism in all its guises. To what extent have these groups adopted the policies once espoused by Sinn Fein? The chapter identifies each of the 'dissident' organisations to emerge in recent years, analysing their political goals and the tactics they employ and interpreting the significance of the proliferation of such groups. This acts as a yardstick by which to measure Sinn Fein's most recent policy and tactical alterations, including the standing down and decommissioning of the PIRA and ultimately the recognition of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI).

Research Methods

A wide range of research methods have been used in order to produce this thesis. These include utilising a variety of primary and secondary sources intended to give weight to claims and validate opinions throughout. Primary sources of data include interviews with leading Sinn Fein politicians and strategists, as well as others at different levels of the party. Republican former prisoners were also interviewed to provide the perspectives on political change of those who had fought the republican cause. A full list of interviewees is provided in the bibliography at the end of this thesis.

Though it was accepted from the outset that a wide variety of sources of information would need to be utilised for this project, qualitative research in the form of semi-structured interviews was selected as a crucial method of data collection. This decision was taken on

the basis that the thesis' primary objective, that of discovering the extent to which Sinn Fein's current policies remain true to longstanding principles, could be realised partly by interpreting the narrative created by those involved in the Irish republican movement. Open-ended lines of questioning offered interviewees the opportunity to talk at length about matters of the utmost importance in this research: national self-determination; liberty; territorial sovereignty. Given it is beyond question that Sinn Fein's policies have changed over the years, the primary focus of this thesis is examining the extent to which the process of policy change can be claimed to have arisen as a result of adapting principles to a modern setting rather than an abandonment of traditional goals. Interviews were judged to be of greatest utility in this regard, since they allow participants to tell their own story in language with which they are familiar.[19]

It is accepted that despite the benefits offered by conducting interviews as part of the research, there were negative aspects to this approach. Not only were the interviews time-consuming and at times difficult to arrange, but in terms of drawing firm conclusions, they did not offer 'trends' in the way quantitative data would.[20] As such, making generalisations as to the attitude of republicans was not possible, since each interviewee chose to answer open questions in their own way drawing on personal experiences. Moreover, it is acknowledged that in face to face interviews, there is a tendency for the interviewee to offer a 'socially acceptable' answer. For example, in probing republican interviewees as to their attitude towards unionists in an attempt to confirm or dismiss the notion that republicanism is de facto sectarian, one might expect to be offered a more conciliatory response than is genuinely the case. Nevertheless, despite these concerns, it was concluded that in a thesis interpreting republican policy change, giving republicans themselves the opportunity to interpret such changes in lengthy interviews was an appropriate method of gathering information.

The semi-structured interview technique also allowed for new areas of interest to be explored. Whilst rigid, structured interviews or surveys are helpful in delivering clear answers to specific questions, they do not allow respondents to offer previously unknown causes, motivations or interpretations of events. Moreover, they prevent researchers from 'digging' deeper when an interviewee provides an intriguing and potentially useful response during the course of an interview.[21] Being able to divert from the basic framework of the prepared interview questions was deemed, and ultimately proved, to be of great utility for this research project.

Overall, interviews provided some of the most helpful insights into the evolving nature of Sinn Fein's political programme. Official party speeches and media releases from the times at which such policy changes occurred offered little in terms of how individual republicans felt about the deviation in course of the republican movement. By speaking to individual republicans it was possible to gauge the emotional reactions to the morphing of Sinn Fein ideology. The analytical take offered by senior party figures and a handful of journalists and academics who have engaged with the ideological side of the republican movement is in itself valuable, but to focus on these at the expense of the feelings of those involved in the movement would be to neglect a key indicator ideological 'purity'.

In addition to these interviews, visits to the Linen Hall Library in Belfast facilitated the gathering of press releases, policy initiative documents, manifestos, election literature, speeches and a variety of other forms of data from Sinn Fein and the SDLP from the Northern Ireland Political Collection. Others were obtained directly from ard-fheisanna.

Moreover, a great deal of primary data was gathered from the Northern Ireland Life and Times surveys, social attitudes surveys and ESRC Northern Ireland election surveys. Such information proved extremely useful when used in conjunction with interview material, allowing measurement of public opinion against the interpretations outlined by republican interviewees. This related to a number of areas including support for particular parties, public preferences on the constitutional future of Ireland and sympathy for the activities of 'dissident' republicans from the 1990s onwards. Quantitative data in the form of voting figures and the demographics of those holding particular political and social beliefs was cross-referenced with claims made by interviewees in order to assess the validity of such assertions, particularly in the thesis' later chapters.

Other than existing literature on Sinn Fein, the SDLP and republicanism and nationalism in general, secondary sources used primarily came in the form of articles taken from newspapers and journals. In addition to republican newspapers and magazines such as *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, *Saoirse* and *Iris*, articles from other magazines such as *Fortnight* and from British and Irish newspapers were also of great use. These include the *Times*, the *Guardian*, the *Independent* and the *Telegraph* from Britain, as well as the *Irish Times*, *Irish News* and *Irish Independent* from Ireland. Local papers such as the *Belfast News Letter* and the *Derry Journal* were a great source of news. Journals from which articles were taken include *Irish Political Studies*, *Irish Studies Review*, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, *European Journal of Political Research*, *Electoral Studies* and *West European Politics*, though there were many others covering a variety of topics.

Internet resources provided a great deal of valuable information from a range of sources. The official Sinn Fein and SDLP websites were visited regularly in order to keep abreast of

unfolding policy decisions, media campaigns and reactions to election results. Furthermore, each website provided a narrative of the political parties' history as told by its own supporters, a take on the development of the Northern Irish peace process through the 1980s and 1990s and an analysis of events in more recent times. Indeed, Sinn Fein has a number of websites dedicated to particular aspects of the party's history and current political programme. Each of these was extremely beneficial for a project seeking to interpret the significance of potentially crucial alterations to political philosophy or ideology. Indeed, other political parties' websites were similarly useful in this regard. Those of so-called 'dissident' republican groups such as Eirigi, the IRSP, Republican Sinn Fein and Republican Network for Unity were particularly crucial to Chapter Seven of the thesis, whilst unionist parties' websites were utilised when considering Sinn Fein's unionist outreach programme and the likelihood of the party persuading a significant enough proportion of the Northern Irish population about the benefits of Irish unity.

The Elections Ireland and CAIN websites were vital sources of voting statistics and, in the case of the latter, archived speeches and policy documents. There were also a variety of other internet resources providing news, data, comment and analysis of events relating to the republican and nationalist movements. These include British, Irish and American government resources, the BBC News webpage, Youtube and many others. There were also a number of blogs offering crucial insight into republicanism and Irish politics in general, not least Anthony McIntyre's Pensive Quill and Slugger O'Toole.

These internet resources, along with the semi-structured interviews, existing literature and regularly updated journals provided information that made for an all-round more comprehensive investigation into the changing nature of Sinn Fein policy, the extent to

which the party remains distinct from the SDLP, whether it remains a legitimate form of republicanism and the wider implications for Irish Republicanism as a whole.

CHAPTER ONE: DEFINING IRISH REPUBLICANISM

The purpose of this thesis is to make a judgement on the extent to which Sinn Fein policy can still be considered republican. In order to do this, it is first necessary to formulate a coherent working definition of the term republican. What general principles are established by republicanism as an ideology? How useful are these principles in terms of application to Irish republicanism? What are the core principles of the republican movement and what makes a party republican? In the case of Ireland, what has traditionally distinguished republicanism from nationalism? This chapter seeks to answer these questions and develop a definition as a useful point of reference for the rest of the thesis.

Republicanism as a general concept

When attempting to establish a clear idea of republicanism as a universal ideology, it is necessary to attempt to uncover a working definition of the word republic. The term 'republic' itself is an anglicised version of res publica, a latin phrase literally meaning 'public thing'[22]. In more general terms the original use of the expression res publica referred to the common weal or wealth. In this sense it is clear that at its outset republicanism was associated with the public realm, though in truth it had little attachment to any specific political system or regime[23]. Consequently, when focussing on the origins of the word and its early meaning, we discover little about the nature of republicanism per se.

However, whilst in its early Roman form republicanism was a slippery term to define in any meaningful way, the French revolution and the ideals that accompanied it are often seen as the starting point of modern European republicanism. Liberty, equality and fraternity were

argued to be the foundation of the French Republic, and it is to these ideals that many later republicans, including those in Ireland, have claimed to adhere. But can we go further than this in identifying concepts specifically attributable to republicanism?

The contention that unity of purpose is expected of all within a state is a criticism often levelled at republicanism. For example, Vincent suggests that republicans' expectation that citizens each recognise every person's equality under the principles of republicanism leads to a lack of pluralism and even intolerance towards minority groups. Indeed, this would seem consistent with examples such as France and Ireland. In France it has been suggested that the Republican state in which all citizens are expected to adhere to the ideals of the Fifth Republic leads to a lack of recognition of minority races and religions.[24] A French Muslim of Algerian descent, therefore, is expected to self-define as a citizen of the French Republic. Multiculturalism, whereby an alternative race or religion would be accepted as a legitimate way for a person to self-define is not the norm in Republics such as France. Indeed, race riots in Paris and the relative strength of the far-right Le Front National (in Western European terms) would appear to reinforce this argument. There is a history of tension between minorities and the main body of Republican society. In the Irish case too this would help to explain the attitudes of many republicans towards unionists. Unionists are argued to be of equal value to a 32 county Irish Republican state. However, it is the lack of recognition of unionists' difference which has at times made republicanism appear to be very exclusive indeed.

Republicanism can be argued to be a civic, non-sectarian entity. However, its lack of recognition of competing traditions, favouring instead the universal, all-embracing republic, makes it very unappealing to certain groups. It is perhaps for these reasons that in Ireland

at least republicanism and nationalism have at times become somewhat intertwined. Whilst it is easy to understand the way in which a Catholic, Gaelic Ireland is unappealing to unionists, republicanism in principle seems a less abhorrent concept. However, in a Republican system it is the overall principles of the nation which are adhered to and cherished, meaning a minority Protestant community for example may well find the general concept of republicanism a threat, irrespective of whether republican methodologies are constitutional or violent.

However, Brugger argues that whilst republicanism does not always lend itself to multiculturalism easily, it is in fact a good balance between liberalism and communitarianism.[25] Liberty need not be seen purely as a positive or negative concept, i.e. the freedom to or the freedom from, but as an overarching concept in which all men [sic] are equal under the law, irrespective of race, colour, creed or other factors.[26] Furthermore, he makes the point that true republicanism rests on the will of the people as a whole, rather than any specific actors, in that "the public...alone must be its interpreter...not God, nor natural law, nor monarchs. All three have been pressed into republican theory at various times but in the end all three are irrelevant."[27]

So republicanism as an overall concept centres on the notion that it is the people who must be responsible for the state and adherence to its laws. Whilst this can cause potential problems for certain minority groups, such as unionists in Ireland, it is the concept of including all people in the ruling of the state that marks out the republican political tradition. This explains both positive rhetoric in Ireland towards unionists and unionist hostility to republicanism as a political ideology. Republicanism's holistic vision and purported indivisibility is both a strength and a weakness. The strength lies in the sovereignty of the

people, allowing nation building. The weakness lies in the apparent non-recognition of those who might dissent from the 'universal' republic.

Conceptualising Irish Republicanism

Various concepts have been associated with Irish nationalism and Irish republicanism. In addition to the anti-monarchism, anti-colonialism and socialism touched upon in the introduction, there is also Catholicism, Gaelicism and 'national liberation'. Furthermore, there is some confusion as to whether republicanism is something separate from nationalism, or a particular branch of the Irish nationalist movement.

Perhaps the most appropriate way to begin tackling this issue is in the broadest terms possible, via examination of the general concept of a republic. A republic, by definition, is a state or country not led by a monarch. The baseline of republicanism must logically therefore be someone who favours a presidential or semi-presidential system such as those in France or the United States of America over a monarchical system of government like those in Britain or Spain. A starting point in defining Irish republicanism would appear to be the belief that the whole island of Ireland should come under the rule of a president, rather than a monarch.

However, a non-monarchical core belief has not *always* been central to Irish republicanism. Sinn Fein can trace its origins to 1905 when Arthur Griffith laid out his *Sinn Fein Policy*. Rather than simply advocate a Presidential system of government, Griffith felt a dual

monarchy was the answer to the constitutional question in Ireland.[28] Moreover, rejection of monarchy is not exclusive to republicanism. Many nationalists favour the idea of a 32 county Irish republic ruled by a President. Anti-monarchism thus loses its value in distinguishing between nationalists and republicans in Ireland.

Although opposition to monarchy has been a feature of Irish republicanism for most of its existence Griffith's view demonstrates that anti-monarchism has not been an ever-present strand. It is reasonable to contend that anti-monarchism is one of the most universal principles held by members of the Irish Republican Movement (no senior republican has publically endorsed the idea of an Irish monarchy since Griffith), it is not its most crucial feature. We can conclude that republicanism is strongly opposed to a *British* monarch's sovereign claim over the island of Ireland. This leads on to another concept often attributed to the republican movement; anti-colonialism.

It was often asserted by republicans that Ireland was Britain's oldest colony,[29] and that consequently the republican movement was fighting a colonial war of liberation. However, whilst it is true to say that there were colonial elements to Britain's relationship with Ireland; this is but one aspect of that relationship; an overly simplistic interpretation of the conflict. It is accepted by most analysts that British settlers arrived in Ireland without invitation and with their own interests at heart,[1] yet, to simply label the case of Ireland as directly comparable with other British colonies elsewhere in the Empire India, Kenya or anywhere else in the British Empire would be foolhardy.

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[1] Adamson does advance the theory that there were a pre-existing Ulster people who were forced to leave the island of Ireland only to return around the time of the plantations in the seventeenth century, but this is not a widely accepted theory. For further information, see *The identity of Ulster: the land, the language, the people* (Bangor, 1987).

In contrast with the case elsewhere in the British Empire, Ireland became a fully integrated part of the United Kingdom in 1801 via the Act of Union. That is, it was not seen as a place apart; rather its relationship to England was in many ways comparable to that of Scotland or Wales. Irish politicians were returned to Westminster, unlike in other colonies. Furthermore, from 1801 onwards there were many Irish people actively involved in the protection and expansion of the British Empire. As a result, perhaps Ireland's relationship with Britain is better described as quasi-colonial, one in which the parent state's relationship with the 'colonial' junior was not merely one of subjugation (although that was an aspect) but also contained elements of cooperation and popular backing at times.

Consequently, it is clear that the anti-colonial strand of republicanism, at least in its early years, was but one aspect of a contested history of Irish nation-building. Ireland's relationship with England has been sufficiently interactive and complex for few Irish people to consider themselves the victims of outright colonial oppression. Irish republicans might be considered to be in a similar position to nationalists in Scotland or Wales. Whilst they seek separation from England, many would agree that their nations are not simply 'English colonies'. Ireland, Scotland or Wales are nonetheless perceived as nations entitled to self-determination with the hope and assumption of republicans and nationalists that an exercise of self-determination will lead to an independent state. The main difference in the Irish case is the issue of how self-determination is defined, given the allegiance of the Unionist section of the population to the United Kingdom and the separate British identity held by that section.[30] In Scotland, many citizens argue that self-determination should be exercised by the Scottish people as a whole. In Ireland there has been debate as to whether separate

referenda North and South constitute a legitimate form of national self-determination, not least between the SDLP and Sinn Fein themselves.

Socialism versus nationalism

Whilst there have been numerous protests, rebellions and uprisings throughout Irish history, that which is generally accepted to have been the forerunner to the creation of an Irish Republic (albeit one still not seen by the most militant republicans as legitimate) is the Easter Rising of 1916, led by a fusion of republicans, nationalists and socialists. A leading figure in the Rising and signatory to the Proclamation of 1916, James Connolly's socialist vision for Ireland was as much about working class empowerment as it was about independence from Britain. For others, such as Pearse, the rebellion was seen in more traditional nationalist terms, the building of a 'pure' territorial nation state.[31]

The socialist element within the republican movement has always been present, but rarely its dominant aspect. The stated goal of Sinn Fein has always been the establishment of 'a 32 county democratic *socialist* republic'.[32] Modern Sinn Fein still claim to believe this is desirable and attainable. Indeed, visitors to Sinn Fein's website are greeted by the following quote from James Connolly that: "the currents of revolutionary thought in Ireland, the socialist and the nationalist are not antagonistic but complementary".[33]

It is difficult to identify socialism as a central tenet of Irish republicanism for a number of reasons. Firstly, prior to the Easter Rising Arthur Griffith poured scorn on socialist ideals. In 1911, he insisted that 'Imperialism and socialism – forms of the cosmopolitan heresy and in essence one – have offered man the material world. Nationalism has offered him a true

soul'[34] and that, 'Against the Red Flag of English Communism...we raise the flag of an Irish nation'.[35]

Griffith's hostility to socialism was hardly exceptional amongst the supposed founders of the modern Irish Republic. Padraig Pearse's primary concern had always been Gaelic culture, particularly language and he repudiated Connolly's Marxist sympathies.[36] Seemingly for Pearse and a number of others involved in the republican movement at that time, the implementation of socialism in Ireland was not such a priority as breaking the link with Britain, cultivating the Irish language or developing a strong Gaelic identity.

Following this, in the period after the 1916 rebellion, the leftist element of the republican movement came under criticism not only from the general population, but also from within the movement. As English puts it:

> **The Irish masses were held to be both socially radical and also instinctively separatist, the two elements of their thinking supposedly interweaving with one another. That this was not the case was demonstrated not only by the increasing marginalisation of hard-line separatism during our period, but also by the repeated failure of the left even to persuade the republican faithful that their Connollyesque duality made sense** [37]

From the aftermath of the Irish Civil War until the 1960s, socialism was isolated as a republican principle. It was of little interest to the mainly Catholic nationalist volunteers and supporters. Indeed, the IRA even flirted with the idea of cooperating with the Nazis during

the Second World War in order to secure Irish freedom and unity. Moreover, the Border Campaign of 1956-1962 did not involve mobilising urban working-class communities with leftist republican ideas. Attacks were kept to more rural, border areas in an attempt to arouse nationalist sentiment. This proved unsuccessful, with the campaign abandoned in February 1962. In the years that followed, under the leadership of Cathal Golding, the decision was taken to make republicanism appeal to the nationalist population by placing more emphasis on social and economic circumstances.

One reason for the formation of the Provisional republican movement in 1969-70 was the increasing focus on leftist ideas from the republican leadership. Traditionalists feared that the Goulding-led republican movement of the 1960s was going down the communist route and away from the fusion of Gaelic nationalism, conservatism, militarism and limited radicalism which had sustained the republican core.[38] Whilst other reasons for the republican split were of greater importance, not least the fear that militarism was being phased out, there was an element within the IRA, including figures such as Joe Cahill and Billy McKee, who (partially due to their devout Roman Catholicism) disliked the leftist rhetoric of the leadership.[39] It would appear that, despite the progressive and socialist rhetoric, Irish republicanism has a socially conservative strand that has never been wholly abandoned.

Whilst Sinn Fein maintains a rhetorical commitment to socialism, the extent to which the party advocate genuinely socialist policies is debatable. For example, Sinn Fein has accepted the need for Private Finance Initiatives (PFI) in Northern Ireland whereby many new buildings used for public services are constructed, financed and owned by private

companies.[40] With socialism traditionally associated with public ownership and high levels of taxation and public spending, one can reasonably argue that PFI should not sit easily with any party truly committed to socialism or perhaps even social democracy. By the time of Sinn Fein's 2008 *ard fheis*, the party's *Ard Chomhairle* announced that it would not be advocating income tax increases unless an increase was 'demonstrably necessary'. This was electorally pragmatic perhaps, but this motion was met with considerable opposition from party members, with many arguing it was simply too conservative for a supposedly socialist political party.[41] The case for left-wing politics continues to be advocated within Sinn Fein[42] but it is hardly the dominant leadership perspective.

Nevertheless, if one is to exclude socialism from the list of Irish republicanism's core principles, then Gaelicism is an even less likely candidate. Whilst it is possible to find republicans who do not consider themselves socialists, it is far easier to point to many examples of republicans who are not fluent Gaelic speakers, nor are they especially interested in a strictly Gaelic Ireland. Less than half of Irish people consider themselves fluent in Gaelic, meaning a republic based purely on Gaelicism would not be very inclusive at all.[43] Of course, the unionist community in particular would be likely to feel marginalised in a Republic created in this fashion. Language has been used as a 'weapon' in Ireland's freedom struggle by a range of republican actors. From Pearse's advocacy of its compulsory use, through the deployment of the language by republican hunger strikers during the 1980s, to support for the Gaeltacht, republicans have insisted that the Irish language is a central component of the nation.

Enthusiasm for Gaelic culture has been associated with Irish republicanism, but often such connections have been made by opponents of the ideology, in criticising the Gaelic Athletic

Association (GAA).[44] Those interested in the preservation and promotion of Gaelic culture may not necessarily be republicans. The GAA and the Gaelic League were set up as non-political entities. Whilst it is probably true to say that their foundation in the late 19th Century helped to foster a feeling of a Gaelic Ireland which in turn may have inspired a certain number of people to become republicans, enthusiasm for Gaelic culture did not automatically mean an enthusiasm for republican politics. This is equally true today. Indeed, one of the most high profile victims of the resurgent 'dissident' organisations was a PSNI officer heavily involved in Gaelic games.[45] Again, for a militant republican core, Gaelicism is part of the national identity and psyche, but not part of a republican struggle. Republicanism, on this reading, is about politicised nation-building which extends beyond sympathy for particular aspects of culture. For more moderate republicans, the GAA and Gaelic language are focal points for Irish national identity, but again, the political roles of sport and language in self-identification as a republican are not paramount.

In identifying republican principles, it may be necessary to concentrate on core political aspects. Republicanism may be distinguishable in terms of its end-goals. A nationalist is not necessarily looking for undiluted sovereignty for the area they perceive to be a nation. A Welsh nationalist might conceivably be willing for Wales to remain in the United Kingdom, albeit with a strong element of self-government. Indeed this was, until recently, the position of Plaid Cymru.[46] Arguably an Irish nationalist in Northern Ireland is comfortable with the concept of an 'agreed Ireland' even if this means the co-existence of two separate political jurisdictions on the island. However, the desire for the state to be the expression of the nationalist's particular nation is often evident. Richard English makes the following point:-

If nationalists are to enjoy independence and self-government within a political unit coterminous with the nation, then state power is almost irresistibly alluring; especially so, given that nationalists so frequently pursue the amending of perceivedly unjust imbalances in access to power – how better to make such amendments than by gaining control over your state? Even at its most basic, the attraction of legitimating physical control over the community is enticing [47]

In short, English feels that those believing themselves to be part of a 'nation' of people are likely to find state power a very attractive option. For example, when an Irish nationalist felt that Catholicism or Gaelic culture was suppressed under Britain, then they responded by favouring independence for their 'nation' in order that state structures either reflected cultural, religious and political practices, or at least allow them full autonomy. Irish republicanism in its civic, non-sectarian form, would attempt to divorce state power from assertive religious and cultural linkages, but this mode of republicanism has often not been the dominant form.

By examining the nature of nationalism and republicanism and the extent to which they can be characterised as cultural or civic phenomena, we should start to gain a clearer idea of how to define them as 'working' ideologies. Furthermore, if the position of each can be clarified in relation to the issues of self-determination and independence, this should also help in the process of defining each term.

Sinn Fein asserts regularly the non-sectarian nature of its 'struggle' and the party is fond of citing the non-Catholic antecedents of Irish republicanism. Indeed, Wolfe Tone was a middle-class Dublin Protestant[48] whilst references to Connolly's socialism remain common.

Concerns over the protection of religion, language and culture were often accompanied by secular or non-nationalistic arguments over the need for class agitation and equality between Catholic, Protestant and dissenter. Taken at face value, one might conclude that republicanism is an inclusive, non-sectarian movement whose argument is predominantly political: an independent and united Ireland. Yet the Irish variant of republicanism has always been more complex. Its adherents have been overwhelmingly Catholic[49] and republicanism has often been seen as inextricably linked to Irish Catholicism.

Republicanism in its early days certainly appealed strongly to the Catholic majority. For example, Eamon De Valera was quoted in 1917 as saying that Sinn Fein "would not divorce religion from politics, and if the party wanted success they must have religion".[50] In February of that same year the party signalled its intentions in that respect by selecting a Papal Count, Plunkett, as candidate for its first by-election in Roscommon. It may well have been rhetoric and practice such as this that reinforced the unionist belief that Irish republicanism, at least in its early Twentieth Century guise, was a Catholic movement.

In addition to giving the 1937 Free State Constitution a strongly Gaelic feel, de Valera also secured a 'special position' for the Catholic Church whilst in government with Fianna Fail. Ireland was not declared a Catholic state, but, superfluously and to the irritation of northern Unionists, Catholicism was recognised as the overwhelming church 'of choice' in Ireland.[51] That said, the British state gives a much stronger role to the Church of England (the Monarch heads that Church and Church of England bishops sit in the House of Lords), yet rarely attracts criticism for overt 'sectarianism'. Nevertheless, a seemingly Catholic and Gaelic Irish Free State was seen as a threat by many Northern Protestants[52] and legitimised the unionist stance on the question of reunification.[53]

Some republicans would argue that following the foundation of Fianna Fail in 1926, Eamon de Valera put any republican principles aside, in his vigorous assertion of Catholicism. Consequently, one should ignore the seemingly sectarian and exclusivist elements of his leadership when discussing the republican movement. The argument here is that de Valera's brand of Irish republicanism involved the construction of an exclusivist, sectarian and inward-looking Irish Free State, even eschewing the potential expansion of that state into the 'full' Irish nation when rejecting the offer of a united Ireland by Churchill in 1940 in return for Irish assistance in the Second World War.[54] De Valera offered a brand of what became mainstream Irish republicanism which recognised that little could be achieved outside of parliamentary politics. Although he was one of the minority who were unwilling to accept the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1919, De Valera's and Fianna Fail's argument was that constitutional republicanism offered the best prospect of building a distinctive Irish nation state, one Gaelic, Catholic, Anti-Monarchist and nationalistic, a country designed to appeal to its own citizens but few beyond. These characteristics were to eventually diminish as core features of the Irish nation. A more lasting legacy of the De Valera and Fianna Fail brand of Irish republicanism may be that it helped enshrined constitutionalism and removed 'armed struggle' as a central component. That is, the employment of 'Armed Struggle' as opposed to parliamentarianism has not been a precondition of republicanism. De Valera had been willing to fight and face imprisonment. However, he was also pragmatic enough to realise despite the difficult step of swearing an Oath of Allegiance to a British Monarch,[55] that in order to have some influence he needed to re-enter the field of parliamentary politics. That faultline between constitutionalism and militarism remained within republicanism for the remainder of the twentieth century.

The special position of the Catholic Church within the Irish state might also have been applicable to the republican movement. The split between Fianna Fail and Sinn Fein in the 1920s and 1930s was on issues of constitutionalism not socialism or secularism and Sinn Fein's republican outlook remained heavily infused by Catholicism. Commemorations invariably contained a decade of the Rosary and the outlook of Sinn Fein leaders, often pious Catholics, was conservative.

The formation of the Provisional IRA in late 1969 strengthened this Catholic element to the republican movement, allowing it to claim a defender role for urban northern Catholic communities. Whilst the split from the Officials IRA was also in part down to their leftward shift under Goulding, a key reason for the formation of the Provisional movement was in order to defend Catholic areas.[56]

The Provisionals gained a reputation (often more mythical than actual) for communal defence through such incidents such as the 'Siege of St. Matthews' in 1970 when the vulnerable Short Strand area of East Belfast was protected from Loyalist attacks.[57] Following this, there was the active targeting of British military personnel and RUC officers, but also attacks upon 'civilians' seemingly killed simply because they were Protestants. The nadir of this phase came in the form of the Kingsmill Massacre,[2] an attack which was followed by an acknowledgement that they might be construed as sectarian in nature.[58] The PIRA was not

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[2] This was one of the most obviously sectarian acts of the troubles. A minibus containing 10 Protestants and one Catholic was stopped in South Armagh by the PIRA (who would later use a cover name of the South Armagh Republican Action Force). The men were ordered off the bus, with the sole Catholic told to leave. The ten Protestants were then shot dead.

merely protecting people by fighting off loyalist mobs; for a time it became involved in tit-for-tat sectarian murders.[59]

Many early PIRA joiners were not interested in a non-sectarian quest for a united Ireland. Rather, they were looking to hit back at the Royal Ulster Constabulary, the British Armed Forces and Protestants in general. As former PIRA member Anthony McIntyre puts it, 'Pearse did not motivate me. That sort of republicanism in 1916, traditional republicanism did not motivate me. I was motivated by Provisional republicanism which was post 1969'.[60]

Catholic influences when considering such moral issues as abortion and the use of contraception. Abortion has been a sensitive issue for Sinn Fein,[61] at the 1998 *Ard Fheis*, for example, the debate on the issue was more heated than that on the Good Friday Agreement, with the result being a complex policy of accepting the need for abortion in certain cases without favouring the liberalisation of the law.[62] Furthermore, Sinn Fein does not support the extension of the 1967 Abortion Act to Northern Ireland.[63] The PIRA's first Chief of Staff, Sean MacStiofain, is alleged to have been unwilling to bring contraceptives into the Irish republic, despite the fact there were some involved in the PIRA who were keen to experiment with them to make acid fuses for bombs.[64]

Sinn Fein has also been seen to 'represent' the Catholic community on the issue of Orange parades. The party argues that in Roman Catholic areas where the parades are unwanted they should not go ahead. Indeed, at times Sinn Fein has labelled Orange parades a major contributory factor to tensions between Protestant and Catholic communities and subsequent sectarian violence.[65]

In summary, the Catholic element to republicanism has always existed, in that its presence has been evident in parties of different republican hues. However, Catholicism's one-time special place in the Irish constitution (repealed in 1972), a large Catholic membership of republican parties and sectarian impulses or sentiments do not necessarily mean that Irish republicanism is a Catholic movement. What these show is that despite the regular assertion that it was not a sectarian entity, republicanism does have a Catholic strand in much the same way as it has a socialist one.

It is at this point that tentative conclusions about republicanism's core principles can start to be drawn. It seems to be becoming clear that there are several strands to the republican movement, none of which are absolutely essential parts of a republican ideology. For example, can republicanism be characterised as primarily about hostility to monarchy? No. Is there a strong anti-monarchic element to it? Yes. Is republicanism by definition a socialist movement, mainly comprising those of a socialist disposition? No. However, is socialist thought a recurring theme within republicanism? Yes, in republicanism's stronger manifestation in Northern Ireland but not within mainstream republicanism. Have all republicans been Catholic and need one be a Catholic to be involved in the movement? No. But there has traditionally been a strong sense of Catholic identity within republicanism.

Republicanism versus nationalism

A key problem in defining republicanism has lay in distinguishing it from nationalism, as many of the key attributes or flaws of Irish republican tendencies – narrowness, exclusivity, Catholicism and Gaelicism, have been equally attributable to nationalism. Yet nationalism

was not always a cultural phenomenon concerned with all things Catholic and Gaelic. In the latter half of the nineteenth century the Irish nationalist movement was dominated by the Irish Home Rule Party, led by Charles Stewart Parnell, later renamed the Irish Parliamentary Party. Parnell himself was a Protestant land owner, whose political leanings (with the exception of the Home Rule issue) could be characterised as distinctly Tory.[66] Indeed, when holding the balance of power at Westminster Parnell was willing to work with Tories, despite the fact that the Liberal Party was more predisposed to supporting the cause of Irish Home Rule. He and his party sought Irish Home Rule under the British Sovereign, but were not interested in fostering a sense of cultural or religious distinction from Britain.

Daniel O'Connell, leader of the Repeal movement in the mid nineteenth century, is another example of an Irish nationalist leader whose principles were more complex than mere religious or ethnic promotion. Whilst by this time the proportion of non-Catholics involved with the Irish nationalist movement was falling, O'Connell never claimed that his concept of the nation was defined in religious or ethnic terms.[67] Instead, his definition of the nation involved all those living on the island of Ireland. He was an advocate of the rights of many disadvantaged groups; Jews, black slaves, and Australian Aborigines. As well as being an Irish nationalist, he was a Universalist.[68]

The principal difference between modern republicanism and nationalism may lie in the respective attitudes towards constitutional imperatives and end-goals. The SDLP, Northern Ireland's 'nationalist' party, traditionally focussed on the two traditions approach to the island of Ireland. In doing so, they sought greater equality for nationalists within the Northern Ireland state whilst accepting unionism as a legitimate political position. They were generally happy to accept an Irish dimension to any potential settlement *within* Northern

Ireland. A united Ireland was an aspiration of the SDLP, but it was not regarded as the party's original *raison d'être*,[69] although the current leader has suggested that it is a core aim and as will be shown later in thesis, the Irish dimension was upgraded to the party's primary concern after John Hume replaced Gerry Fitt as the party's leader in 1979.[70] [71] The constitutional nationalist position accepted the equal legitimacy of the nationalist and unionist traditions. A rights oriented agenda and an acknowledgement of unionism as a legitimate tradition characterised the SDLP's approach, at least for a large portion of its existence. As a result, it can be reasonably argued that nationalism in Northern Ireland has traditionally had a civic dimension.

Harris supports the contention that nationalism is often of the civic variety, as well as pointing out that nationalism need not by synonymous with the nation-state.[72] Nationalism is about the self-rule of the people that identifies with a nation.[73] So, for Northern Irish nationalists, devolution secures a form of self-rule within a UK framework. It is of course a shared self-rule (with Unionists and within a legislative framework developed partly by a British government), but local shared self-rule may be enough to satisfy many nationalists. The absence of aggressive demands for territorial sovereignty does not preclude the SDLP's agenda from being categorised as nationalist.

The republican movement, in the form of Sinn Fein (and, effectively, Fianna Fail until 1998), demanded territorial and political reunification on the basis of ethno-geographical determinism, taking a holistic view of 'Ireland' as a 32 county undivided entity. This reading regarded British unionists as their fellow Irish who would come round to their point of view once the connection with Britain had been broken. Unionists, it was claimed, were being deluded by the British remaining in Ireland and would realise their rightful place as a part of

the united Irish nation once the British government had withdrawn. Reconciliation was not to be achieved through constitutional tinkering but through the (re)-establishment of a unitary civic republic which would reconcile the different religious and political traditions on the island. How those who dissented from this enforced reconciliation would fare was unstated.

Republicanism and nationalism were also divided on strategy and tactics. The SDLP were strongly constitutional arguing that violence was immoral and counter-productive in terms of the search for a united Ireland. Militant republicans in Sinn Fein claimed PIRA violence was legitimate because Ireland was occupied by a foreign power. Consequently, the violence used against the security forces was part of a long-standing war of independence. Its utility was also defended, with Sinn Fein claiming the British would not listen to the demands of the Irish people unless the threat of violence was there. As Martin McGuinness put it, 'We Republicans don't believe that winning elections will bring freedom in Ireland. At the end of the day it will be the cutting edge of the IRA that will bring freedom'.[74]

Constitutionalism ensured that the SDLP, in seeking greater recognition for nationalists' Irish identity and greater equality within Northern Ireland, saw no contradiction in putting forward its case at Stormont or Westminster. Sinn Fein, seeking a united Ireland and an end to British rule, refused to take seats in 'partitionist' institutions, a position reversed since 1986 for all but Westminster.

The SDLP's enthusiastic support for the Sunningdale Agreement of 1974, Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 and the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 confirmed northern

nationalism's post-1970 participatory tendencies. On each occasion the prospect of an improvement of the situation of Northern Irish nationalists was a concern of the SDLP. Furthermore, unionists were expected to accept changes; the Council of Ireland in 1974, a consultative role for the Dublin government in 1985 and Sinn Fein taking its place in government in 1998. However, the party's approach was not to demand that unionists stop being unionists by accepting a united Ireland. Rather, they sought a more democratic Northern Ireland with a focus on equal rights and an Irish dimension any deal.

Sinn Fein's brand of republicanism is closely tied to the nationalist community. In this sense one could argue that Irish republicanism, at least in its Provisional form, differs from notions of republicanism elsewhere. After all, the French Revolution and the founding of the Republic was not about a nationalist movement, it was about embracing the concepts of liberté, egalité and fraternité. In other words, those involved in the French Revolution may well have considered the ideals of the republic more important than their particular national identity. In the Irish case there is a very strong argument to say that 'Irishness' and republicanism overlap, with many Irish republicans placing Gaelic culture, Catholicism or general patriotism at the centre of their republican beliefs.

Given that its self-ascribed defence of the community was seen as vital in 1969, it would be difficult to argue that in that sense Sinn Fein has *become* nationalist having formerly been republican. Its particular association with nationalism has not arisen in recent years as part of an abandonment of idealist republican principles; it has always been part of the Provisional movement's thinking. Moreover, Sinn Fein has engaged in tactical pan-nationalist alliances in recent decades. There are those who claim that the Provisional movement from its very origins was not a truly 'republican' group; at least not in a comparable way to

republicans of the past. For example, Anthony McIntyre argues that Provisional Republicanism was simply a reaction to British state strategies and that ideological commitments to civic republicanism amongst the 'republican' grassroots were virtually non-existent.[75] Indeed, from a different political perspective, Rogelio Alonso claims that many involved with the PIRA knew little or nothing of republican history or ideology until they were educated in prison.[76]

However, this is not a universal view and conflates grassroots with ideological leaders. Whilst undoubtedly McIntyre is correct in that there was an element within the PIRA for whom 'hitting back' was important, to argue that forcing British withdrawal and subsequently achieving the reunification of the island was irrelevant is surely misrepresenting many of those senior figures of the movement for whom this did remain of the utmost importance.

Alonso's claim that many who got involved with the PIRA joined for reasons other than deep-rooted commitments to the ideals of 32 County Irish Republic, whether it be the quest for status, the impact of peer pressure or the opportunity to retaliate is also correct. However, it is a great leap to then argue that this means Provisional Republicanism had no ideological base and was simply a band of people looking to kill and maim. All it proves is that there were *some* in the PIRA whose political thinking was not advanced. Indeed, one could argue this is the same for any political movement, whose ranks contain adherents possessing a less than coherent set of political beliefs. This does not mean the UUP or Labour Party are devoid of any meaningful political ideology.

That the Provisionals at times showed themselves to be de facto exclusivist and sectarian is important to note, but does not necessarily challenge their status as republicans. However, like republican predecessors in Fianna Fail, Sinn Fein and the Provisionals redefined what constituted republicanism. They did this by recognising Dail Eireann in 1986, via the signing of the Good Friday Agreement and through entry to Stormont in 1998, seismic developments which changed hitherto abstentionist, conspiratorial and militarist republicanism into a more participatory, normalised political entity. Beliefs in an Irish nation state, anti-monarchism and anti-colonialism remained as core outlooks, as did the claim that the British government has no legitimate claim to any part of Ireland. Everything else had changed utterly. Republicanism had again been re-defined to take the view that recognition of the Dail and Stormont and decommissioning of weapons are part of a workable strategy to reunify Ireland and can thus be justified as 'republican' strategic thinking. This leaves the republican core as a desire for Irish unity, not as prescription for the means of attainment.

Examining republican groups from the past provides evidence for this being the case. Whether it is the United Irishmen, the Young Irelanders, the Fenian Movement or those responsible for the Easter Rising, the common factor has been the insistence that the British government has no rightful claim to any part of Ireland. The circumstances facing each group of republicans differed in respects of Britain's presence, but nevertheless their actions were consistent with those of groups demanding a united Ireland free from British rule.

Each of these groups predated partition and although abstention from 'partitionist' institutions was claimed by republican militants as a principle, other republicans argue that republicanism is better defined by unity of end goals and flexibility of tactics. A common denominator of republicanism from the 1700s to the 2000s is that force has been regularly

used in an attempt to hasten British withdrawal, but it has also been a device eschewed by many republicans.

Identifying the Irish Republican 'Core'

Republican core ideology is flexible and amorphous beyond seeking to end the connection with Britain. Its political or military actions must work towards that ultimate goal. Whilst there are other recurring themes in republicanism, some of which are more popular or important than others, these are not what encapsulate the movement. The dropping of tactics such as abstentionism and support for violence raised serious questions as to Sinn Fein's republican credentials from 1986 onwards, not because they were essential in and of themselves, because these tactics had been the most obvious indications that Sinn Fein would not recognise partition and British authority. The new departure has been interpreted by some critics as tacit acceptance of British authority, even though Sinn Fein denies this is the long-term position.[77] However, labelling such developments as a departure from Irish republicanism is problematic as there is no agreed conceptualisation of what it contains.

Consequently, when referring back to this core republican concept in the rest of the thesis, the decision must be made as to whether Sinn Fein's actions at any given time are the actions of a movement whose principal goal remains removing the British from Ireland and reunifying the island. There is nothing to say that violence or abstentionism *must* be employed by a republican movement, but tactics such as these make clear a party's republican nature. Entering partitionist institutions and laying down arms does not, nor does accepting that an exercise in self-determination can involve separate referenda North and

South. Therefore, we must examine Sinn Fein's alternative tactics in order to make a final judgement as to whether the party remains republican.

We are able to approach the republican credentials of Sinn Fein by this standard because the following points have been established in this chapter; Irish Republicanism is concerned with removing the British from Ireland and reunifying the island. Catholic, Gaelic and Socialist strands are all identifiable, but not essential, to the republican movement. Anti-monarchism and anti-colonialism, although important aspects of Irish Republican ideology, are overshadowed by the ultimate ambition to unite Ireland and remove the British government's hold on any part of Ireland. Whilst generally civic Republicanism is inclusive and Nationalism is exclusive, this has not been the case in the political manifestation of the two ideologies, under which there has been considerable overlap in Ireland. Now we are equipped with a working definition of the term republican, it is possible to answer the sub-questions outlined in the Introduction, beginning with a comprehensive literature review.

CHAPTER TWO: ASSESSING THE PERSPECTIVES ON IRISH REPULICAN IDEOLOGY

Having established that Irish Republicanism's ideological and political core is difficult to identify, beyond the ambition to create an independent united Ireland free from British rule, it is now necessary to undertake a comprehensive literature review. Examining the difficulties and successes other authors have had when trying to pin down core republican concepts should help to build a more comprehensive assessment as to which, if any, are the core principles of Irish Republicanism. The literature on Sinn Fein and the PIRA contains a wide variety of perspectives on issues surrounding the Republican movement, reflecting the diversity of Republican thought; the coalitional nature of the movement; internal fissure and the difficulty of goal attainment.

Irish Republicanism: 'Perverted' or 'true' Republicanism?

There is debate about the extent to which Irish Republicanism can be considered as true to republican principles or a deviation, even distortion of its tenets. Furthermore, there is not universal agreement as to which of Ireland's political parties, if any, live up to their republican labels. After all, Republican Sinn Fein, (Provisional) Sinn Fein and Fianna Fail all claim to be republican, yet there are significant differences in their respective 'brands' of republicanism.

O'Donnell accepts that Fianna Fail's brand of republicanism in Ireland has often involved 'playing the green card'.[78] Not only did the pre-Good Friday Agreement of republicanism espoused by Fianna Fail fail to acknowledge unionists' right to see themselves as unionists,

it also promoted Catholicism and Gaelicism as essential components of an indivisible 32 county polity. Fianna Fail's republican credentials were questionable, since on the 'national territory' it offered far more Green Catholic irredentist nationalism than a brand of civic republicanism cherishing and accommodating all the citizens of the state. Republicanism per se can of course be criticised for struggling to accommodate diversity within nations (Chapter 1) and Irish republicans of different shades traditionally refused to accept the British identity and Unionist political outlook of the minority on the island of Ireland. The 1998 Good Friday Agreement marked a major change in that conceptualisation and acceptance of diversity, indicative that republicanism cannot be considered a static ideology – assuming of course that the label of republicanism is still applicable.

Whilst rhetorically Fianna Fail argued for an end to partition, the extent to which this end was actively pursued is questionable. Whilst Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution laid claim to Northern Ireland, there was never any sustained action to achieve this supposed goal. Since the aspiration of territorial unity has been a central theme in Irish republicanism, this could be construed as a serious shortcoming of any self-titled republican party.

This latter criticism cannot be levelled at Sinn Fein or Republican Sinn Fein. Both argue for Irish unity, claim that it could only come about with the British government's withdrawal from Ireland, and sought to achieve this via support for political violence. However, much like Fianna Fail, Sinn Fein has at times played upon nationalist sentiment or communalism rather than republican ideals,[79] as can be seen through talk of 'our people' by those involved in Sinn Fein. This brings into question how 'republican' is the party, since many of the issues on which Sinn Fein mobilises its support base appear to be tied up with Irish nationalism. The other basis on which Sinn Fein operated was its supposed mandate from the dead, the

legacy of the events of 1916-19 and the declaration of a Provisional government. The Proclamation, Easter Rising and overturning of the 1918-19 Provisional government led to Sinn Fein claims that it embodied the will of the people via the establishment of a Sovereign Republic.[80]

These claims of Sinn Fein may have been a bastardised form of republicanism and it is worth revisiting Brugger's argument at this point (see also chapter one). Brugger[81] defined republicanism as resting on the will of the people, the public at large, rather than any specific actors. However, strands of Irish Republicanism have often ignored the will of the people. For a long period the PIRA's Army Council was argued to be the legitimate government of all-Ireland. This was because the Second Dail's remit over the 32 counties was usurped by British-imposed partition in 1921. Seven surviving anti-treatyite members of the Second Dail signed over in 1938 what they believed was the authority of the Government of Dail Eireann; thus, in the eyes of the PIRA and Sinn Fein, the PIRA Army Council became the legitimate government of the 32 Counties. When the split between the Official and Provisional IRA's came about over thirty years later, the only surviving anti-treatyite member of the Second Dail (with the exception of Eamon De Valera), Tom Maguire, endorsed the PIRA. Therefore, the Provisional movement now claimed to be the legitimate government of the country,[82] even though this position palpably did not reflect the will of the Irish people at this time. The vast majority of people in the '26 counties' accepted the institutions of the state as legitimate and certainly were not willing to accept an unelected paramilitary leadership as their government. Effectively therefore, Sinn Fein's mandates were more from the dead than the living. Sinn Fein's transformation to constitutional republicanism in recent years means it can be argued to act on the will of the electorate which chooses its representatives. The tiny Republican Sinn Fein party still refuses, however, to recognise any of the institutions for which it is eligible to stand, other

than local councils, their stance ignoring the will of people on the island of Ireland, in favour of an historic, long extinct 'mandate'.

However, if claims that 1918 represent a living mandate appear arcane and irrelevant, Irish republican principles articulated in the Proclamation remain of salience and all republican parties (and indeed Fine Gael) claim adherence. As examples of contemporary importance, Sinn Fein's website[83] and Annual Conference handouts[84] contain copies of this Proclamation.

The requirements for modern mandates and for constitutional republicanism have been borne of political realities. Fianna Fail, and in recent times Sinn Fein, have accepted that reunification of the island is an aspiration that realistically the parties *know* they cannot achieve in the immediate future. Although republicanism is associated with reunification of the country, acknowledgement that it is impossible to coerce the citizens of Northern Ireland into it need not necessarily disqualify a party from carrying the republican label. Rather republicanism has consent as a key principle and consent for unification is not forthcoming from a significant section of the population on the island. Both parties maintain a rhetorical commitment to the introduction of an all-Ireland state and draw upon the fact that neither were in favour of or involved with the negotiations over partition,[85] but are able to practise republicanism all the same. Republicanism is seen as aspirational rather than coercive. Pre-1998 Irish republicanism, across its political parties, was an ideology based upon assimilation. The difference between Sinn Fein and Fianna Fail was one of contemporary tactics (violence versus non-violence) not overarching outlook, which saw Irish republicanism as embodying the will of all Irish people. British identity, Unionist politics and the northern state (the 'occupied fourth green field') were not seen as legitimate entities.

Post-1998 republicanism has been more accommodationist in tone, one in which the civic republic still desired is more able to embrace political, religious and cultural diversity.

Interpreting republicanism as anti-colonialism

One of the reasons that the PIRA argued the use of force was necessary (and why it is still defended by the small number of 'dissident' republicans) was that they perceived Irish republicanism as a struggle against colonial occupation for the establishment of a Republic.[86] However, English feels that colonialism has persistently been over-emphasised in republican historical interpretations.[87] Amongst his concerns about the extent to which Ireland could ever be described as a colony are the way in which it has been a fully integrated part of the United Kingdom, the large numbers of Irish people who protected and expanded the British Empire and latterly the perceived lack of benefit to the British government of Northern Ireland remaining in the UK.[88]

English identifies two main reasons why the Provisional Republican leadership chose to portray their struggle as an anti-colonial; the PIRA was keen to characterise the conflict as a typical case of oppressed against oppressor; and that the PIRA knew that it had the opportunity to harness support in countries that were traditionally fiercely opposed to colonialism.[89]

The PIRA were keen to depict themselves as fighting a just akin to that of the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa,[90] a comparison designed to bolster the legitimacy of the republican campaign. Adrian Guelke agrees with English in so far as noting Gerry Adams' regular referral to South Africa as an analogy for the Northern Irish situation.[91] In

terms of their attempts to gain greater support from traditionally anti-colonial countries, the support that the PIRA gained in America through NORAID and from the Libyan government under Colonel Gaddafi were attributable to the anti-colonial sentiments of those offering assistance.[92] The American and Libyan states were each other's sworn enemies at this time, yet both Gaddafi's regime and a large number of Americans were rallied by an anti-colonial quest.

English's view on the lack of tangible benefit to Britain of the Union with Northern Ireland is a common one in the academic literature. After all, when the British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland declared that Britain had 'no selfish strategic or economic interest'[93] in Northern Ireland few could argue. The end of the Cold War meant there was no longer any particular strategic purpose for holding on to Northern Ireland. The economic drain on the British economy was well-documented. Spending per head has consistently been higher than in any other part of the UK. The stress on British armed forces, both financially and in terms of lost personnel, has also been reported comprehensively. Accordingly, Agnes Maillot shares the opinion that republicans over-emphasised the anti-colonial nature of their struggle at particular times. However, she contends that Republicanism is an ever-evolving entity[94] meaning the movement's most vehemently anti-colonial stage was part of the natural flow of political ideas, whereas English takes the somewhat more instrumental view that the PIRA presented the colonial aspect of the conflict in order to secure financial and symbolic support. They each agree, however, that even prior to Brooke's 'no selfish strategic or economic interest' assertion of 1989 the Republican movement was not necessarily *reliant* upon an anti-colonial interpretation of the Northern Ireland conflict.

Whilst the lack of any obvious advantage to the British government of maintaining Northern Ireland's place in the United Kingdom is an important issue, it is crucial to acknowledge that this does not in itself mean that Britain's relationship with Northern Ireland is not at least a colonial derivative. Not only do the differing circumstances of each colonial situation make it impossible to find a paradigm for a 'normal' colonial relationship, but there is a subtle difference between colonialism and imperialism which must also be explored. Colonialism, according to Loomba, can be defined as 'the conquest and control of other people's land and goods'.[95] Imperialism, however, is a more ambiguous term. Whilst on occasion the word has been used interchangeably with colonialism, the two terms are not synonymous. There are those who have taken imperialism to represent a political system whereby an imperial centre governs colonised countries,[96] i.e. taking the word as a direct derivation from 'empire'. However, a more common definition in recent times has been imperialism as a system of penetration and control of markets whereby *economic* benefits accrue to the imperial power.[97] Colonial motivations might be as much about purporting to serve the interests of the (supposedly inferior) indigenous population – a form of paternalism. Indeed, this is how Osterhammel views it. He claims that colonialism is a relationship between an indigenous majority and a minority of foreign invaders. The fundamental decisions affecting the lives of the colonised people are made and implemented by the colonial rulers in pursuit of interests that are often defined in a distant metropolis. Rejecting cultural compromises with the colonised population, the colonisers are convinced of their own superiority and their ordained mandate to rule.[98]

Whilst there are many who disagree that the British presence in Ireland is colonial in the terms set out by Loomba and Osterhammel, there are aspects of the relationship which historically have colonial attributes. Ireland was under loose British rule from the twelfth century, although this took seven further centuries to be formalised via the 1801 Act of

Union. There were economic gains to this control, including its perpetuation after the 1920 partition when the most prosperous and industrialised part of Ireland was retained. However, this was also the most pro-British part of the territory, thus its retention was hardly an act of colonial subjugation of a foreign land. Moreover, imperial interpretations of Britain's relationship with Northern Ireland are even less convincing, given that the region has been costly to the UK since 1945.[99]

This begs the question then, why did the British government maintain the Union with Northern Ireland, even in the face of a long and costly war with the PIRA from 1970 until 1997 and amid continued drain on the exchequer's finances? The answer to this may well lie in the rather abstract concept of national prestige. Whilst *imperialism* involves the mother country gaining something from possession of the satellite country, a *colonial* outlook might involve the British government seeing Northern Ireland remaining British as a matter of status, reinforced when the 'colonial power' is challenged by a an armed insurrection.

Mark Ryan accepts that the British government does not stay in Northern Ireland for any short-term gain as would be expected in a traditional imperial relationship.[100] However, he feels that Northern Ireland's full integration into the United Kingdom and the way in which the state has been challenged mean there is more at stake than mere prestige. Instead, the British government stays in Northern Ireland because nationalists and republicans have actively tried to undermine the British state. To capitulate in the face of an uprising fundamentally based on an unwillingness to recognise the British state would, Ryan argues, be a dangerous precedent to set in a nation where the state hasn't always come under the same levels of scrutiny as other countries:

What is at stake in Ireland is the existence of the British state itself. The war in Ireland is not just a war taking place in some distant colony, but a challenge to the state within its own boundaries. It is the integrity and the existence of the state itself which is under threat in Ireland.[101]

However, the British government insists that the reason it remains in Northern Ireland is that the majority of people there wish to remain part of the United Kingdom, a 'consent principle' no longer seriously challenged. In this sense, it can be argued to be acting unselfishly in upholding the democratic wish of the people, although this rather anglophile view can be criticised by reference to the Government of Ireland Act and the way in which citizens of the United Kingdom (albeit often unwilling ones) were denied democratic rights in Northern Ireland between 1922 and 1972.[102] A British government supposedly upholding the democratic wishes of the people should surely have combatted the gerrymandering and disenfranchisement experienced by the nationalist community within Northern Ireland.

Palpably the British government does not retain the Union with Northern Ireland for short-term economic benefit. This rules out the possibility of it being labelled an imperial oppressor. That does not, however, preclude Great Britain's relationship with Ireland from having a colonial element. The British state may be motivated to maintain jurisdiction because it feels it is best placed to maintain security arrangements, or because Northern Ireland remaining in the Union helps maintain a sense of prestige. Both these motivations bear a resemblance to the colonial definitions forwarded earlier by Loomba and Osterhammel.

Whether anti-colonialism is a central tenet of the republican movement is unclear, since there is disagreement as to whether that element of republican thinking was relegated due to other concerns winning out in internal ideological debate; or was purposely exaggerated for a period of time in order to generate support; or was in fact the result of confusion since it was the domestic state that was being challenged, not that of a far-off coloniser.

The importance and interpretation of national self-determination and territorial sovereignty for Irish Republicanism

Irish self-determination is seen as a central demand of republican thought. There was an exercise in this as part of the Good Friday Agreement, although it involved separate referenda in the North and South, a process of co-determination. Previously this had been declared unacceptable by Sinn Fein and the PIRA. Whilst it is possible to view 'co-determination' as a legitimate expression of people's wishes without interference from the British government, critics conclude that Sinn Fein have accepted the 'unionist veto' and therefore cannot argue that the quest for self-determination on an unfettered all-island basis is a genuine principle of Republicanism.[103]

Murray and Tonge argue that the language of Irish self-determination in the traditional sense was neutralised as part of the Good Friday Agreement.[104] For consent to be based on the will of citizens in Northern Ireland, the boundaries of which had never been agreed by the majority of the Irish people, amounted to the maintenance of the 'unionist veto' and the denial of the self-determination that Sinn Fein had traditionally demanded.[105] This might lead one to conclude that the right of the Irish people as a whole to self-determination is no longer central to Irish Republicanism, though one could also claim that co-determination

made it possible for the Sinn Fein leadership to present the referenda as a legitimate, updated form of self-determination.

Richard English suggests that Republicans began to question and then modify their ideological commitment to the people of Ireland exercising self-determination as a single unit.[106] Prison debates within the PIRA sometimes involved those incarcerated putting forward the unionist viewpoint. It was this experience that led some Republicans to feel that coercing unionists via an all-Ireland referendum might not be necessary as a precondition to any settlement. Self-determination became an issue of mode rather than outcome. English himself emphasises that many of the concerns felt by Irish nationalists regarding feeling can be applied just as easily to unionists as nationalists. That is, whilst nationalists 'trapped' in the Six Counties often felt no loyalty to the state, the same would be true of unionists forced into a united Ireland against their will.[107] Furthermore, whilst Republicans often speak of unionists as 'their fellow Irish people', one can easily contend that unionists have a right to regard those on the mainland as 'their fellow British people'. English also takes issue with the claim formerly made by Republicans that Ireland is one island, and therefore one nation. After all, if that were true then it must hold that the people of Scotland and Wales should be denied the right to self-determination, for Britain is an indivisible island.[108] Patently a Scottish desire for independence would not be deemed the 'Scottish veto', and so the traditional Republican argument on this appears somewhat unconvincing. English feels that many Republicans came to realise this over time.

Jonathan Stevenson agrees with English in so far as he feels Sinn Fein altered their view on national self-determination over time. However, rather than citing prison debates as the cause of this, he argues that it was the exogenous factor of the European Union that was

the chief cause.[109] Stevenson claims that in a new Europe where national borders are increasingly blurred, the right of nations to self-determination is no longer such an important factor. As a result, at least in the short term, the Sinn Fein leadership are able to ignore the border between the North and South, since it is of diminished importance.[110] This would indeed be consistent with Sinn Fein policy changes. Having originally favoured withdrawal from the EU, the party now advocates engagement with its institutions, articulates its case via a dedicated Brussels office and supports the extension of the Euro to Northern Ireland as part of a move towards an all-island economy.[111]

Traditionally the quest for national self-determination previously defined as the Irish people expressing sovereign choice as a single political unit, was tied up with the notion of sovereignty. However, with the acceptance of an 'updated' form of national self-determination, in recent years, the changing take on sovereignty must also be examined. Both Sinn Fein and Fianna Fail have now accepted that whilst their definitions of the nation remain the same, i.e. 32 counties, it is necessary to accept that sovereignty of the people is a more realistic definition of sovereignty than territorial unity. As Catherine O'Donnell states, 'Maintaining a 32 county definition of the nation whilst recognising the two states on the island represented the key formula employed by FF and SF in terms of constitutional change'.[112] Mcauley and Tonge note the Irish government's role in explicitly offering Irish citizenship to those resident in the North. Indeed, 400,000 Irish passports were issued to those living in Northern Ireland in the ten years after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement.[113]

O'Donnell argues that sovereignty now rests with the Irish people since the British government has allowed referenda on the future of Ireland to take place without its

interference. Republican ultras would dispute this since Westminster retained a sovereign claim to Northern Ireland and specified separate referenda North and South. Even in the unlikely event of the South expressing overwhelming support for retention of Articles 2 and 3 in irredentist form (the reverse happened) the result would have been immaterial, if contradicted by the separate vote in the North. Nevertheless, Sinn Fein and Fianna Fail have chosen to frontload the exercise of self-determination as a form of political advancement and have downgraded the demands for sovereignty over a 32 County territorial unit. The party is, in effect, embracing the notion of 'one nation, two states'.

O'Donnell's point is crucial – the goal of political advancement was a big motivator for Sinn Fein. The party had to concede something in order to gain something on the issue of self-determination. That is, the party accepted a mode of self-determination that was almost certainly going to block immediate transition towards Irish unity, but by securing the vote it did set in stone a situation whereby the British government had at least conceded the principle of Irish self-determination. This is a sound base from which to work, despite the task at hand from this point being an extremely difficult one in which to succeed. Rather than having to fight two battles, one with the British government over granting self-determination and the other with unionists over the benefits of unity, the party can concentrate on the latter.

In distancing 'new' republicanism from its older parent, Sinn Fein's Mitchel McLaughlin argues, in much the same way as Maillot, that there is a difference between core principles and political ideology.[114] McLaughlin argues that whilst keeping those principles in mind, Sinn Fein is seeking social and economic democracy as well as national political democracy.[115] In its pursuit of these it is seeking coalitions, with these coalitions working

towards ending inequality and sectarianism, and towards a greener Ireland not subsumed into a European superstate.[116] McLaughlin acknowledges the right of Unionists to feel British and to express their culture, arguing however that they would hold a position of relative strength and influence they would hold in constituting one fifth of the Irish nation post-reunification, rather than one twentieth of the United Kingdom.[117] This contention, that being one-fifth of a nation to which they do not belong rather than at least a part of their desired nation, has had little impact on Unionists. McLaughlin's approach is at least however a nod towards accommodation of diversity, a point emphasised by another Sinn Fein MLA, Michelle Gildernew, who argued that it was important for her party to 'allow Unionists to be whatever they want to be' (interview, 10 June 2007).

Irish Republicanism and Socialism

The issue of socialism is the source of some of the greatest variations of perspective of any of Irish Republicanism's supposed core principles (see also chapter one). Whilst there are those who argue that the two concepts are easily reconcilable, perhaps even complimentary to one another, there is a competing argument claiming that republicanism is made up of two competing strands; socialism and nationalism. Irish Republicanism often resembles a militant form of Irish nationalism, yet maintains a rhetorical commitment to socialism today. However, there is considerable evidence of the marginal position of socialism within Sinn Fein's republicanism. The party advocates the establishment of a socialist Republic, campaigns for 'an Ireland of Equals'[118] and has in many ways stolen the SDLP's ground in its promotion of the equality agenda in the North.[119] However, recent developments in party strategy, including campaigning to lower corporation tax in Northern Ireland and the support for Private Finance Initiative, are not the kind one would regularly associate with a socialist movement. It is worth mentioning that the 'Ireland of Equals' the party advocates is

something of an ambiguous term. Whether it refers to people's economic plight or is dealing with issues of national identity is unclear.

Historically, the progressive credentials of militant republicanism were challenged by the crucial parts played by nationalists. The Easter Rising of 1916 contained progressive elements, but much conservative, garrison-state Irish nationalism at the expense of international socialism. By the 1940s, armed republicans were working with the Nazis .The 1950s were characterised by catholic conservatism, the 1960s by a leftward shift unpopular with the rank and file, which reasserted itself in the 1970s and positioned Irish republicanism as centre-left, but anti-Marxist. Sinn Fein's left-turn of the late 1970s and early 1980s proved only a temporary departure from the centre-left approach found today.[120]

Murray and Tonge, whilst acknowledging that Sinn Fein has a progressive take on many issues[121] of the type Mitchell McLaughlin refers to, use the example of abortion debates to show that there is a conservative Catholic strand to Sinn Fein. Whilst Gerry Adams has asserted that 'Sinn Fein is not a Catholic party',[122] the rather ambiguous policy devised by the party, whereby abortions are supported only in very limited cases, is almost certainly in response to the fact that Catholic teaching remains important to a section its supporters. The extension of the 1967 Abortion Act to Northern Ireland continues to be opposed by the party.

Pat Walsh argues that socialism was never an essential part of Provisional Republicanism. He contends that socialist republicanism was defeated when the Provisionals usurped the

Official IRA post-split and that the brand of republicanism seen thereafter has been an intellectually unsophisticated and largely Catholic entity.[123] The reason the Provisionals' brand of Republicanism won out in this internal battle is that the sophistication of socialist republican ideology has proven inappropriate to the crudity of the situation produced by British policy in the North.[124]

Whilst Walsh also uses Sinn Fein attitudes towards contraception and abortion in order to question the credibility of Provisional Republicanism's claims to be socialist, he also attempts to deconstruct the anti-capitalism that has often been attributed to the movement. He acknowledges that *Republican News* and *An Phoblacht* did at times carry anti-capitalist articles.[125] However, he contends that this is because Catholicism has traditionally equated large-scale industry with Protestantism and it is for this reason that the movement has chosen to oppose it. Small producers and rural farmers were more commonly associated with the maintenance of the Catholic faith.

Walsh accepts that the 'Catholic element' of republicanism is perhaps less dogmatic than was once the case. Although Adams and McGuinness are practising Catholics, they are more open to a mixture of liberal, secular, even socialist ideas.[126] However, only those which have been seen as beneficial to the survival of the movement have been adopted; anything antithetical has been ignored. In this sense, Walsh claims, Sinn Fein has behaved almost exactly like the Catholic Church itself. It has adapted as much as has been necessary to survive, whilst maintaining what it can of the old. For those reasons he concludes the following, 'Sinn Fein and the IRA are anything but socialist, and fundamentally remain what they always were, a movement for the extension of Catholic nationalist power over the whole island'.[127] There is a considerable evidential basis to Walsh's arguments, particularly

given the changes within Sinn Fein during the peace process. However, Walsh does not appear to factor in Sinn Fein's post-1982 need to trim its (then) embryonic socialism, which appeared to have only modest appeal even its urban heartland. Sinn Fein did garner support on the basis of local communitarianism and challenges to the local state, but this did not necessarily extend to support for full-blooded socialism amongst an electorate divided between the twin impulses of leftism and Catholicism and an activist base more interested in the prosecution of 'armed struggle'.

Henry Patterson argues that the history of the republican movement has been marked by attempts to marry the militant nationalist cause with progressive leftist thinking. However, he feels that the history of Sinn Fein has shown that the two are incompatible.[128] Indeed, he highlights Adams' attempts to steer the party away from 'social republicanism' in the 1980s to make this point. He uses the following quote from the Sinn Fein President:

> **This [pushing 'leftism'] must narrow the potential support base of the republican movement and enable other movements to claim that they are republican though they are not socialist; for example, Fianna Fail or the SDLP. This carries the danger of letting these parties off the hook, for their leaders will be able to claim that they are the real republicans and that what 'republicans' are offering is some foreign importation called socialism.[129]**

Patterson argues that whilst leftist or socialist doctrine has been influential within republicanism at times, notably in the late 1970s and early 1980s in the Provisional era, apparent opportunities tend to shift the emphasis away from a socialist agenda. In the late 1980s and early 1990s the shift in focus towards self-determination from socialism was in

Patterson's view both significant and typical of a movement that has been inconsistent in its commitment to socialism. This is not to say that there is not a continuing strong commitment to socialism from party activists at grassroots level, but Sinn Fein is a leadership dominated organisation.

Republicanism then is a broad concept; not only are there variations in opinion between external commentators as to which if any are its core principles, but the regular splits in the movement and the different levels of significance attributed to particular issues by those within the group would appear to give further credence to the contention that Irish Republicanism has no fixed principle beyond the aspiration to establish a 32 county Irish Republic free from British rule. In order to establish the extent to which Sinn Fein remains 'republican' in the remainder of the thesis therefore, it shall be necessary to examine the way in which alterations in policy can be argued to be part of the pursuit of the thus far elusive Republic rather than an attempt to survive at all costs.

The importance of 'armed struggle'

The theme most commonly associated with the Irish Republican movement over the course of the latter decades of the twentieth century was the 'armed struggle' carried out by the PIRA. However, there are a wide range of views on the nature of the PIRA's armed campaign. Not only is there disagreement on the reasons for the re-emergence of armed struggle and its utility, but also the reasons for and significance of the PIRA eventually standing down. These varied interpretations must be explored in order to gain a better understanding of the significance of armed struggle to Republicanism.

The nature of armed struggle and its centrality to republicanism (mere tactic or otherwise) remains contested. One of the PIRA's primary claimed functions, particularly in the early period of the troubles was to 'defend' nationalist areas. The 'Siege of St. Matthew's' in which PIRA members defended a Catholic church in the nationalist Short Strand area of East Belfast in 1970 has achieved mythical status in giving the PIRA credibility. It was largely down to this event that the Provisionals were able to usurp the Official IRA as the primary defenders of the nationalist community in many people's eyes.[130] Peter Taylor and Ed Moloney in particular argue that this event legitimised the PIRA's 'defenders' label. Taylor describes the event as the 'stuff of legend' and notes that other instances of defence in the Ardoyne area meant the PIRA had to be taken seriously as defenders of 'their community'.[131] Moloney makes the point that for many people in nationalist areas the lack of a proper defence force was a far more significant reason for switching support from the Official IRA than was that organisation's leftward lurch and decision to enter electoral politics.[132]

However, this view is not universally endorsed by academics or journalists. Both Richard English and Malachi O'Doherty argue that the PIRA's actions in nationalist areas were primarily about *defiance*, not defence.[133] [134] After all, by waging an armed campaign they were likely to antagonise loyalists, subsequently placing Catholics in even greater danger. O'Doherty puts this succinctly:

> **It seems the IRA was prepared to accept the increased endangerment of Catholics, and the attendant loss of life, in the furtherance of political objectives. If defence is protection, marked by the reduction of casualties – and this would seem to be a simply obvious condition of defence – then what the IRA did for the Catholic community was the precise opposite, for it plunged Catholics into a war with the British army and escalated tensions in Belfast.[135]**

A further criticism of the PIRA's self-ascribed defenderism comes from Rogelio Alonso. Whilst Alonso acknowledges that defence provided a rationale in terms of local legitimacy, however spurious, for the Provisionals, he uses testimony from volunteers to argue that the claimed utility of the role did not exist. Citing ex-Volunteer Carl Reilly, he demonstrates that Republicans who claimed they joined in order to protect their community were essentially just trying to justify their existence.[136] In this sense, defence was just a myth. Loyalist terror campaigns centred almost entirely on murdering Catholics (often with no connection to the PIRA or Sinn Fein), a strategy based upon deterring the Catholic community from supporting the PIRA. Yet the PIRA's principal objective often appeared to be blowing up city centres or murdering security personnel.[137] These were acts of attack, not defence, and were not conducive to protecting Catholics.

Despite the compelling arguments put forward by English, O'Doherty and Alonso, when analysing the defensive credentials of the PIRA one has to acknowledge that there were occasional instances of the Provisionals successfully defending nationalist areas.[138] In addition, one might make the case that the PIRA attempted to assassinate Loyalist paramilitary leaders who were putting Catholic lives in danger, perhaps most notably (although unsuccessfully) Johnny Adair in the Shankill Road fish shop bomb in 1993. In that particular instance the PIRA identified what they believed to be a loyalist meeting place on the Shankill Road, then planted a bomb in an attempt to 'eliminate' that threat to the Catholic community. The subsequent backlash from loyalist paramilitaries, involving the murder of several Catholics, belied claims of 'defence' from PIRA.

However, the identification of successful instances of defence[139] does not mean the PIRA can be described as a successful or legitimate defender of the nationalist people overall. After all, it is difficult to argue with English when he points out that 'the battle of St. Matthew's was far from paradigmatic for these years...it is sadly more plausible to argue that, during the troubles as a whole, IRA violence made more rather than less likely the prospect of Catholics suffering violence'.[140]

In order to claim that PIRA violence was necessary for defensive reasons and that it was effective, one would have to prove that there was no link between PIRA violence and loyalist reprisals. The evidence shows that as there was an increase in Republican activity, so too was there in Loyalist violence. The fact that the PIRA's cessation was followed within weeks by Loyalist ceasefires reinforces the point that there clearly was a connection, whilst Loyalist violence was not merely reactive.[141] Furthermore, even if one were to accept that the PIRA were ultimately ineffective defenders of their communities, in order to contend that those in the movement at least *thought* of themselves as defenders would require the belief that PIRA members were unaware that calling a halt to the violence would make Catholics safer. Patently PIRA members knew that this was the case, and for that reason it is sensible to conclude that English, O'Doherty and Alonso are correct when they argue that defence was not a key element to the PIRA's campaign.

Republican violence has been equally justified by adherents as part of a liberation campaign; a fight to free the people of Ireland and ultimately unite its people via the reversal of British-imposed partition. Again the literature offers a range of opinions about the usefulness and legitimacy of armed struggle in relation to the goal of reunification of the island. There are

also a variety of arguments put forward in relation to the reasons for the end to PIRA violence.

Perhaps the most scathing academic attack on PIRA violence comes from Rogelio Alonso. He dismisses any notion that violence was imperative to a liberation struggle; rather he contends that huge numbers of PIRA volunteers were wholly apolitical. The PIRA, he claims, was not characterised by well-educated and politically sophisticated recruits. Rather, there were a significant number of young people who were willing to kill in the name of Republicanism despite having little or no understanding of the reasons for the PIRA's existence and little conception of the supposed colonial history of oppression furthering the conflict. Furthermore, Alonso argues that some were so young that it was irresponsible of those involved in the movement to let them join.[142] Far from a clear connection to republican ideas, PIRA volunteers were engaged in spurious local defenderism or sectarianism.

Alonso's claim implies that the PIRA was made up of two types of recruit. Firstly, there were aggressive young people who were looking for a means to perpetrate violence for no particular reason. Secondly, bigots were attracted to the republican movement, happy to 'defend' what were perceived to be their areas by murdering members of the RUC or even ordinary Protestants. On this interpretation, aggression and communal bigotry were of far greater importance than republican ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity.

The use of testimony from a large number of ex-PIRA volunteers adds credence to Alonso's argument. He uses an extract from an interview with Anthony McIntyre in which the ex-

PIRA man recalls being unable to answer an RUC officer who asked him why he wanted to unite Ireland.[143] He was so young he had never thought to stop and think through why he was fighting. Gerard Hodgkins is quoted as saying the primary reason for him joining was the excitement surrounding the idea. Indeed, he openly admits that he was thrilled to be given a gun since he had only seen them 'on television and in comics'.[144] Similarly, Sean O'Hara talked of his desire to be a hero, to die for his country, rather than any specific desire to follow through Republican objectives.[145] Alonso's account is full of similar admissions by ex-PIRA men as to their reasons for joining the Republican movement.

Alonso reinforces his argument about the apolitical nature of recruits using the example of the way in which volunteers chose which branch of the Republican movement to join. For example, whilst the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) was the more left-leaning militant Republican group founded by those who had been members of the Official IRA, but disagreed with the leadership's decision to call a ceasefire, it was not the organisation's politics that encouraged people to join its ranks. Ex-volunteer Tony O'Hara is quoted as saying that it was not one's take on class-struggle or Marxist doctrine that determined which group to join, it was more to do with the personalities involved in each organisation. The desire to avoid people whom one knew and disliked tended to be the deciding factor.[146]

In terms of arguing that the nature of PIRA volunteers tended to be youthful, politically naïve or even downright ignorant, Alonso makes a strong case. After all, the testimony of numerous ex-PIRA members admitting as much is as strong a body of evidence as one could ever wish to see. However, Alonso appears to conflate leaders and led. As well as the impressionable young volunteers who joined the movement as the troubles began, there were also many older members who had long held Republican beliefs. To argue that Sean

MacStiofain and Ruari O'Bradaigh founded the Provisional movement because they were told to by their peers, or because they liked the idea of having a gun, is somewhat spurious. Republican leaders such as these consistently made the point that they were waging war against the occupying British forces, not the Protestant majority in the North.[147]

Additionally, Alonso ignores the general transmission of republican ideology which helped form the Provisionals, even if many recruits were not fully conversant with its theological certainties. That young recruits have only a hazy idea of republican objectives does not fully undermine the perception of the movement as political. This logic appears to hold that if one is able to point to examples of members who have an incoherent or underdeveloped understanding of what it is they have joined, then that movement has no rationale. By that same logic, one would have to question whether eighteen-year-old British Army recruits had a sufficient grasp of the political situation to be involved in conflict.

Anthony McIntyre argues that the genuine belief in armed struggle as a means by which the PIRA would inflict military defeat on the British government and reunite Ireland was not as pervasive as some authors would claim. Indeed, he feels that from early on republican leaders recognised that theirs was a campaign of political leverage.[148] He contends that ultimately republicanism was always likely to come up short in its quest, if it sought reunification of the island. The recent departure into constitutionalism has simply confirmed this. The *stated* goal was to bring about a declaration by the British government that it intended to withdraw from Northern Ireland and armed struggle was seen as a necessary means, as confirmed by Gerry Adams' declaration that, 'There are those who tell us that the British government will not be moved by armed struggle...the history of Ireland and British colonial involvement throughout the world tells us that they will not be moved by anything

else'.[149] Sinn Fein's publicity director, Danny Morrison, offered a similar view, arguing that, 'if every nationalist in Northern Ireland voted Sinn Fein the British would still not withdraw...the only way, therefore, to force a disengagement [is] through armed struggle'.[150]

In signing the Good Friday Agreement and ultimately decommissioning its weapons, McIntyre claims that the Republican movement cannot claim simply to have altered its tactics. The quotes above show the way republicans felt about armed struggle and its importance in bringing about British withdrawal, and yet ended the armed campaign without goal attainment. Consequently, they have ceded their 'historic goal' of forcing British withdrawal in favour of the aspiration for unity at an unspecified date.[151]

Sinn Fein's downgrading of the immediacy of its demand for unity and willingness to participate within the northern state appears to back-up McIntyre's central point; Republicanism does whatever is necessary to survive in the face of British state strategies. Despite earlier claiming that armed struggle was a necessity, the PIRA were willing to call ceasefires and eventually decommission weapons in the knowledge that Sinn Fein would benefit electorally. With immediate goals appearing unattainable, at least in the short to medium term, this was deemed a sensible tactic. The reason Republicanism has been able to go down this route without haemorrhaging support is the importance of issues *within* Northern Ireland to its supporters. After all, had its sole purpose been reunification by force, then signing the Good Friday Agreement would have been seen by its followers as a surrender yet even most of those who participated in the 'war' supported the deal.[152]

McIntyre makes valid points in terms of the shallowness of republican commitment amongst many volunteers. There was a significant body of 'Republican' recruits for whom 'hitting back' at the RUC, the British Army and even Protestants in general was a key reason for joining and/or supporting the PIRA. He is also correct in identifying the desire amongst many Northern Catholics for an improvement in their rights and social standing, with militancy appearing to be the only way to achieve this in a state with artificial gerrymandered electoral constituencies and wide-scale discrimination in the areas of housing and employment. However, he appears to imply that the politics of traditional Republicanism of the 1916 variety was grafted on as an after-thought. This is a somewhat unconvincing contention, with McIntyre appearing to make the same misjudgement as Rogelio Alonso, i.e. focussing entirely on the led without considering the leaders. After all, he may be totally correct in that the vast majority of new recruits after 1969 were interested solely in 'hitting back', but that does not mean this was the overall nature of Provisional Republicanism.

An examination of events over the course of the Troubles adds weight to this argument. For example, if the PIRA were willing to settle for something less than immediate Irish unity, why did they show *no* interest in the Sunningdale Agreement? Perhaps one might argue that Sunningdale conceded virtually from a Republican perspective, but the fact that even at this stage when it was clear the Unionist-dominated majoritarian system was a thing of the past the PIRA continued to call for an indivisible sovereign republic is telling. *Internal* reform, at this stage at least, was not enough for the Republican leadership.

Furthermore, the terms of the Good Friday Agreement were similar enough to Sunningdale for Seamus Mallon to famously refer to it as 'Sunningdale for slow learners'.[153] It was after a

sustained period without success that it started to become clear to those within the republican movement that the armed struggle simply wasn't going to bring about a united Ireland. As a result, it was necessary to accept the best settlement on offer and to try to pursue the goal of Irish unity through success at the polls. This would appear to be a more logical assessment than the claim that the organisation was always willing to settle for less than unity, yet accepted an offer that was similar to the one on the table twenty-five years earlier, even acknowledging that the Good Friday Agreement did, in contrast to Sunningdale, include an agreement to release Republican prisoners within two years. The meeting between Republican leaders and British government officials in 1972 saw Sean MacStiofain act 'like the representative of an army which had fought the British to a standstill',[154] seemingly a clear demonstration that as the PIRA's Chief of Staff he felt that reunification was imminent. By the 1990s, and much earlier for some, notably Gerry Adams,[155] this was no longer the case.

In summary, McIntyre appears to argue that the demand for immediate British withdrawal was bravado; an attempt to strengthen its bargaining position with the British government by appearing to be uncompromising. The deal Sinn Fein has settled for as a result of the Good Friday Agreement is not one that on any literal reading will lead to Irish unity, yet the Republican leadership knew this was likely to be the case. Provisional Republicanism was an attempt primarily to address issues *within* the Northern Irish state, which is why Sinn Fein has kept the majority of its supporters on board. As such, the nature of the armed struggle is that it was designed to bring about radical internal reform to the benefit of the nationalist people of Northern Ireland. However, this analysis is unconvincing in so far as Sinn Fein and the PIRA dismissed internal reform in the 1970s, and then *continually* argued for British withdrawal in the years that followed.

MLR Smith argues that the role of militarism in Irish Republicanism should have been as a valuable tactic. However, he contends that too often armed struggle has been elevated from tactic to apparent principle. As a result, republicans have been slow to recognise when precisely they have held the upper hand and for that reason have persisted with the tactic when its utility has already been exhausted.[156] In this sense, one could argue that the PIRA would have been no less 'republican' had they recognised their position of strength in 1972 by taking the opportunity for some political gains through negotiation rather than continuing with an armed campaign that ultimately proved insufficient to deliver the stated goal of Irish unity. Smith appears to feel that republicans' principal error has been their inability to see the limitations of armed struggle, rather than the 'abandonment' of it. That is because he regards it merely as a tactic, of limited use and of marginal importance to a core Irish Republican ideology.

This argument is applicable to the earlier period of the troubles, but it is worth recognising that by the 1990s the PIRA had recognised that violence was not going to force immediate withdrawal. Instead, through its English bombing campaign, it sought to remind the British government that it was capable of causing significant damage on mainland Britain in an attempt to press for Sinn Fein to be put at the same level as other parties in negotiations over devolution.

Richard English makes the point that the PIRA's violence was waged alongside the claim that the Six Counties were irreformable.[157] The campaign the PIRA waged was argued to be a necessity; the demands of the northern nationalist people had been repeatedly ignored in

the 'illegitimate statelet' and so reunification by force was the only option open to Republicans. However, English feels that the Republican argument on armed struggle runs into some serious problems. He contends that the PIRA were slow to recognise that their long war strategy was not only likely to fail in terms of delivering Irish unity, but was also unlikely even to deliver a better internal settlement for nationalists. He argues that violence was not a useful tool for two main reasons; Protestants who might have considered unity were put off by the PIRA's campaign, and Loyalist paramilitary violence was just as much a threat to the British government as the Republican campaign.

Republicans consistently claimed that it was the British presence in Ireland that deluded unionists into thinking they were a separate people on the island.[158] Consequently, the PIRA did whatever they felt necessary to remove the British government in the 'knowledge' that unionists would then come round to the idea that they were Irish. However, by trying to force a situation whereby unionists would be allowed to discover their Irishness, English feels the PIRA completely alienated many of these people.[159] If anything, this only served to make reunification less likely. In pursuit of these goals, the PIRA used the experience of the British Empire as a basis for legitimising force. Elsewhere in the Empire, however, the British government was often left in a situation where there was a choice between 'stay and put up with violence', or 'leave and be free of it'. However, Loyalist paramilitaries were seen as capable of making life as difficult for the British government as were Republicans.[160] For this reason there was no particular benefit for the British government in withdrawing, for they knew this would not be the end of their problems. Overall, English concludes that since the preface to PIRA violence was that the six counties were irreformable, yet Sinn Fein has now gone into the ruling coalition at Stormont, the assertion that the PIRA's campaign was necessary and beneficial was incorrect. It was most effective in delaying the implementation a working devolved settlement.[161] After all, and as McIntyre claims, the settlement on offer

as part of the Good Friday Agreement was quite similar to one offered twenty five years earlier. The context, but not the constitutional architecture, was what had changed.

A conflicting interpretation of the PIRA's campaign is given by Ed Moloney, grounded less in ideological debate and more in military fortune. He argues that it was the interception of the arms onboard the *Eksund* that convinced the PIRA leadership that military victory was out of reach.[162] He claims it was the interception of these arms that scuppered Republican plans to step up the campaign as part of a 'Tet Offensive' in the late 1980s. In other words, outright military victory was still aspired to at a fairly late stage of the PIRA's campaign. It was only once the PIRA was faced with a lack of firepower that Gerry Adams and his followers decided to manoeuvre the Republican movement into politics alone. Had these arms been acquired, Moloney appears to think there may still have been some prospect of British withdrawal.

The significance Moloney attaches to a specific arms shipment is typical of journalists' accounts of the republican movement. The overemphasis on militarism, however well-informed the author, is a deficiency common in the literature. Whilst the interception of the Libyan arms lessened the PIRA's military capabilities, the changes that were to occur in the movement over the next decade cannot be fully explained by a lack of PIRA firepower. Moloney and Taylor give a good insight into the problems the military wing of republicanism faced at this time, but military fortunes alone do not explain the changes undertaken by Sinn Fein from the 1980s onwards. Whilst the PIRA's English bombing campaign may have been largely a failure, it remained a concern of the British government given the PIRA's ability to cause substantial damage. The huge bombs in London and Manchester during the 1990s caused enormous economic damage and although those campaigns were not

effective in shifting the British government's position on the constitutional question the creation of a 'Ring of Steel' to protect financial institutions London, allied to the damage to prestige and the high costs of insurance (which caused some city firms to threaten to relocate) indicate that the IRA's campaign, whilst struggling badly in Northern Ireland, was not entirely spent.[163]

Electoralism's triumph over abstentionism and the implications for the republican movement

Sinn Fein's dropping of abstentionism in respect of Dail Eireann in 1986 saw a split in the movement, albeit with a large majority of members deciding to back the decision of the leadership with few joining Ruari O'Bradaigh's 'Republican Sinn Fein'. For those who did break away, abstentionism is more than just a tactic; it is a core principle of Irish Republicanism not to recognise illegitimate institutions.

Brendan Lynn's analysis of Sinn Fein makes the point that for any organisation to realise its historic goals, it needs to survive and adapt. De Valera recognised this in an earlier era, and his decision to enter the Dail saved Republicanism from a sustained period of 'political impotence',[164] in the twenty six counties at least. Sinn Fein were faced with a similar decision in the 1980s, and opted to take the same decision as De Valera had with Fianna Fail. In Lynn's view Gerry Adams, in conjunction with Danny Morrison, Tom Hartley and others close to him, took the decision from quite early on that in order for Republicanism to survive and flourish it was necessary to compete in elections. Adams' Brownie articles written whilst in prison between 1975 and 1977 advocated greater focus on politics. Whilst at this time he was advocating what he termed 'Active Abstentionism' and refusing to

recognise partitionist institutions, he was clearly trying to lay the ground for a more politically-minded movement.

In his 1979 address at Bodenstown, having just become Vice President of Sinn Fein, Adams talked of the need to update Republican philosophy in order for it to 'suit today's conditions'.[165] He also talked of a need to realise that the Republic could not be established 'solely by military means'.[166] Nevertheless, the issue of participating in elections and taking seats was not directly addressed until after the hunger stikes of 1981. Whilst beyond the direct control of Adams and his allies in the Sinn Fein hierarchy, it was the election of Bobby Sands and the others in support of the hunger strikers that kick-started the move towards dropping abstentionism. The proof that they could command a significant level of support, even temporarily, in the South as well as the North, was welcome. However, the subsequent loss of support in the twenty six counties made clear Sinn Fein's problem. As Gerry Adams put it:

> ordinary people...accept free state institutions as legitimate. To ignore this reality is to blinker republican politics, to undermine the development of our struggle...It has to be stressed that the people of the six counties cannot secure Irish independence and the conditions for our Irish Republic on their own. A firm foothold and a relevant political organisation in Southern politics is vital.[167]

In short Adams was keen to stress that abstentionism, whilst for many a point of principle, was having a detrimental effect on Republicans' ability to adhere to the most important principle of all; establishment of a thirty-two county Republic free from British rule. Any tactic that led to Sinn Fein being seen as an irrelevance to the majority of people on the

island was of no value. In this sense, those in favour of dropping abstentionism argued that it was no different to the decision to fight charges against PIRA volunteers in court. Whilst originally deemed a point of principle not to recognise an illegitimate court, the fact that the PIRA was losing many volunteers through casualties and imprisonment made it necessary to fight to keep them out of prison.[168] This did not mean that Republicanism had been abandoned; rather it was doing what was necessary to continue its struggle.

Richard English agrees with Lynn that Sinn Fein's move to drop abstentionism was merely recognition of certain political realities.[169] Not only was there a realisation that Sinn Fein needed to make electoral headway in order to make progress towards its goals, but there had also been the recognition that despite partition being British imposed the Dail was not a British-controlled parliament nor were the twenty six counties at the mercy of the British government. English makes these points using quotes from Gerry Adams and Tom Hartley respectively:

what persuaded Sinn Fein in the end to contest and take seats in Leinster House was that they recognised the reality of the situation in the twenty-six counties, the vast majority of people there, cynical though they are about their politicians, accept their institutions. Partition has had that effect.[170]

whether we liked it or not, the Dail is an *Irish* institution, it's not a British institution. It might have been an outcome of British strategy or policy, but it certainly wasn't a British institution.[171]

Whilst Taylor feels that the maintenance of an armed campaign and the support of prominent PIRA men were key to keeping the majority of Sinn Fein's supporters on board,[172] since there was some scepticism from the 'rank and file', he too feels that the decision to drop abstention was inevitable. In his opinion it did not, despite the protestations of O'Bradaigh, indicate that Sinn Fein had ceased to be republican. As Jim Gibney argued in an interview with Taylor, 'the idea that in 1986 you could put on the mantle of republicanism and say that we do not recognise Leinster House because it emerged from the Treaty is not a credible one'.[173]

Gibney's point is one acknowledged by Murray and Tonge. Whilst it might be interpreted as the end to Republican 'purism', most within and all outside the movement saw it as recognition of reality. Those against the move to electoralism could not counter the argument levelled against them that without an end to abstentionism the party would never make electoral headway in the South. Upping its polling figures was recognised as being of greater value to the republican cause than claiming the PIRA were a government in waiting when in reality they had no credible modern mandate,[174] although the change in policy was sold as a fusion of militarism and electoralism. Furthermore, those members advocating the taking of seats at the Dail included some influential figures. High-profile PIRA prisoners such as Gerry Kelly were amongst those in favour[175]. This further strengthened the belief within Sinn Fein and the PIRA that abstentionism was not a tactic to hold onto at all costs.

This changed perception was inevitable given the isolating effects of armed struggle. Joost Augusteijn feels that recognition of the Dail was inevitable. In fact, he goes as far as claiming that pragmatists are not a specific grouping within republicanism. At heart they are

all democrats, the acceptance of political institutions has been is a consistent and logical response by a section of the movement to prevailing circumstances.[176]

Whilst Kevin Bean does not entirely concur with McIntyre's assertion that the PIRA's campaign was primarily about achieving internal reform in the North, he does argue that the internal economic situation in Northern Ireland has been an important factor in the changes seen in modern times. McIntyre described Provisional Republicanism as the politics of an economically marginalised 'underclass'.[177] It is Bean's contention that the emergence of a Catholic middle-class has been one of the factors affecting Sinn Fein's policy,[178] principally its embracing of electoralism and the institutions of government.

Sinn Fein has recognised that the Catholic electorate who, for example, do not live in Belfast or Derry's republican heartlands and who work in secure public sector jobs provided the electoral impetus for the party, as it broke from its communal ghetto. Whilst he acknowledges that Sinn Fein is adept at turning communal grievances to its advantage in such a way as it often manages to gain broad Catholic support on certain issues, he also argues that in order to tap into the Catholic middle-class vote Sinn Fein needed to become more like an 'ordinary' political party.[179] Ryan, too, feels this is the case. He argues that through the adoption of conventional political strategies Sinn Fein has morphed into a 'normal' Irish political party, pluralist in tone and competing in a Catholic nationalist electoral marketplace.

However, there is also a case to be made that Sinn Fein's 'de-ghettoisation' has made the party more republican. Since it has attempted to reach people other than those in its inner-

city working class heartlands and represent the broader community, it has been attempting to appeal to *all* Irish people. It once claimed to represent not a Northern 'underclass' but a genuine republican movement of all Irish people. Yet this position contrasted starkly with the electoral evidence. Since the Good Friday Agreement, however, electoral growth on both sides of the border has at least given Sinn Fein a credible claim that it represents a significant section of the people of the entire island of Ireland. This is in accord with the avowed universalism of republicanism, a holistic entity embracing *all* the people.

Agnes Maillot offers a moderately sympathetic account of Sinn Fein's journey. Maillot claims that whilst Sinn Fein's progress has been at times slow, the electoral success it has had in recent times vindicates the difficult decision made over dropping abstentionism as a tactic since it was probably the greatest obstacle to Sinn Fein ever managing an electoral breakthrough, at least in the Irish Republic.[180] Maillot feels that not only is this shift important to the electoral future of the movement, but is in-keeping with the traditions of a movement which has always been more pragmatic than dogmatic. Sinn Fein has now realised that a sovereign republic needs to take the people with it, and dispensing with an outdated tactic in order to compete in elections is the best way to do that. It can now truly represent 'the people' since it is operating in the present rather than harking back to the past on a point of principle.

The relative electoral success of Sinn Fein, combined with the fact that an armed campaign was not going to bring about immediate withdrawal of the British government, appears to have justified Sinn Fein's decision to recognise the Dail and later Stormont. Whilst Sinn Fein's share of the vote in the twenty-six counties is still fairly small, it has a strong electoral base in the border counties and, to a lesser extent, inner-city Dublin. Furthermore, in the

North it has long overtaken SDLP as the leading nationalist party; and by some distance. Whether this will ultimately lead to Irish unity clearly remains doubtful, but Sinn Fein's argument remains that it is more likely to achieve it by polling well and taking seats than by polling poorly and abstaining from parliaments. Many would argue that being in government North and South is the best way to advance Republican goals.[181] Republican electoralism, as articulated by Sinn Fein, was born of necessity and remains its only alternative to failed militarism or the risk of political extinction.

Feeney also feels that the electoralism now displayed by Sinn Fein has been of great benefit to Irish Republicanism, at least its northern variant, arguing that Sinn Fein's acknowledgement that the PIRA Army Council was not the legitimate all-Ireland government[182] and the decision to fight for votes in the contemporary Irish political scene have 'have helped create the conditions in which Ireland can achieve the end that Irish leaders have sought down through the centuries'.[183] He also makes the point that by stealing many of the SDLP's policies, particularly regarding the equality agenda, Sinn Fein has managed to portray itself as politically similar to its nationalist rival but with the added dimension of being the stouter defender of its ethnic bloc.[184]

Having said this, Feeney's conclusion remains slightly baffling. Sinn Fein has '...helped create the conditions in which Ireland can achieve the end that Irish leaders have sought down through the centuries' he argues.[185] This statement seems to be an almost teleological one, as if Ireland must achieve what it has sought through the centuries. There is little evidence as yet that Sinn Fein is any closer to delivering a united Ireland than it was, for example, just prior to the Good Friday Agreement being signed, nor why unity should be an imperative.

Conclusion

The apparent fluidity of the republican movement has been demonstrated. Whilst there remains debate around particular decisions or policies at any given time, it has proved difficult to identify any additional core principles of republicanism. As an ideology in the broadest sense, republicanism focuses on the will of the people. In this regard the Irish variant seems to have been consistent since it has regularly been subject to alterations due to the changing political conditions of the time. This is most obviously demonstrated by the changes of policy in regard to abstentionism, the mode of self-determination deemed to be acceptable, and the oscillation between the view that militarism was key to the republican cause, or merely a useful tactic.

There is a consensus amongst all bar militant irreconcilable republicans, confined to those in Republican Sinn Fein, that electoralism's triumph over abstentionism did not mark the dropping of a core principle. After all, abstentionism can be argued to have been at odds with republican ideals in a number of ways; it meant that the mandate of the past ideal outweighed that of the living, it was elitist, and it did not embrace the contemporary, as distinct from past, will of the people.

Irish Republicanism has been shown to have a large number of marginal items, but only one central component; the ambition to break the connection with Britain and establish a 32 county Republic. Until the late 1980s the Provisional movement was fixated with this, to the detriment of policy agendas in other areas and the necessity of compromise when goal attainment through outright victory cannot be achieved. Since that time republicanism, as

espoused by Sinn Fein, has been markedly more flexible. Whilst it has maintained a desire to end the partition of the Ireland, it has acknowledged the need to enter institutions in the short term and work towards goals other than securing immediate withdrawal of the British government.

Furthermore, reviewing the literature has shown that analysts have placed the greatest emphasis on two factors when analysing the changes in Sinn Fein policy; the military fortunes of the PIRA, and the need to compete and be successful in elections. Indeed, these are convincing as reasons for the advent of 'new' Sinn Fein. In the aftermath of the Hunger Strikes it became clear that support for Sinn Fein in the South could not be sustained at the level achieved by the Anti-H Block candidates, whilst the armed campaign had gone on for over a decade without the forced withdrawal of the British government. However, it is necessary to go beyond these two reasons alone as explanations of the transformation of republicanism. After all, even if Sinn Fein had been able to increase its share of the vote throughout the 1980s in conjunction with a more successful military campaign, are we to believe that the changes that have occurred in the movement would never have come about? This seems unlikely. English, and to a certain extent Maillot and Patterson, have looked at factors beyond military fortune and immediate electoral advantages when explaining the 'new' Sinn Fein. However, it is necessary to inspect closely the republican transition and the conditions under which it occurred in order to get a fuller explanation as to why it came about.

CHAPTER THREE: THE FOUNDATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF PROVISIONAL REPUBLICANISM

Having established that Irish Republicanism is fluid ideologically, with the main continual theme being the desire to break the connection with Britain, it is now crucial to examine the foundation and development of the Provisional movement. A comprehensive review of the causes of the IRA split at the end of the 1960s will be helpful in assessing the ideological nature of Provisional Republicanism at its birth. Combined with an examination of the tactics employed by Sinn Fein and the PIRA in the 1970s, it should be possible to provide a clear picture as to the overall character of early Provisional Republicanism. This will be particularly useful for two reasons; combined with a detailed analysis of the SDLP it will make clear the difference between republicanism and nationalism during the early period of the troubles; it will also make it possible to assess the scale and significance of changes within the republican movement later in the thesis.

Lack of Progress: Post-partition Republicanism

Whilst this chapter is not intended to be a history of the Irish Republican movement, a brief overview of republicanism prior to 1969 will make clear the course of events leading to the Republican split of December 1969 and the subsequent formation of the Provisional movement. During the Irish War of Independence 1919-1921, the IRA fought a guerrilla campaign against the British Army. The stated aim of the IRA at this time was to oust the British government and establish an independent united Ireland. However, it split over the issue of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1922. The anti-treaty members of the IRA were fiercely opposed to two aspects of the treaty in particular; swearing an Oath of Allegiance to a

British monarch; and accepting that six counties of the province of Ulster were to remain under British control.

Many of the IRA Volunteers who accepted the Treaty were to become part of the new Irish National Army from 1922 onwards. However, those opposed were to mount an armed campaign against the National Army in an attempt to establish a *fully* independent thirty-two county Irish Republic. Ultimately the IRA was defeated by the National Army (which was assisted by the British government) in 1923. The anti-treaty IRA continued to exist thereafter, but in truth posed little genuine threat to either the Free State or Northern Ireland, at least in terms of overthrowing these regimes via armed insurrection. The marginalisation of Sinn Fein and the IRA was sealed when in 1926 Eamon De Valera, a vehement critic of the Anglo-Irish Treaty and the Oath of Allegiance that came with it, left Sinn Fein to form a new constitutional party; Fianna Fail. Indeed, when De Valera entered the Dail with Fianna Fail, he took with him a large number of supporters from Sinn Fein. Consequently, the IRA was low on numbers and short of support by 1926. It was at this time that the IRA began to take something of a leftward shift, with prominent socialists such as George Gilmore and Frank Ryan heavily involved in the leadership.[186] However, this 'social republicanism' failed to garner the support the IRA needed. By the 1930s the vast majority of Irish people had accepted Free State institutions in the twenty-six counties, whereas in the North of Ireland sectarian concerns were utmost in the nationalist psyche, not republican leftist ideals. Indeed, the latter were openly criticised by the Catholic Church that many nationalists followed. As a result, Walsh argues that from 1927-1934 the IRA's attempts effort to convert to social republicanism proved to be the lowest point in the organisation's history. Not only did it fail to harness support from the public at large, it struggled even to convince those already part of the republican movement of leftist ideals.[187]

In the years that followed the IRA became all but irrelevant, with many volunteers leaving the organisation due to the perceived futility of action either North or South of the Border.[188] Whilst attempts were made to work with the Nazis during World War II (a clear sign that 'Connolly-esque' socialism was now off the agenda), these were far from successful. Hopes of large arms shipments to the IRA from Germany were never realised, nor was the ambitious 'Plan Kathleen' devised by IRA Chief of Staff Stephen Hayes whereby the IRA, with German assistance, would mount an invasion of Northern Ireland.

With the twenty-six counties becoming a Republic in 1949, the IRA's attention began to turn northward.[189] Clann Na Poblachta, a republican party which had employed participation rather than abstentionism, had become a member of a coalition government in the Dail. Clann was committed to pursuing a united Ireland, and as a result was more sympathetic to the IRA than De Valera's governments had been. This offered some comfort to the IRA, which reverted to a more traditional conservative Catholic-nationalist outlook, and led to another concerted campaign designed to bring about a thirty-two county Republic. However, the Border Campaign of 1956-62 proved unsuccessful and would lead to the IRA once again taking a radical path in an attempt to raise its fortunes. Ultimately, this would put into motion a series of events leading to the 1969 split and a continuous armed campaign spanning two and a half decades.

The Aftermath of the Border Campaign and the Republican Split

The split in the republican movement of December 1969 was to prove crucial to the unfolding events in Northern Ireland, with the 'new' IRA mounting an armed insurrection

that would help bring down Stormont and test the British government's will to remain in Northern Ireland. The IRA's previous concerted attempt to drive the British government out of Ireland had ended in 1962 with the abandonment of the 'Border Campaign'. Defeat came about as much because of an inability to gather significant support from the nationalist community as from any particular British military strategy. Indeed, upon ending the campaign, the IRA released a statement demoralised and frustrated in tone which confirmed this difficulty:

> **The decision to end the resistance campaign has been taken in view of the general situation. Foremost among the factors motivating this course of action has been the attitude of the general public whose minds have been deliberately distracted from the supreme issue facing the Irish people – the unity and freedom of Ireland[190]**

Traditional physical-force republicanism had garnered little support in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Following the emphatic defeat, Ruari O'Bradaigh was replaced as IRA Chief of Staff by Cathal Goulding. It was after this leadership change that the IRA began to shift its focus away from the traditional republican approach of armed resistance designed to force the British government to withdraw. Instead, under the influence of left-leaning academics such as Roy Johnston, Anthony Coughlan and Desmond Greaves, Goulding sought to create a class-based non-sectarian republicanism that might attract support from both Catholics and Protestants.[191]

This notion was not, of course, entirely new to the republican movement. James Connolly and later George Gilmore and Frank Ryan, leading republican figures in earlier generations, advocated this brand of socialist republicanism. However, up to and including the Border

Campaign, it was a marginal element to the overall republican movement; certainly seen as of secondary importance to the removal of the British government's presence in Ireland. Under Goulding this changed, with 'progressive' class-based politics becoming central to the republican cause. However, two decisions would lead to a republican split and the birth of a strong Provisional movement capable not only of usurping the Officials as the dominant republican group, but also go on the offensive against the British Army after 1970. The first was to encourage the civil rights movement. The NICRA eventually confounded Goulding's expectations of inter-communal cooperation, leading as it did to entrenched sectarian conflict. The unionist ascendancy and the marginally superior loyalist working class were unwilling to participate in a campaign designed to alter the status quo. The second was the focus on left-wing politics *at the expense* of militarism. This would ultimately leave the IRA's traditional support-base, the nationalist community, helpless against loyalist mobs, thus discrediting the 'Official' IRA as a military force.

Whilst not directly founded by the IRA, the NICRA was not an entity bereft of influence from the republican movement. Members of the IRA, along with communists and Irish nationalist activists, played an important part in the civil rights campaign. In August 1966 the idea of a civil rights association was mooted at a joint meeting of the Wolfe Tone Societies, a meeting attended by Cathal Goulding, who was happy to pledge the IRA's support. When NICRA was formally founded during the following January, IRA volunteer Liam McMillen was a member of the committee charged with running the campaign. The IRA may have been moving in a new direction, and it is clear that they saw civil rights agitation as an opportunity to achieve long-standing historic goals, albeit via radically different tactics.[192] What would later become known as 'the stages theory' was a plan that involved a mixture of Marxist ideals, traditional republican 'teachings' from Wolfe Tone, nationalist inspiration from the Easter Rising and tactics employed by the civil rights movement in the United States.

The plan can be argued to have been doomed from its outset since it took little account of historical realities in the North of Ireland.[193] It envisaged workers in the Six Counties conducting a civil rights campaign that would establish equality for the Catholic minority. In the process, the sectarian barriers between the two communities would be broken down, enabling the proletariat to recognise their communal class interest. At that point, Sinn Fein political agitation in the South would transform the ingrained conservatism of the working class into a progressive non-sectarian attitude. Parallel to this process, the dynamics of capitalism would be forging a strong bourgeoisie all over the island, which would eventually become equally oppressive to workers of all creeds. At some point the workers would band together to overthrow capitalism; whether it was by violent or peaceful means was a matter for their own choice.[194] Coughlan described his vision of cross-community cooperation leading to Irish unity as follows:

[The] unfreezing of political life in the six counties may release the political energies of the people, and particularly the Catholic people and the Protestant working class, and lead to results which the unionists never bargained for. If things change too much the orange worker may see that he can get by alright without dominating his Catholic neighbour. The two of them may in time join forces in the Labour movement, and where would unionism be then? How can unionism possibly survive when Protestant and Catholic are no longer at one another's throats, when discrimination has been dealt a body-blow?[195]

NICRA mobilised huge numbers of people from the Catholic community, so in this sense it was successful from a republican point of view. After all, the IRA had been able to generate very little support from any section of the general public during the Border Campaign.

However, the republican leadership made a costly miscalculation. Whilst it was anticipated that the Protestant workers would come to perceive unionism as misguided and join their Catholic comrades in civil protest, the reality was that the Protestant community were more likely to criticise, or in certain instances physically attack, those involved with NICRA.[196] Breaking through to the bulk of the Protestant population had proved impossible, mainly because the republican leadership had failed to take into account the internal dynamics of unionism and had placed too much emphasis on 'the British imperial masters'.[197] With non-sectarianism and the fall of capitalism in both parts of Ireland crucial to the 'stages theory', the IRA's hopes of wide-scale working class empowerment and the establishment of an Irish Republic as proclaimed in 1916 were mere fantasy.

Consequently, the situation at the end of 1969 was as follows. Nationalists in Northern Ireland had enthusiastically embraced the NICRA. The IRA had seen the NICRA as essential in undermining the unionist regime at Stormont and to a certain extent this view had been vindicated through the wide-scale nationalist involvement in the civil rights campaign and the instability generated in unionism. However, not only had the Protestant reaction been a blow to socialist republicans in that the national consensus they had sought had proven elusive, it also resulted in attacks on nationalists that the IRA were unable to combat due to a lack of firepower. In effect, a large section of the Northern Irish people had been motivated to rebel against the regime in the North, but the IRA's credibility had been sapped and it was unable to capitalise on this. This meant a split was inevitable, and the result was the birth of the Provisional IRA that would claim the mantle of 'defenders' and later mount an armed insurrection against the British government.

The reasons stated for particular individuals leaving to form the Provisionals differ. However, the two that appear most frequently are distaste for Goulding's 'Marxist' agenda, and the IRA's inability to protect people from loyalist gangs. Joe Cahill, whilst accepting that republicanism in Ireland had a socialist strand, was clear about what he saw as the main difference between the Provisionals and the Officials:

> **Our aims are the same, but our methods are different. Both lots have the central aim of a United Ireland. We the Provisionals, are content to leave to the people what happens after that. But the Officials put the need for a social revolution before the need for a national government ...We are socialists but we are content to leave the path to socialism to the people. This is a democratic country and we are not communists.[198]**

Sean MacStiofain and Ruari O'Bradaigh expressed frustration at the lack of military training in the wake of the civil rights campaign. To them, it was the perceived running down of the military wing of republicanism that was the greatest shortcoming of Goulding's leadership. The following quotes, the first from MacStiofain's autobiography and the second an argument made by O'Bradaigh at an Army Council meeting, illustrate this point:

> **I and others in Republican circles saw that the civil rights strategy had the Unionists puzzled and threatened reaction to it could lead to a very dangerous situation. Therefore, it was more than ever essential to maintain the IRA at as high a standard as possible ... Demanding an increase in active training, I pressed the point that some of our own members had helped to initiate the new weapon of mass civil rights protest in the North. The least we expected of the IRA was that it would be ready to meet the dangers that this development might bring about.[199]**

[it was] the height of irresponsibility and madness to have the pressure continue from the Civil Rights movement knowing where it was going to lead and being unable then to meet the logical consequences.[200]

Goulding's dismissal of these concerns, combined with the violence that took hold in late 1969, set in motion the foundation of a breakaway IRA. Consequently, we can draw certain conclusions about the nature of Provisional Republicanism at this point. It was socialist in nature, but was opposed to the kind of Marxist-influenced politics of Coughlan and Johnston. It adhered to the traditional republican maxim of seeking an end to the British presence in Ireland and the reunification of the country above all else. Although not intrinsically sectarian, as an organisation the PIRA accepted that sectarianism was a reality in Northern Ireland and felt it was the PIRA's duty to defend nationalists who came under attack with the aspiration to turn to defence into offence when the opportunity arose. In this sense the Provisionals were employing typical physical force republican tactics in a contemporary setting. The focus on militarism more than politics, the desire to rid Ireland of the British government and the affinity with the nationalist community were all central to the PIRA.

New Nationalism: The SDLP

Plans for a new non-violent nationalist party were drafted in the wake of the civil rights campaign. The Nationalist Party had been the leading representative of non-violent nationalism up until the civil rights agitation. However, a common perception in Northern Ireland was of the Nationalist Party as disorganised, virtually non-existent east of the Bann in terms of local branches, and unable to force the unionist regime to bring about all the reforms necessary. Consequently, the party had gone into terminal decline.[201] In August

1970, the Social Democratic and Labour Party was launched, with the MP for West Belfast, Gerry Fitt, as its leader. Social Democratic Party was discussed as a possible name, but 'Labour' was included on the insistence of both Fitt and Paddy Devlin who felt it was important to make it abundantly clear the left-leaning ideological stance of the party.[202] Whilst the inclusion of the word 'Labour' clarified the party's position on social and economic matters, the exclusion of any reference to Irish unity or the concept of 'the Republic' was equally telling. Reunification of the island was an ambition of the SDLP, but was secondary concern for many of its original founders, although this sequencing was to fluctuate. The SDLP's original ordering of priorities was in stark contrast to the Nationalist Party, whose fixation with partition was well-known and which operated as a clergy-influenced, often right-of-centre organisation. In fact, the Nationalist Party's tendency to emphasise partition to the exclusion of other social issues affecting the welfare of their supporters was one of its major shortcomings.[203] Foremost in the minds of those within the SDLP was the quest for equality within Northern Ireland. This was summed up by founder member Austin Currie:

> **At the time of the foundation of the SDLP ... nationalism was being put on a back burner ... There was recognition that we had to live within Northern Ireland for a considerable period of time ... we had to make the best of that situation, but that we were entitled to an equal spot in the sun — that was our determination and commitment.[204]**

In terms of organisation, the party modelled itself closely on the old National Democratic Party that had operated in Belfast since the mid-1960s with a card-carrying membership, a growing level of political organisation and a belief that constructive political action could advance the cause of northern nationalists.[205]

The SDLP believed the achievement of Irish unity was contingent upon two things, political co-operation from unionists at Stormont and the building of trust between the two traditions on the island.[206] The party was sufficiently cognisant of the depth of Unionist opposition to constitutional change to recognise that these two conditions were a long way from being realised and as a result set about working within the constraints of the situation in Northern Ireland. Its newly written Constitution confirmed this, incorporating objectives such as 'To promote the cause of Irish unity based on the consent of the majority of people in Northern Ireland' and 'To contest elections in Northern Ireland with a view to forming a government'.[207] However, the series of events in Northern Ireland immediately after the party's foundation throw up some interesting instances of the SDLP's intentions mirroring those of Sinn Fein, even though tactics employed by the two parties were seldom similar.

Sinn Fein, the PIRA and the SDLP in Practice

In the aftermath of Billy McKee's successful rearguard action during the 'Siege of St. Matthew's' in June 1970, the PIRA went on the attack.[208] Indeed, it appeared to be following through on its conviction that first and foremost the Republican movement must expel the 'occupying' British forces. By 1972 the PIRA had a large body of volunteers and could count on a significant level of support within working-class nationalist communities,[209] perhaps most notably in Belfast,[210] where the IRA had previously held little influence. Partly as a result of the violence it had perpetrated, the 'illegal' parliament at Stormont was brought down and 'temporary' direct-rule from Westminster imposed on Northern Ireland. However, whilst Sinn Fein (moribund at the time) and the SDLP were in complete disagreement on the legitimacy of PIRA violence, republicans' determination to wreck Stormont was in fact shared by the SDLP.

Whilst the SDLP's nationalism has been characterised as participatory, at this particular juncture the SDLP showed that it was willing to destroy a system it felt was unfair to the nationalist community, by abstaining from parliament. In July 1971, the party decided to withdraw as the official opposition at Stormont. Two unarmed youths had recently been shot by the British Army in Derry and the SDLP declared itself unhappy at the Conservative Government's buttressing of the Unionist regime at Stormont with the nationalist people in such a disillusioned state. John Hume, in particular, felt that in order to find a solution, Westminster had to be convinced of the ineffectiveness of the system of government in Northern Ireland and prepare its abolition.[211] Furthermore, an internal party document in September 1971 criticised the British government for 'propping up a discredited, unjust and corrupt post-colonial regime'.[212] The SDLP's approach at this stage suggests that constitutionalism and participation were not as important as might be supposed in McAllister's account.[213] Not only did the party show a willingness to abstain, a tactic more common for republican groups, it was also willing to flirt with a colonial interpretation of the conflict, one explicit in allocating historical responsibility for the problem almost exclusively to the British government[214]. This belies the perception of the origins of the party as more 'red' than 'green', notwithstanding the claims of party founders.

Nonetheless, the differences between Sinn Fein and the SDLP remained stark, most obviously over the utility of violence. However, perhaps even more significant at this time, Sinn Fein felt it was imperative the British government withdraw as soon as possible. Despite also favouring Irish unity in the long term, the SDLP felt that immediate British withdrawal would be a negative step. They argued that without the improvement of relations between the two traditions on the island, the situation would almost certainly spiral

into further violence. Instead, the SDLP favoured all-island bodies and cross-border programmes as means to improve the situation for nationalists in the North and to begin to improve levels of trust between unionist and nationalist, North and South.[215] Its suggestion of a Supreme Council of Ireland to analyse legislation in Northern Ireland and the Republic was an example of one of these all-island bodies. It also argued that citizens in Northern Ireland should be able to vote in Irish Presidential elections.[216] Finally, the SDLP recommended changes to the Irish Constitution should any part of it be deemed offensive to the unionist community.[217] This was almost certainly in reference to Articles 2 and 3 which laid claim to Northern Ireland, as well as the special place reserved for the Catholic Church under Article 44 of the 1937 Irish Constitution, but this latter Article was in any case rescinded by the Irish government in 1972.

Sinn Fein's political vision at this time was more straightforward. Following the withdrawal of the British government forced by the PIRA, it sought to abolish the political institutions North and South. Following this a federal system of government would be introduced whereby each historic province, including a nine county Ulster, would have its own regional parliament. Devised principally by Ruari O'Bradiagh and Daithi O'Connaill, 'Eire Nua' was supposed to offer some succour to unionists, who would constitute a slight majority in an Ulster regional parliament. Sinn Fein did not advocate any interim measures or all-island bodies, feeling they would be little more than an attempt to satisfy nationalists without giving them the Republic they required.

After the suspension of Stormont in 1972 and the introduction of direct rule, the British government was keen to find a solution to the troubles that involved the reintroduction of devolution. As a result, the Sunningdale Agreement was drawn up at the end of 1973 and

implemented during the following year. The Agreement was to involve power-sharing between 'moderate' nationalists and unionists in Northern Ireland, with an all-island dimension involved via the Council of Ireland. The respective reactions of Sinn Fein and the SDLP to this development was perhaps the clearest indication of just how different the two parties were at this stage, with ideological divergence clearly highlighted through the actions of each.

The Sunningdale Agreement and its Aftermath

The British government's attempts to broker a consociational power-sharing arrangement in Northern Ireland took the form of the Sunningdale Agreement. Signed in late 1973 and coming into effect in January 1974, it involved 'moderate' constitutional political elites sharing power as part of a coalition devolved administration. By encouraging moderates representing each community to work together, the British government was endeavouring to marginalise 'extremists' such as the PIRA. Whilst it was eventually loyalist hostility to the power-sharing deal and subsequent strikes called by the Ulster Workers Council that would bring down the agreement, it is the respective reactions of Sinn Fein and the SDLP to Sunningdale that will be of use to this study.

The SDLP embraced Sunningdale for a number of reasons. It signalled an end to the majoritarian system of government that had worked against the nationalist community in Northern Ireland. It also contained an Irish dimension, embodied in the Council of Ireland. The Council was to comprise two tiers; the Council of Ministers and the Consultative Assembly. The former involved seven ministers from each part of Ireland meeting to discuss economic and social matters,[218] whilst the latter comprised thirty representatives from each

of the Dail and the Northern Ireland Assembly, combining to undertake 'advisory and review functions'.[219] Whilst the actual function of the Council of Ireland was somewhat ambiguous,[220] it nevertheless marked an acknowledgement that Dublin had a genuine and legitimate interest in matters north of the border. Whilst these perceived improvements to the political system in Northern Ireland were welcomed by the SDLP, the party felt that unionists would participate safe in the knowledge that they were not being forced into a united Ireland.

Provisional republicans rejected Sunningdale and strongly criticised the SDLP, labelling them 'collaborators' and arguing that the Council of Ireland was not going to produce the dynamic that could lead ultimately to an agreed single state for Ireland as claimed by the SDLP's Paddy Devlin. Rather, republicans felt the whole agreement was designed to grant nationalists in the North just enough to satisfy them, thereby copper-fastening partition rather than bringing about a long-term transition to Irish unity. In the period that followed the collapse of Sunningdale, the PIRA described the SDLP as 'a new unionist party ... they have demonstrated their ability to betray their own people'.[221]

In the aftermath of the collapse of Sunningdale there was some internal disagreement in the SDLP about the cause of its failure. Whilst Gerry Fitt felt that the Council of Ireland was too much too soon for unionism when in fact power-sharing had the potential to work quite well,[222] John Hume and Eddie McGrady felt it was the weakness of the British government that was to blame for the failure to successfully implement devolution.[223] In truth, Hume and McGrady may have been somewhat naïve. Whilst it is generally accepted that there was some intimidation of workers by loyalist paramilitaries in 1974, there was a genuinely strong anti-agreement feeling in unionism. This had been demonstrated by the General Election

result of February 1974 when the overwhelming majority of unionist politicians returned were against power-sharing. It is difficult to see how the British government could compete with such fierce opposition. A majoritarian system of government with no outside influence was still fresh in the memory of unionists and this radical departure from that was too seen as too much to bear. The SDLP nonetheless tended to blame the British government for not 'imposing' Sunningdale.

With power sharing having failed, the PIRA's Army Council held talks with the representatives of the British government in late 1974 which culminated in a cease-fire. Originally the cease-fire was temporary, but in February 1975 the PIRA leadership declared it indefinite.[224] The cease-fire was agreed upon after British government officials suggested during dialogue with the PIRA that British withdrawal was on the agenda.[225] There then followed a series of meetings between British government officials and the republican leadership. However, as time wore on little political progress was made and by late 1975 the PIRA were involved in a series of mainly sectarian actions. The last of the meetings between the two sides occurred in February 1976 with the PIRA having already effectively returned to 'war' and some within the republican leadership realising it had overseen a disastrous period in which the British Army had been given breathing space whilst the political cause had failed to advance at all. Younger members of the PIRA felt the leadership had been naïve in their dealings with the British government and regarded the entire cease-fire as a betrayal.[226]

In many ways it is the period after Sunningdale which best sums up the early Provisional movement. Militarily they had been strong enough to contribute to the downfall of an anachronistic parliament and had helped make Northern Ireland ungovernable (without the

presence of British troops). However, politically they were woefully underdeveloped, so much so that the leadership persisted with meetings with the British government in the hope that withdrawal was imminent without having devised any other realistic political strategy as an alternative. Gerry Adams later confirmed this difficulty by admitting, 'For me it was becoming clearer that the struggle had been limited to armed struggle. Once this stopped, the struggle stopped'.[227]

Whilst in prison Adams wrote a series of articles for *Republican News* under the pen-name 'Brownie'. It is in these articles he began to tackle what he saw as the deficient politics of Provisional republicanism. By advocating what he termed 'Active Abstentionism', Adams made clear that he felt republicans needed to be more politically active. He did, however, make clear that as far as he was concerned the armed struggle was still an essential tactic in a situation where the enemy, i.e. the British government, 'protects his vested interests by force of arms'.[228] Adams' articles laid the foundations for a better synergy between army and party. Whilst the latter had been totally subordinate to the former, this was to change in the ensuing years.

Whilst the PIRA's post-Sunningdale experience resulted in fruitless negotiations that failed to deliver British withdrawal, the SDLP entered into the Constitutional Convention established by the British government and designed to provide Northern Irish political leaders with the opportunity to resolve problems amongst themselves.[229] However, with the Convention being a forum for elected politicians, and with the United Ulster Unionist Council (UUUC) holding a majority of Convention seats, the proposals put forward by the Convention were largely those of UUUC political thinking and did not involve the SDLP's preferred option of

power-sharing with an Irish dimension.[230] As such, there was little prospect of a deal being brokered.

Following the collapse of the Convention, the British government felt a political solution was unlikely in the short-term. As a result, it settled upon direct-rule from Westminster with a shift in focus from the political to the security situation in Northern Ireland.[231] This left the SDLP in something of a political vacuum. Its advocacy of power-sharing had seemingly been dismissed by unionists and the party was left in a situation where the British government no longer had the appetite to find a workable form of devolution. As a consequence, there developed within the SDLP a more hard-line element who actively advocated British withdrawal. This marked quite a transformation for a party that had been keen to stress the importance of the consent principle only a few years earlier. Moreover, the Southern government also came in for strong criticism for its supposed lack of interest in affairs north of the border.

The SDLP's 1976 Annual Conference saw a challenge in the party ranks to moderate SDLP positions. Motions calling for British withdrawal and for the Southern government to exercise its claim to the North were defeated, but only narrowly.[232] The party was clearly frustrated by the attitudes of unionists and the British government. Realising that as a result of these two factors power-sharing was not a viable option in the short-term, it set about outlining a more nationalist political outlook in which closer ties with the South were actively sought and the Irish dimension superseded power-sharing as the party's immediate concern. The nature of the SDLP's Annual Conference of 1976 and the shift in policy thereafter again provides evidence that there was a tendency within the party to adopt neo-republican policies, not markedly different from those offered by Sinn Fein. The competing elements in

the nationalist community were far from polar opposites in the aftermath of Sunningdale. Indeed, this was confirmed when at the 1978 Annual Conference a motion was passed claiming that British disengagement was 'inevitable and desirable'.[233]

The following year saw the resignation of party leader Gerry Fitt. Considered to be on the socialist rather than nationalist wing of the party, Fitt declared that he had observed an emerging republican element within the SDLP. Indeed, he even went so far as to imply the party had been taken over by the Provisionals, an excessive claim even despite the policy convergence and one which marginalised Fitt from his colleagues.[234] The SDLP had rejected talks proposed by new Conservative Secretary of State Humphrey Atkins after it had become clear that discussions would not include any reference to the Irish dimension, a decision with which Fitt had been in disagreement.[235] Although exaggerating the influence of the Provisionals, who were not an electoral rival for the SDLP at the time, Fitt clearly had a case in highlighting the drift of SDLP policy towards a dilution of the consent principle and stress upon a strong Dublin role. The founding ideals of the party had placed much more emphasis on internal northern consent for change and had promoted labourist rather than nationalist politics.

Fitt's Departure: Nationalism's Primacy over Socialism?

Fitt's resignation of the SDLP leadership in 1979 highlighted the juxtaposition between social democracy and Irish nationalism in the party. This is an area warranting further exploration, since an understanding of what might be labelled the socialist versus nationalist dichotomy within the party is crucial in interpreting the ideological development of the SDLP. Furthermore, the extent to which the party accommodated two wings, 'red' and 'green', is

important in assessing the external influences upon Sinn Fein's brand of republicanism in later years as it underwent a series of 'tactical' changes.

Before attempting to uncover the extent to which the SDLP's constitution, policy documents and specific actions were typical of a social democratic or nationalist party, it will be useful to put forward a definition of social democracy in much the same way as a definition of nationalism was constructed earlier in the thesis. Social democracy can be argued to be a moderated form of socialism. It espouses a desire to distribute wealth in accordance with moral, rather than market, principles.[236] However, it does not advocate the destruction of the capitalist market economy, since this is the only reliable mechanism for the generation of wealth.[237] Perhaps the chief characteristic of social democratic thought has been a concern for the weak and the vulnerable in society. This tends to take the form of principles such as welfarism, redistribution and social justice.[238]

The SDLP's Constitution, approved at its first Annual Conference in 1971, shows a clear commitment to the kinds of principles outlined above. The Constitution's Second Clause outlined the party's aim 'To organise and maintain in Northern Ireland a Socialist Party'.[239] Furthermore, the party's commitment to contesting elections was asserted, with the aim of implementing policies, including 'The public ownership and democratic control of such essential industries and services as the common good requires'[240] and 'The utilisation of its powers by the state, when and where necessary to provide employment by the establishment of publicly owned industries'.[241]

The SDLP's Second Annual Conference saw a continuation of this Labourite theme. The leadership address by Gerry Fitt not only emphasised the need to promote radical socialist policies,[242] but also advocated a moderate tack on nationalist issues. In Fitt's own words, '...of our three 'Rs' Reunification comes last. It is preceded, as it must be, by Reconciliation and Reconstruction'[243]. That same year, 1972, evidence submitted by John Hume to the Commission on the Constitution again focussed on themes of equality within Northern Ireland. Hume suggested a periodic referendum on the status of Northern Ireland. Whilst this illustrated the SDLP's belief that Northern Ireland is not an integral part of the United Kingdom, the purpose of these periodic referenda was '...[to] remove the constitutional question from party politics and allow for the development of normal politics'.[244] Effectively, this was recognition of the 'unionist veto' and assertion of the SDLP's desire to get involved in 'normal' politics. The assumption is that 'normal' politics centres on social and economic issues, again seeming to show that the party in its early days could be characterised *primarily* as social democratic.

Yet 1972 also saw the SDLP publish *Towards a New Ireland*, a policy document in which nationalist issues were addressed and proposals for the future of the island put forward. Whilst there was nothing of 'Brits out', there was no mistaking the strong nationalist flavour of the document. Amongst the 'greenest' portions of Towards a New Ireland was the following:

> **The first unchallengeable fact which we face is that the area which has come to be known as 'Northern Ireland' is inherently unstable... The last attempt to find a settlement to the problems of this country was The Government of Ireland Act 1920. It was an imposed settlement which was at the time, unacceptable to all sections of the people of this Island. It has failed. One of its essential elements, The Stormont**

Parliament, has recently disappeared and it is necessary to realise that its failure does not simply represent the failure of the Northern System of Government but the failure of the 1920 Irish Settlement of which it was a part.[245]

The document argued that whilst immediate British withdrawal was not an option, nor was it preferable to force unionists into a united Ireland in which they would feel uncomfortable, Irish unity was an ultimate long-term ambition of the SDLP. Indeed, it made the following proposal in which the British government was encouraged to make clear its support for an agreed united Ireland:

An immediate declaration by Britain that she believes that it would be in the best interest of all sections of the Communities in both Islands, if Ireland were to become united on terms which would be acceptable to all the people of Ireland and that she will positively encourage the prosecution of this view point.[246]

The party clearly had strongly held convictions on both social and national issues. However, within a decade of formation the SDLP's 'moderate' brand of nationalism hardened. Whilst the party always condemned the use of force, the Annual Conferences of 1977 and 1978 were notable for the number of motions levelling fierce criticism at the British government, as well as the advocacy of a policy akin to 'Brits out'. The drift towards a policy of integrationism from the Westminster government was seen as so abhorrent by the SDLP that its own party leader was overruled when he tried to engage in talks which may have yielded some social or economic advantages. This symbolised the fact that the satisfaction of nationalist ambitions through a strong Irish dimension was by the late 1970s a precursor to any attempted long-term social reform.

The SDLP's share of the vote had begun to dip slightly after the collapse of Sunningdale.[247] There was a risk that an electorate hungry for reform would lose faith with an impotent outfit committed to working within a state in which there was still considerable discrimination against a section of the population and little recognition of 'Irishness'. Faced with this difficulty, perhaps the party felt the need to adopt a tougher approach vis-à-vis nationalist issues lest it become an irrelevance. Commitment to work towards reforms within a Northern Ireland increasingly closely tied to Britain without looking Southwards could well have been electoral suicide for the party. The lack of electoral success enjoyed by those senior figures, Gerry Fitt and Paddy Devlin, who left the party on the grounds it had become nationalist rather than socialist would appear to reinforce this hypothesis.[248]

The SDLP's decision to adopt a 'greener' agenda, particularly after the collapse of power-sharing, is one that has been criticised by certain analysts. McLoughlin claims that Sunningdale, primarily constructed by the SDLP, was too demanding of the unionist community.[249] He claims that Faulkner, leader of the Ulster Unionist Party at the time, had an almost impossible task in selling the agreement to the unionist community at large. This was made even more difficult by such comments as "the Council of Ireland will be the vehicle by which unionists can be trundled into a united Ireland" by the SDLP's Hugh Logue.[250] Despite protestations that it was seeking cooperation with unionists, SDLP rhetoric such as this implied that unionists would be unable to resist Irish unity. This made a settlement including an Irish dimension very difficult to achieve, particularly with that Irish dimension being the Council of Ireland.

Undoubtedly Logue's comments and the implementation of all-island structures so soon after the collapse of majoritarianism were a lot to take for many unionists. However, to blame the SDLP exclusively for the collapse of Sunningdale seems somewhat unfair. After all, the party had to bring about change that would be acceptable to its own community first and foremost. If the party had concentrated primarily on appeasing unionists it may well have brought about only cosmetic change. The SDLP's mission was to bring about a situation that would be deemed acceptable by the Northern nationalist community. This, as it turns out, was not possible due to forces such as loyalist paramilitarism's support for strike action and Paisleyite condemnation of any Irish dimension to a political deal.

With the socialist Fitt having left the party, the SDLP came under the guidance of a more openly nationalist politician; John Hume. Indeed, Hume's exact intentions regarding the unionist population of the North has come under question. Whilst he regularly referred to the two *traditions* in Ireland, marking unionism out as distinct from nationalism, he did not make clear whether unionists constituted a 'nation' or whether, as Sinn Fein argued, unionists were fellow Irish. Cunningham, for example, argues that Hume was employing 'slippery' rhetoric in order to confuse Protestants.[251] Whilst he was seeking to offer unionists some succour by noting their difference, Cunningham claims that by never referring to the unionist people as a nation Hume showed he was hopeful of forcing them into a united Ireland.

Cunningham's point regarding the ambiguity of the word 'tradition' is worthy of note. After all, the decision to avoid the term 'nation' was an intentional strategy. However, to go so far as to argue it was an attempt to 'dupe' unionists into a united Ireland seems somewhat unlikely. More likely is it was a term used for the benefit of the SDLP's support-base; the

nationalist community. To refer to unionists as a nation would be tantamount to accepting partition in perpetuity. This would effectively rule out the ultimate ambition of any Irish nationalist party, the reunification of the island, and surely alienate the party faithful. However, by making the case that unionists are those of a political tradition who must be persuaded of the advantages of Irish unity, unionists are left with the impression that constitutional change depends on them whilst nationalists feel Irish unity is a possibility at some stage in the future.

This approach to unionism is backed up in another of Hume's somewhat ambiguous constructs; an 'agreed' Ireland. Again, whilst it does not openly concede the notion of a unionist veto, it shows a desire to form a deal between unionism and nationalism. Whilst Cunningham's point that as a term it automatically has all-island connotations is valid, this does not mean Hume's view of nationalism was the same as those held by members of Sinn Fein. In reality, if Sinn Fein's classification of unionists simply as 'Irish' was the *thesis* and the UUP and DUP's claim that unionists were a nation was the *antithesis*, then the SDLP's stance was the *synthesis*. It accepted a difference between unionists and nationalists in a way Republicanism did not, but it refused to accept that unionists were a nation that could be left to determine their own future alone. Negotiation with people of an opposing tradition on the island was demanded of the unionist political elite. In these senses, an 'agreed Ireland' and the need for reconciliation between the two 'traditions' in Ireland borrowed heavily from both Republican and Unionist positions.

Conclusion: The State of Provisional Republicanism and its Relationship to Nationalism at the End of the Decade

By 1979 the Provisional movement and the SDLP had been in existence for a nearly a decade. Neither had achieved their stated goals, nor even come close, yet neither had softened their stance on nationalist issues. The Provisionals rejected compromise with unionism or the British government, whilst the SDLP had become more strident in its assertions of the desirability of Irish unity. The differences between the two strands of northern nationalism had narrowed over the course of the decade, owing mainly to the increasingly 'green' agenda pursued by the SDLP at the expense of its more labourist origins. However, the differences in methodology of goal attainment remained stark. Distinctions over the morality of the use of violence and regarding its political effectiveness remained acute. Furthemore, the validity of perpetual abstentionism and the radically different definitions of national sovereignty were both areas in which Sinn Fein and the SDLP were at odds.

The beginnings of attempts to politicise the Republican movement were underway through Adams' advocacy of 'active abstentionism'. Furthermore, it had not gone unnoticed by some in Sinn Fein that the SDLP's response to the threat of being rendered politically redundant was to adopt a more obviously nationalist programme. Whilst issues concerning equality and social justice were obviously vote winners (the NICRA showed just how many people could be mobilised on these themes), the SDLP decided that Northern Ireland required a greater influence from the rest of the island. This is something that would later be pursued through the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Sinn Fein, still at this time adhering to the principles of Eire Nua, was about to undertake a political overhaul from the green romanticism of Irish federalism to a more urban socialist agenda. However, it was unable to test its popularity with the

electorate since it was opposed to participating in elections to partitionist institutions. This was also to change in the 1980s, with Provisional Republicanism employing the 'Armalite and Ballot Box Strategy'.

That Sinn Fein underwent very little change in the 1970s whilst the SDLP took a clear path from a predominantly socialist stance to an overtly nationalist one is hugely significant. A common perception, put forward by McIntyre,[252] is that Irish republicanism has consistently shown itself to be situational. This can be seen through the way in which Provisional Republicanism arose, as well as the numerous 'tactical' changes it underwent in later years. However, in this chapter it has been shown that it is the SDLP that made the greater changes in the face of particular circumstances in the 1970s. That is, path-dependency models appear to come closest to accounting for the changing nationalist agenda[253]. This is an area that has been under-researched and must be further scrutinised in later chapters covering later time periods.

The years that followed saw very little progress made in terms of finding an agreeable form of devolution to Northern Ireland. Having tried and failed in 1974, the British government appeared fairly content to focus on security arrangements whilst governing directly from Westminster. Consequently, many of the most significant developments came in the form of SDLP and Sinn Fein relationships with the British government, the Irish government, and perhaps most significantly each other. This must be examined in order to clarify the nature of Provisional Republicanism by the end of the 1980s, its changing relationship with other actors, its adherence to or divergence from previous tactics and the extent to which it remained distinct from the SDLP by the time a pan-nationalist alliance began to emerge at the beginning of the peace process.

CHAPTER FOUR: SINN FEIN AND THE TACTICAL REVISIONS OF 1980-1992

At the beginning of the 1980s republicans had a number of issues that needed to be addressed. The first and most obvious problem was that the Provisional movement had now been in existence for a decade, but British withdrawal looked as far away as ever. The second problem, as highlighted in the previous chapter, is that the SDLP had developed into a more openly and stridently nationalist outfit. This new 'green' political stance found considerable favour in the nationalist community, leading to considerable support for SDLP electoralism, a backing unchallenged amid the absence of any Sinn Fein electoral strategy. SDLP support and the campaigns of the Peace People during the late 1970s hinted indicated the limitations to the popularity for IRA militancy, which appeared ghettoised in working-class strongholds and confined mainly to border areas elsewhere. Sinn Fein's support for PIRA violence and the commitment to avoid elections did not lend themselves to increasing republicanism's support-base, and in the years that followed these problems were addressed by an emerging Northern-based leadership.

The SDLP had developed into a 'greener' outfit, whilst still clinging to its 'red' social democratic agenda. Both the SDLP and Sinn Fein had 'red' and 'green' agendas, though Sinn Fein's nationalism was stronger whilst its brand of social politics was further to the left, with the majority of its supporters being inhabitants of inner-city Catholic ghettos. However, Sinn Fein's official political outlook remained centred on a rural, federal policy entitled *Eire Nua*.[254] Its core features held little appeal to Sinn Fein's urban base more concerned with immediate security and social welfare issues. Moreover, the regional parliament in Ulster[255] proposed under Eire Nua appeared to be a concession to unionism despite the traditional republican belief that unionists are 'fellow Irish'. Prior to the 1980s the lack of an active Sinn Fein with

complex and comprehensive policies was of little significance, as the political side of the republican movement was still totally subordinate to the IRA at this time. However, by the end of the 1970s some within the party had recognised the need to develop a more relevant political strategy rather than rely predominantly on militarism. The transformation of Sinn Fein began as it came under a new Northern-based leadership. The party ditched its federal approach in favour of a more anti-loyalist position.[256] Thus, the demands of electoral competition against the SDLP originally led to a more sectarian approach. The party's tone would ultimately, however, become somewhat more conciliatory as the peace process began to emerge.

Sinn Fein had consistently disavowed participation in elections. The exceptions to this rule came in the forms of local council elections in the South and a referendum on remaining in the European Union in 1975 (during which republicans urged people to vote for withdrawal[257]). Naturally the party did not stand for Stormont (mothballed since 1972), Leinster House or Westminster since it did not recognise any of them as legitimate parliaments to govern the people of Ireland. However, the events of 1980 and 1981 were a watershed for the republican movement. They would transform the movement's approach to politics, bring about the 'Armalite and ballot-box' strategy and ultimately see Sinn Fein taking seats at both Irish parliaments. These changes were presented as tactical, but for a minority of the republican movement they were seen as the beginning of an irresistible move towards more fundamental shifts.

The impact of the hunger strikes

The hunger strikes marked the beginning of Sinn Fein's journey into constitutional politics. However, it was in response to a change in British government policy that the decision to refuse food was taken by a number of republicans in prison. Republican prisoners had lost their political status following the arrival of Roy Mason as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in 1976. Mason had acted upon the recommendations of the Gardiner Report of 1975 which had stated, amongst other things, that 'the introduction of special category status for prisoners was a serious mistake'[258] and that 'the earliest practicable opportunity should be taken to bring special category status to an end'.[259] The Thatcher government from 1979 onwards continued this policy of 'criminalisation'.[260] The reaction to this decision came in the form of the 'blanket protest'. This involved a refusal by republicans to wear prison uniforms on the grounds that they were the uniforms of criminals – those republicans in gaol did not accept that they had committed crimes. Rather, they claimed they were soldiers fighting a 'war' of liberation against the Crown forces. Furthermore, with time this protest became 'dirty'. Excrement was smeared on the walls of prisoners' cells and urine poured out under the cell doors.[261] Nevertheless, this failed to move the British government and after four years without success a number of prisoners decided to call a hunger strike in 1980.

The hunger strike was called off after the British government indicated it was willing to make concessions on the inmates' status and privileges.[262] However, these concessions never materialised and as a result further hunger strikes were planned the following year.[263] The difference between the strikes of the previous year and those of 1981 was that prisoners were to start their strikes one at a time, with seven days elapsing before a new inmate went on strike. Bobby Sands was the first to refuse food. It was felt that a steady

stream of strikes might be particularly effective in keeping the issue in the public domain and subsequently pressurising the British government into acceding to the prisoners' demands. In terms of the former the campaign did have some success, with nationalist sentiment being stirred throughout Ireland. There were even expressions of support on humanitarian grounds from those nationalists not usually supportive of Sinn Fein or the IRA. Prison conditions had also been lamented by Catholic Cardinal Tomas O'Fiaich, further raising the profile of the hunger strikers at home and abroad.[264]

Just a few days into the strike an independent Republican MP for Fermanagh and South Tyrone, Frank Maguire, died. Although its leaders were nervous concerning the possible outcome (as they were in respect of the hunger strike) Sinn Fein saw this as an opportunity to play on latent nationalist sentiment by contesting the subsequent by-election. Consequently, the decision was made to put Bobby Sands forward for the seat under the banner of 'Anti H Block/Armagh Political Prisoner'. Sinn Fein set about trying to dissuade other republican candidates from standing, an aim in which it was successful. The stage was then set for a straight fight between Bobby Sands and the Ulster Unionist Party candidate Harry West. Sands won the seat with a majority of over 1,000 on a turnout of over 80 per cent.

In terms of the original aims of the hunger strikes, the prisoners were unsuccessful. Ten died from starvation before the strike was eventually abandoned. However, this was something of a Pyrrhic victory for Thatcher's government. Whilst they had not given in to terrorist demands, the exposure that the strikes generated and the subsequent election of a republican prisoner to the British House of Commons was a huge boost to the republican movement. It showed republicans that there was indeed sufficient sympathy for republican

prisoners to fight and win elections, at least in certain circumstances. It also damaged the British assertion that the moderate majority had no sympathy with the perpetrators of republican violence.

After Sands' death, another by-election was necessary. The British government had introduced legislation banning convicted prisoners from competing in elections, so Sands' election agent, Owen Carron, stood under the same 'Anti H-Block' banner. Whilst this time the small Workers Party and Alliance Party also stood in the constituency, the SDLP (and DUP) did not. It was, therefore, something akin to a straight fight between Carron and the UUP's Ken Maginnis. Carron won by an even greater margin than Sands, over 2,000, on an extremely high turnout. Furthermore, in the elections to Dail Eireann, two Anti-H Block candidates were elected. This showed that even in the South, where republicanism was of less relevance to the general population, there was a wave of emotion concerning the plight of PIRA political prisoners.

Whilst the hunger strikes were an unexpected and unplanned catalyst for the journey towards electoralism (and eventually participation), there are those who question the way in which this situation came about. O'Rawe argues that rather than Thatcher's intransigence being the primary reason for the lengthy nature of the strikes and the high number of fatalities, it was Gerry Adams' acknowledgement that the strikes were exceptionally useful in giving republicans a platform to perform well at elections that led to the strike dragging on long enough for Carron to win his seat.[265] Whilst this view is not shared by many ex-strikers or Sinn Fein supporters, there are those who agree with O'Rawe's analysis – ex-prisoner Anthony McIntyre for one.[266]

The debate over the precise impetus behind the unfolding events of the hunger strikes ties in to a wider debate about Irish Republicanism. In this particular instance there are those who feel the entire series of events was down to chance, i.e. republicans just reacted to events. This analysis dovetails with the view that movement as a whole can be categorised as being 'event-driven'. An alternative reading sees the changes in republican tactics as being down to informed strategic decisions taken by the movement's leaders. The truth lies somewhere in between. Sinn Fein's emerging leadership, the Adams axis within the strategy, held the strategic goal of the political development of republicanism to accompany a military campaign which appeared to have already peaked. This would provide an enduring republicanism regardless of the fortunes of the IRA. Particular events, such as the emotion generated by the prison strikes, proved fortuitous in facilitating movement towards this goal, but were not necessarily part of the strategic plan. The Sinn Fein leadership were nervous of the hunger strike and of contesting by-elections, fearing defeat in both.

Following the electoral success of the hunger strikers Sinn Fein recognised there was support to be built upon in both parts of Ireland. In order to achieve this end, it was proposed at the autumn 1981 *Ard Fheis* that Sinn Fein itself should make available the option to contest elections. Candidates would not accept their seats, but by having members elected the republican movement would be able to demonstrate without dispute that it represented a sizeable portion of the Irish people. There was some concern about this move towards political activity, but following a speech by Danny Morrison in which he asked, "Who here really believes that we can win the war through the ballot box? But will anyone here object if with a ballot paper in this hand and an Armalite in this hand, we take power in Ireland?"[267] the motion was passed and republicanism had embarked upon a more political

approach. Whilst Morrison later admitted his speech was ad hoc, its content was memorable enough for the new tactic of employing electoralism along with physical-force to be dubbed 'the Armalite and the ballot-box strategy'.

This was not, of course, entirely new. Republicans had employed electoralism previously within the northern state, with some success in the mid-1950s. However, this remained a crucial development in the modern republican struggle. Its immediate and undeniable impact was to elevate the position of 'politics' to a similar level of importance as armed struggle. The second was the potential for further alterations in approach. If electoralism was seen to be a worthwhile tactic having previously been dismissed, what else might be up for review? The fact that the position was changed with popular support showed that many republicans were susceptible to rethinking the traditional agenda.

The following year saw Jim Prior, who had been installed as new Northern Ireland Secretary at the end of 1981, bring about plans for 'rolling devolution'. Originally parties elected to the assembly were to have consultative powers only, but if unionists and nationalists proved themselves capable of working together then powers would be rolled out to the Northern Irish parties.[268] Whilst the SDLP and Sinn Fein had little interest in this rolling devolution (the Irish dimension was not on the British government's agenda), the 1982 elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly gave Sinn Fein its first opportunity to test its new electoral strategy. The party polled a respectable 10.1 per cent of the vote.[269] This accounted for around one third of the Catholic electorate. Furthermore, the following year saw Gerry Adams elected to Westminster as the MP for West Belfast in the 1983 British General Election.

Successful election results were vitally important for the republican movement. Firstly, the results improved the morale of PIRA volunteers who had failed to make significant progress towards their ultimate political ambition of a united Ireland. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, it meant that Sinn Fein had a mandate from the living rather than the dead. The elitist and arcane argument that the PIRA Army Council was the legitimate government of all-Ireland had been an irrelevance to the vast majority of Irish people. However, the fact that one third of the Northern Catholic electorate, as well as a majority of people in certain constituencies in both parts of Ireland, felt republicans were worthy of their support gave the movement far greater legitimacy. Thirdly, contesting elections on an abstentionist basis did not offend any section of the movement, being at one with traditional republican principles.

Republicanism, perhaps for the first time since the damaging cease-fire in the mid 1970s, appeared to be on an upward trajectory. The SDLP's share of the vote in the early 1980s was down on its 1970s levels, hovering around the 18 per cent mark.[270] Sinn Fein had shown itself to be capable of polling in excess of 10 per cent, whilst through the hunger strikes and subsequent election of Sands and Carron the republicans' cause was firmly in the public eye – domestically and internationally.

The rise of Sinn Fein as an electoral force was of great concern to both the British government and the SDLP. Whilst both wanted to scupper Sinn Fein's chances of becoming the main nationalist voice in the North, the SDLP needed to balance this with a continuing commitment to the all-island agenda. The policy pursued in order to achieve this aim was

greater emphasis being placed on the Dublin government, which eventually culminated in the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement and its aftermath

Encouraged by an SDLP needing reward for its non-violent endeavours, the Anglo-Irish Agreement's inter-governmental arrangements between the London and Dublin governments held advantages. Firstly, no matter what hard-line elements of unionism or republicanism felt about the agreement, they could do nothing to stop it since it was signed by the Irish and British Prime Ministers and did not require the acquiescence of any particular political party or organisation.[271] Secondly, it introduced an Irish dimension to the government of Northern Ireland without conceding republican demands. This was seen by many nationalists to be an improvement in the general situation, and had been brought about by the non-violent SDLP. It was anticipated, therefore, that the electorate might turn away from Sinn Fein in favour of the SDLP. It was also hoped that it would begin a reappraisal in unionism whereby the unionist parties would recognise that power-sharing was now the best option in order to have a greater say in Northern Irish affairs than the Dublin government. As Margaret Thatcher put it, 'The only lasting way to put an end to violence and achieve the peace and stability in Northern Ireland is reconciliations between these two communities. That is the goal of this Agreement'.[272]

Thatcher deemed the Anglo-Irish Agreement necessary to stunt Sinn Fein's growth and see 'moderate' nationalism reassert itself over republicanism in the North. It is for this reason that the nationalism referred to in the document is always the constitutional variety – it is an attempt to marginalise Sinn Fein and the PIRA.[273] In terms of giving the SDLP a timely boost

and stunting Sinn Fein's political growth, the Anglo-Irish Agreement was indeed a success. The SDLP began to improve its poll ratings. After collecting just 4.5 per cent more of the vote than Sinn Fein in the 1983 Westminster election,[274] the same election four years later saw the SDLP increase its lead to almost 10 per cent.[275] Clearly the rise of Sinn Fein had been successfully halted, with much of the electorate having a new confidence in the non-violent and participatory (at least at Westminster) SDLP.

The Sinn Fein leadership had become aware of what might be deemed the electoral 'false dawn' in the run-up to the Anglo-Irish Agreement being signed. Whilst Sands and Carron had been elected in the immediate aftermath of the hunger strikes in the North, TDs elected to Leinster House during the same period, and Adams able to take a Westminster seat in republicanism's heartland the following year, there had been a tailing-off of the Sinn Fein vote in the South. Coupled with the SDLP's 'achievement' in delivering the Anglo-Irish Agreement, by the end of 1985 Sinn Fein was encountering its first major political challenge since embracing electoralism four years earlier.

The party responded to its difficulties in two ways. The first involved criticism of the agreement and those involved in its construction. The second saw a crucial alteration in Sinn Fein policy in order to regain the momentum it was losing. Rather predictably, Sinn Fein attacked the Anglo-Irish Agreement for being well-short of Irish unity and containing little prospect for ever reversing partition. It was dismissed as a means by which the British could copper-fasten the partition of Ireland with the Dublin government in acceptance of the deal. Adams outlined his position in an interview with the party's own publication:

The Hillsborough Agreement consists of two major elements. Firstly, it institutionalises the British presence and pledges Dublin's formal recognition of the six-county state, partition, the loyalist veto and the British connection. Sinn Fein, quite rightly, is opposed to this. No Irish nationalist or republican could support it. Secondly, it contains a promise of concessions to improve the quality of life for nationalists in the six counties. Sinn Fein correctly sees these concessions – if they come and if they have any real substance – as being a result of the steadfastness of a section of the nationalist people, allied to their support for Sinn Fein...Dublin and London readily admit that their Agreement is partly aimed at isolating Sinn Fein by introducing concessions and creating a political climate. The equation is therefore a simple one: support for Sinn Fein equals concessions from the British.[276]

Adams' assessment of the political motives and implications of the agreement was somewhat unconvincing, since along with dismissing the deal Sinn Fein also claimed that anything positive that did come out of it was down to the IRA's campaign. This is because in Sinn Fein's estimation it was support for the republican campaign that the agreement had been designed to curtail. However, Adams' words showed a muddled picture of cause-and-effect, seemingly arguing that the cause of the Anglo-Irish Agreement's positive points was the PIRA whilst the negative aspects were down to the British and Irish governments. If anything this rather bizarre claim appeared to reinforce the view that the deal was a positive step for the nationalist community, one delivered through the endeavours of Hume's SDLP.

The Provisionals were convinced that as well as being an attempt to hamper Sinn Fein's electoral progress, the Anglo-Irish Agreement was also a piece of counter-insurgency. Indeed, there was a belief amongst some in the party that not only was the agreement a way of forming closer links between British and Irish security forces, but it was also an

attempt to provoke a violent rejection of the deal by the IRA and to then use this reaction as an excuse to bring about a security clampdown.[277]

Whilst the leadership had been quick to attack the agreement, there were those within the republican movement that recognised the significant positive aspects of the deal. Mitchell McLaughlin, later Sinn Fein party chairman, said of the agreement, 'There is a negative counter-insurgency element to it, but in fact as a result of it the British government position has changed and changed irrevocably. They have actually indicated, in terms of historical perspective that they can be moved along'.[278] McLaughlin later claimed he made the statement in order to provoke debate within republican circles.[279] Nevertheless, his statement indicated that even republicans had to admit that there were positive aspects to an agreement in large part constructed by their political rivals, the SDLP.

Gerry Adams and his allies were by now acutely aware that there needed to be changes in republicanism in order to deal with the emerging electoral difficulties it was experiencing. One of the key reasons it had been unable to build on early electoral breakthroughs, particularly in the South of Ireland, was that its elected representatives were unwilling to take their seats. Sinn Fein was asking for the support of the electorate despite refusing to actually represent them once elected. It was as a result of this situation that Adams, along with those close to him in Sinn Fein, decided to argue for a further 'tactical' revision of Sinn Fein policy. Since a lack of participation in institutions to which members had been elected was harming Sinn Fein's chances in elections, the Northern-based Sinn Fein leadership felt that the taking of seats at Leinster House in Dublin was a worthwhile political move. In conjunction with a sustained IRA campaign and continued demands for British withdrawal

from Ireland, they felt that the electoral fortunes of the party could improve without the rank and file membership fearing a sell-out.

Following the first IRA General Army Convention for sixteen years, the decision to allow debate on the PIRA's policy on abstentionism had been taken.[280] This was a clear indication that the leadership was intent on bringing about a change in approach to the Dublin Parliament. Consequently, at Sinn Fein's Ard Fheis in Dublin the following month there was a vote on ending the party's policy of abstentionism in the 26 counties. Adams' preference – that abstentionism be dropped – was secured, leading to a withdrawal from proceedings of a group including former President, Ruari O'Bradaigh, and ex-Vice-President Daithi O'Connail. They formed Republican Sinn Fein, with O'Bradaigh installed as President, claiming this group was now the legitimate government of all-Ireland and the rightful owner of the label 'republican'. The last surviving member of the First Dail, Tom Maguire, favoured O'Bradaigh's stance on the abstention issue and chose to back the newly formed Republican Sinn Fein.

For those that walked out of the Ard Fheis there were two fundamental problems with the ending of abstentionism. It was not a tactic to be done away with, but instead was an essential principle of the republican movement. Recognising an illegal, British-imposed partitionist parliament was seen to be against the ideological reasoning behind Irish Republicanism. That is to say, according to this ethno-geographical political determinism, all those living on the island are Irish and it is up to the Irish people as a whole to determine their future. By working within a system forced upon them by a British government that had no moral authority to do so, Sinn Fein would be sacrificing the republican principle of Irish self-determination. Equally, it was the meshing together of militarism and participatory

electoral politics that was simply illogical. O'Bradaigh himself claimed 'it is impossible to be both revolutionary and reformist at the same time. One cannot, after all, ride a horse going in two opposite directions'.[281] By taking seats at the Dail whilst the armed campaign was continuing, that is exactly what the Provisional Republican movement was trying to do. Eventually, he claimed, any formerly revolutionary movement that begins to embrace constitutional methods will become a wholly constitutional entity within the existing system.[282]

The 'ultra-traditionalists' had been defeated by a younger, Northern-based elite comprising figures such as Adams, McGuinness, Morrison and Hartley. Whilst O'Bradaigh's claims about recognition of a partitionist institution had convinced some in the party to reject Sinn Fein's acceptance of Leinster House, Republican Sinn Fein was little more than a splinter group. Sinn Fein was able to hold onto the vast majority of its members and supporters after the Ard Fheis. It had made sure of this in three ways; it had promised no cessation in IRA military operations; it had managed to convince a large number of influential militarists to throw their weight behind the campaign to lift the ban on participation; and it had articulated its case coherently and convincingly. The final two points in particular are crucial and Gerry Kelly's letter from prison in support of the campaign provides an example of both at once. In it he claimed '[Irish people] accept the twenty-six county state as their own – however flawed and partitionist it may be'.[283] Kelly's case was a powerful rejection of O'Bradaigh's claim that recognition of the Dail by Sinn Fein was damaging. After all, the Dail had already been recognised by the vast majority of Irish people – whether Sinn Fein liked the way it was established or not, the people of Ireland accepted the twenty-six counties and in that sense the damaging recognition had already been done. Sinn Fein's new strategy might at least be a way of using the 'flawed' political system to their advantage.

O'Bradaigh's theory that Sinn Fein's semi-constitutionalism would eventually lead to a fully constitutional political movement minus an armed wing proved to be correct. However, whether this goes to prove that his own Republican Sinn Fein is the truly republican outfit in Ireland is another matter. The traditionalist, fundamentalist, outlook espoused by O'Bradaigh and his supporters stems from a series of beliefs popular within republican circles. For example, the continued abstention from political institutions directly relates to the fact that the institutions are a product of British rule. It is the opinion of any republican, whether a part of O'Bradaigh's Republican Sinn Fein or Adams' Provisional movement, that the British government ignored the wishes of the Irish people as a single unit when it created separate states on the island. It is understandable that Republican Sinn Fein deem the recognition of either of these parliaments illogical for a truly republican party. After all, to claim the British government were wrong to create this parliament but then participate in it anyway is incongruous.

However, whilst tying in neatly with republican opinions on self-determination and the role of the British government, there remains one major shortcoming of the fundamentalist approach of Republican Sinn Fein: it was tried for the majority of the twentieth century, yet failed to bring about Irish unity. As an ex-IRA volunteer explained:

> **[Irish Republicanism] is about breaking the connection with Britain. Making Ireland sovereign, independent, and letting the Irish people decide their own future ... You can have theory or principles, but you have to deal with the real situation you find yourself in. Sometimes you have to sidestep issues to go forward ... In the mid 80s the movement had to face up to where it was going and how, which involved soul**

searching and casting some 'principles' by the wayside. Realistically, there were too many 'don'ts' in republicanism. Don't do this, don't go here, etc.[284]

By adhering to a series of rules, including on the issue of abstentonism, republicans seemed unable to advance their cause. Whilst O'Bradaigh's views were rooted in consistency and logic, they did little for the ultimate ambition of Irish republicanism – Irish unity. By at least opening up the possibility having an influence at Leinster House, Sinn Fein was exploring the utility of another strategy towards the movement's *principal* ambition.

Adams and those close to him had succeeded in bringing about an important revision in political strategy. With elections in the South taking place the following year it was felt a renewed upward surge in Sinn Fein's vote in the South might be possible. The Irish General Election did not, however, yield any startling successes for the new participatory Sinn Fein. The party polled just 1.8 per cent of the vote, and failed to take any of the seats it contested. The party even lost more than twenty deposits.[285] This poor showing caused much despondency, since the primary justification for the lifting of abstentionism to Dublin was the electoral success that would inevitably follow.

The party put a brave face on the disappointing result. It was claimed that the Southern electorate would need time to be convinced of Sinn Fein's programme for a democratic, socialist, united Ireland.[286] Whilst there may indeed have been some truth in this claim, it was becoming apparent that the party still had much to do in order to convince a majority of people that its programme was worthy of support. The claim that Sinn Fein abstention was damaging their electoral progress had been exposed as a fallacy. The SDLP's delivery of the

Anglo-Irish Agreement had enhanced that party's electoral fortunes. Sinn Fein's muddled condemnation of the agreement, whilst claiming credit for the benefits, made it all the more apparent that the SDLP had delivered for the nationalist community whilst Sinn Fein's momentum of the earlier part of the decade had ground to a halt.

Following the disappointing British General Election result and the disastrous poll in the Irish Republic, it was beginning to look like the most important roadblock to any significant change in the electoral fortunes of republicanism was the ongoing violence of the IRA. There appeared to be a ceiling on Sinn Fein's support whilst violence of any sort continued. However, whilst the morality of IRA violence was always a source of fierce debate, the Enniskillen bomb on Remembrance Sunday 1987 was perhaps *the* most serious blow to Sinn Fein's popularity. Whilst the IRA always justified their campaign by claiming it was a war against colonial aggressors, Enniskillen saw eleven innocent civilians killed and over sixty injured on a day of remembrance for British war casualties. The attack generated widespread revulsion – a public relations disaster for Sinn Fein. Attacks of any kind were always too much for many nationalists to accept, but when large numbers of civilians were involved it became all the more damaging for the party. An IRA spokesperson admitted as much when they stated, '[there is] a greater realisation than ever of the need for the IRA to avoid civilian casualties'.[287]

This period of frustration for the republican movement was rounded off when in 1992 Adams lost his landmark seat of Belfast West. Whilst as in any election there were a combination of factors leading to this result, one of the crucially important election issues was that of botched IRA operations and the subsequent civilian casualties. In part the result might be explained as a backlash against such operations. Furthermore, the punishment

beatings and shootings taking place in the late 1980s and early 1990s were a source of concern to some in the nationalist community. A 1994 report compiled by Amnesty International documented these incidents starkly. For example, 1991 and 1992 saw almost 200 cases of the IRA carrying out punishment beatings or shootings.[288] Amongst other reasons cited for dealing out such violence to members of its own community were 'refusing to allow car to be used by IRA men in an attack'.[289]

The Quest for Pan-nationalism: Hume-Adams Dialogue

It was in the wake of the disappointing electoral performances in the two general elections and IRA 'mistakes' that Adams first met with SDLP leader John Hume in January 1988. A republican movement that had now embraced the idea of competing in elections, and shown itself willing to participate in a partitionist institution, was finding it difficult to reap the rewards available through electoral success. As a result, Adams came to consider the idea of 'pan-nationalism', hoping that this would entail a new era of cooperation with the SDLP whereby a common strategy in relation to Irish unity might emerge, as well as consensus on a variety of issues affecting the nationalist community of the North.[290]

Amongst proposals put forward by Adams in discussions with Hume were "That Sinn Fein and the SDLP agree on a common solution to the political situation existing in the Six Counties"[291] and "That Sinn Fein and the SDLP join forces to impress on the Dublin government the need to launch an international and diplomatic offensive to secure national self-determination".[292] Whilst at this early stage Sinn Fein were still looking for clarification on the precise nature of the SDLP's take on self-determination and the role of unionists, the fact that Adams was looking for the SDLP and the Dublin government to join Sinn Fein in a

'diplomatic offensive' indicated an attempt to isolate unionism by drawing together all of nationalism's 'big players'.

Whilst Hume was willing to meet with republican leaders, he made it clear that ultimately cooperation would have to involve greater flexibility from Sinn Fein on constitutional matters, as well as a move away from IRA violence. Hume's arguments against the IRA's campaign were compelling. Rather than focus purely on the moral issues attached to violence, a point already made by a wide range of PIRA critics, Hume outlined a whole host of ways in which republican violence actually made nationalists more vulnerable and Irish unity less likely. Firstly, he argued that the ongoing killings made the unionist community more steadfast in their opposition to a united Ireland.[293] In this sense it was completely counter-productive to republicans' core ideological belief in an inclusive Irish Republic. In terms of the safety and wellbeing of the nationalist people, Hume felt that were the IRA to stop its campaign, the activity of the British security forces and the loyalist paramilitaries would quickly become a much less serious threat to the nationalist community.[294] This would be of immeasurable benefit to the nationalist people. Hume also made clear that the deprivation present in nationalist communities such as the two men's constituencies in Derry and Belfast was being perpetuated by a lack of economic investment in Northern Ireland. A key reason for the absence of significant investment was the ongoing violence, and so an end to the IRA's campaign might stimulate badly-needed economic growth.[295]

Having helped construct the agreement which saw the Dublin government gain a consultative role in Northern Irish affairs, the SDLP were seen as an important link to an increased role for the Irish government in the North. A pan-nationalist alliance that would

consist of both the main nationalist parties in the North as well as the Dublin government was seen as a formidable force for unionist politicians to counter. The Hume-Adams dialogue signalled intent from within the republican movement, or at least its upper echelons, to pursue a different strategy in relation to Irish unity. It seemed a 'diplomatic front' had been identified as the most likely method to realise republican objectives. However, after a series of public meetings between delegations from each party, as well as private meetings of Adams and Hume arranged by Father Alec Reid, the two parties failed to agree on any shared policies. Sinn Fein was still sceptical of the notion that the British government was a neutral actor.[296] The SDLP were left frustrated by Sinn Fein's inflexible attitude towards Irish self-determination, with Sinn Fein steadfast in its assertion that:

> **Sinn Fein accepts self-determination to mean a nation's exercise of the political freedom to determine its own economic, social and cultural development, without external influence and without partial or total disruption of the national unity or territorial integrity...we accept the right of the Irish people to self-determination, i.e., the right of the Irish people as a whole. The right of the Irish people, as a whole, to self- determination is supported by universally recognised principles of international law.[297]**

The following year one of the sources of disagreement between the two parties was addressed. The new Northern Irish Secretary, Peter Brooke, openly stated that Britain had 'no selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland'.[298] This was in line with the SDLP's interpretation of the British government's role and seemed to be an attempt to convince Sinn Fein that its colonial interpretation of the conflict might be too basic. In response to Brooke's assertion, the party went on to publish in 1992 its most subtle

discussion document yet. *Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland* made clear that Sinn Fein was committed to a pan-nationalist alliance between itself, the SDLP and the Irish government and called upon the British government to persuade unionists that a united Ireland was in their interests, by outlining British government 'responsibilities':

to recognise the right of the Irish people to self-determination; change its current policy to one of ending partition and giving sovereignty to an all-Ireland government; influence unionist attitudes to this end; consult with Dublin to agreement on ending partition.[299]

Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland did not make clear exactly if or when a PIRA ceasefire might be forthcoming, but its conciliatory tone and more nuanced language was of great interest to its fellow nationalist representatives and to the British government. Indeed, it was as a direct result of the document that the British and Irish governments later hinted that Sinn Fein would have a place at multi-party talks were there to be a cease-fire called by the PIRA the following year. Republicans had finally been convinced of the need to soften their stance on certain issues, whilst in response the British government showed it was keen to include Sinn Fein in any settlement rather than trying to marginalise the party as it had with the Sunningdale Agreement in 1974. *Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland* also removed a specific timetable for British withdrawal from Northern Ireland, which previously was demanded within the lifetime of a Westminster parliament. It was a far more nuanced policy document than its predecessor, *A Scenario for Peace*, the first draft of which had suggested that Unionists could be encouraged to leave Northern Ireland by being offered repatriation grants[300]. *A Scenario for Peace* was perhaps the last uncompromising major policy statement of hardline republicanism from Sinn Fein. *Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland* may not have placed Sinn Fein firmly in the civic republican, as distinct from ethnic republican, camp, but it did offer new, more pluralist thinking on the identity and aspirations of Unionists, hitherto

ignored. It also indicated that Sinn Fein had moved from the age-old position of being a government-in-waiting towards becoming merely another competitive actor in a political market place.[301]

Conclusion

For republicans and nationalists the period from 1980 to 1992 was in many ways a mirror of the events of 1970-1979. Whilst the earlier decade had witnessed the SDLP make a series of policy revisions as part of a 'greening' process that took it ideologically and politically closer to Sinn Fein, after 1980 it was Sinn Fein that was making key changes, firstly to its *modus operandi* and, from the middle of the decade, in terms of its policies. Following Bobby Sands and Owen Carron being elected to the British House of Commons in 1981, the party decided to employ electoralism – just as the SDLP had been doing (for the most part) for over a decade. Then, with electoral fortunes flagging and the SDLP riding the crest of a wave following the implementation of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, Sinn Fein decided to take a step towards participatory politics by abolishing abstention from Leinster House. It did not manage to make use of this since it failed to get any of its candidates elected, but still this represented a key shift.

The narrowing of the gap between the two parties did not end there. Indeed, Sinn Fein openly sought talks with the SDLP in an effort to form a political alliance to present to the British government. Whilst initially treated very cautiously, the SDLP's conviction that the British government were now neutral on Northern Ireland's future was of increasing interest to Sinn Fein. The party altered its interpretation in which the British were seen to be the 'occupiers' and the unionists 'puppets of their imperial masters'. Instead, it began to call for

the British government to be persuaders to unionists of the benefit of Irish unity, claiming unionists had 'nothing to fear' from a united Ireland.[302]

The period culminated in *Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland* being published in 1992. Increasingly Sinn Fein was adopting similar policy positions to those of the SDLP, although without the explicit emphasis on the need for Unionist consent for change. For Sinn Fein, consent was a consequence of change, not a prerequisite. Beyond the consent principle, differences between Sinn Fein and the SDLP were primarily confined to the key issue of support for the PIRA's campaign. The SDLP were no longer the 'red' outfit they had been when founded, whereas Sinn Fein's journey towards constitutionalism and away from a colonial interpretation of the Northern Irish conflict were moving the party closer to SDLP policy. Sinn Fein had altered course and the relegation of what had been held as principle to the status of mere tactic had begun.

The PIRA's campaign continued in parallel to Hume-Adams dialogue, making for a curious situation by 1992. There were effectively three republicanisms operating at the same time; the fundamentalist approach of Republican Sinn Fein, utterly ignored by the wider public; the pan-nationalist approach adopted by Sinn Fein in conjunction with the SDLP and the Dublin government; and the militarism of the PIRA. Militarism remained of central importance to many republican supporters, some of whom might have been dismayed had the armed campaign been seen to be wound-down, but Sinn Fein had not only grown in importance having formerly been subordinate to the 'army', but had also begun to distance itself from perpetual unambiguous support for the PIRA. The party even stated, 'Sinn Fein does not unambiguously support the PIRA, we support their right to engage in armed struggle. No-one should give unambiguous support to any organisation or institution'.[303]

In returning to the central focus of this thesis, namely the extent to which Sinn Fein have remained true to Republican principles, it is reasonable to argue that the party's political path from 1980 to 1992 is a tale of discontinuities in tactics. Previously unwilling to contest elections, let alone take seats, the party later adopted electoralism *and* recognised Leinster House. From being little more than a support organisation for the PIRA, Sinn Fein distanced itself from the position of unwavering champion of paramilitarism, instead trying to deliver a political message of its own. Crucially, Sinn Fein's interpretation of the British government's influence in Northern Ireland and the identity of unionists had also shifted by 1992. However, despite these departures from republican orthodoxy, the party was able to convince its supporters that it still embraced the overarching republican vision to which all tactics were oriented - the desire to bring about Irish unity free from British rule. Sinn Fein recognised that employing the PIRA methodology of armed struggle had not achieved this goal, nor would the combination of armalite and ballot box evident since 1981. Amid this recognition, the transfer to an entirely unarmed republican campaign became the only logical conclusion.

Whilst very different from the 'traditional' republican agenda, Sinn Fein's pan-nationalist quest was undertaken for one simple reason: the IRA's long war was not going to bring about Irish unity. The armed insurrection that saw the IRA go on the offensive from 1970 had not yielded victory and having run for 22 years, there was little to suggest it ever would. Furthermore, the abstentionist tactics of Republican Sinn Fein harmed that party's electoral fortunes and meant that even if they were to win seats, they would not be used to any great effect. In this sense, one can argue that those 'principled' republicans not in favour of Sinn Fein's new strategy were actually anything but principled. After all, the principle

cherished above all others is breaking the connection with Britain and bringing about a united Ireland. IRA militarism and outdated abstentionist federalism were not going to yield success in this aim, and so the Sinn Fein leadership felt obliged to try something else in order to create a dynamic towards Irish unity. It was in response to Sinn Fein's political changes that it would ultimately be invited into all-party talks and take seats at Stormont from 1998. This will be examined in the following chapter, along with an analysis of the Irish government's role and the SDLP's continuing influence on Sinn Fein and the extent to which the two parties had ideologically converged by the time the Good Friday Agreement was signed.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE ROAD TO THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT 1992-1998

The 1980s saw a gradual shift away from fundamentalist militarism towards a more politically sophisticated brand of Irish republicanism among the Provisionals. Sinn Fein developed a more relevant brand of politics with a clear socialist flavour of particular relevance to its supporters in urban areas such as West and North Belfast. It had eschewed the federal ideas of Eire Nua that O'Bradaigh's Republican Sinn Fein continued to advocate. Furthermore, the party now contested all elections for which it was eligible, and was willing to take seats in Leinster House. Sinn Fein's policy document, *Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland*,[304] indicated that further revisions in the party's approach might be possible in the coming years. Indeed, from 1992 the changes in republicanism were both numerous and, by comparison to the previous two decades, surprisingly fast-paced.

In the six years from the publishing of *Towards a Lasting Peace* to the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, a ceasefire was called, the decision was taken to enter Stormont and one can reasonably argue that the party 'fudged' the issue of national self-determination having previously been steadfast in its rejection of the 'unionist veto'. The vast majority of Sinn Fein's membership and support-base were in favour of the party's political path.[305] The Catholic electorate voted overwhelmingly (99 per cent backed the deal) in favour of accepting the Good Friday Agreement and 98 per cent of Sinn Fein's own 1998 ard fheis delegates did likewise[306] However, the compromises attendant to the deal led to disquiet amongst a small number of militants about the extent to which this new departure remained truly 'republican'. Indeed, there were some former members and supporters who, despite having remained loyal to the Provisional movement over the dropping of abstentionism in

1986, broke away in the wake of the decision to accept the Good Friday Agreement (see chapter six).

The Path To Ceasefire

In the wake of Sinn Fein's more subtle language in *Towards a Lasting Peace*, Gerry Adams and John Hume held further talks the following year. Whilst the talks were viewed with suspicion by many outsiders, particularly unionist politicians, they were a further indicator that change was afoot within Sinn Fein. Adams had already held exploratory talks with Hume from 1988, but little was agreed upon and the talks stalled. That he was keen to reignite this dialogue indicated policy revisions were under consideration.[307] Midway through the year the two leaders issued a joint statement confirming they were indeed involved in official talks. In September 1993 Gerry Adams appeared to demonstrate that republicans were looking for a viable alternative to armed struggle when *The Hume/Adams Initiative* was outlined:

> Our discussions, aimed at the creation of a peace process which would involve all parties, have made considerable progress ... We are convinced from our discussions that a process can be designed to lead to agreement among the divided people of this island, which will provide a solid basis for peace ... Such a process would obviously also be designed to ensure that any new agreement that might emerge respects the diversity of our different traditions and earns their allegiance and agreement.[308]

The onus was on the British and Irish governments to respond in a manner which indicated the possibility of an agreement acceptable to nationalists. This they did in the form of the Downing Street Declaration (DSD) of December 1993. The declaration was a signal to Sinn

Fein that if a ceasefire were forthcoming, the party would be welcomed into all-party talks on the future of Northern Ireland. The document stated:

> **The British and Irish Governments reiterate that the achievement of peace must involve a permanent end to the use of, or support for, paramilitary violence. They confirm that, in these circumstances, democratically mandated parties which establish a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods and which have shown that they abide by the democratic process, are free to participate fully in democratic politics and to join in dialogue in due course between the Governments and the political parties on the way ahead.[309]**

The DSD also made clear that the British and Irish governments were keen to work together in order to find a resolution to the Troubles. It reiterated the British government's position of neutrality on the Northern Irish issue, i.e. that it held no selfish strategic or economic interest.[310] It also, perhaps disappointingly but not unexpectedly for republicans, upheld the principle that there could be no change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland without the backing of the majority of its citizens.[311] This had previously been seen as a 'unionist veto' by many republicans.

Following the joint declaration from the British and Irish governments, Sinn Fein circulated an internal policy document. The 'TUAS' document, believed by some to be an acronym for 'Totally Unarmed Strategy', and by others to stand for 'Tactical Use of Armed Struggle',[312] outlined a series of strategic objectives. It made clear the desire to develop a pan-nationalist front comprising Sinn Fein, the SDLP, the Irish government and an increasingly influential Irish-American lobby,[313] all of which were now perceived as rowing in the same neo-

nationalist direction. The latter part of the TUAS document implies that, in the wake of the DSD implication that there was a place in multi-party talks for any party not espousing violence, armed struggle was no longer the essential tactic it had previously been:

The aim of any such consensus [between the various nationalist actors] is to create a dynamic which can ... develop and mobilise an anti-imperialist Irish peace movement ... It is vital that activists realise the struggle is not over. Another front has opened up and we should have the confidence and put in the effort to succeed on that front. We have the ability to carry on indefinitely. We should be trying to double the pressure on the British.[314]

Although Sinn Fein acknowledged that the DSD had utilised 'greener' language and included an acknowledgement that the Irish government would continue to have a role in Northern Ireland,[315] the party criticised the document on the basis it was essentially a restatement of the unionist veto. Whilst some commentators were sceptical about republicans' willingness to accept the document and move forward, the PIRA called a ceasefire nine months after the DSD.[316] Sinn Fein saw the prospect of being able to influence a political settlement as too good an opportunity to miss. They had, therefore, embarked upon what might be a purely political journey despite the original terms on offer being unfavourable. Conscious of potential concerns from Sinn Fein's support-base about a cessation of military activities, several leading republicans are alleged to have claimed privately – and reassured the republican base - that the British had agreed to withdraw within ten years, a claim entirely untrue.[317] Evidently there were reservations from within the republican movement about calling a ceasefire given the British government's continued support for the 'consent principle' which republicans had rejected throughout the history of the northern state.[318]

Nevertheless, the leadership was willing to downgrade armed struggle to a disposable tactic in order to pursue the 'peace strategy' whilst attempting to remove its supporters' fears.

The Ceasefire breaks down

Sinn Fein was left disappointed in its quest to set the agenda on all-party talks. Whilst the PIRA's ceasefire had been recognised by the British government, they were also being asked to decommission some weapons prior to talks taking place. This would, it was argued, be a vital confidence-building measure.[319] This issue proved to be a key stumbling block, and with a political impasse dragging on for a number of months, the PIRA's ceasefire ended when a huge bomb was detonated in London's Docklands. It killed two people, injured many others, and caused millions of pounds worth of damage. This incident was followed by a bomb in Manchester City Centre four months later. Hundreds were injured, a large part of the city obliterated, and once again the financial impact was huge.[320]

If the British government had seen the PIRA ceasefire as a sign that republicans had given up their 'struggle' without setting any pre-conditions of their own, they were mistaken. Sinn Fein was willing to explore negotiating opportunities to which it might have access, but entry to those negotiations was the minimum requirement for a permanent cessation of PIRA violence. Prior demands for the decommissioning of PIRA weapons were also seen to be totally unacceptable for internal reasons, and the PIRA proved itself capable of causing havoc on mainland Britain if it felt the British government was continuing a policy of excluding republicans from negotiations, or attempting to introduce pre-conditions over IRA weaponry to those talks. Although not publicly declared for obvious reasons, Sinn Fein's position was in effect to demand entry to talks to negotiate around positions well short of

avowed republican objectives. The outcome of talks was negotiable; what was non-negotiable was Sinn Fein's right to be present at those talks.

The Conservative government, with an extremely slender parliamentary majority, had become concerned that pushing unionists too quickly would lead to a withdrawal of support at Westminster.[321] This could have needed the fragile Major government, and as a result the move towards all-party talks lost momentum. The IRA decided that rather than be seen to be strung along with little in the offing, as occurred in 1975, they would 'remind' the British government that the IRA was still capable of devastating attacks. This, it was felt, should ensure republicans were taken more seriously if and when talks on a political settlement resumed.

Major's Conservatives were routed in the British General Election of 1997, with the British Labour Party securing a landslide victory and Tony Blair installed as the new Prime Minister. Fianna Fail's Bertie Ahern became the Irish Taoiseach the following month, replacing a brief period of a Fine Gael Taoiseach, John Bruton, who had been less wedded to the idea of 'pan-nationalism' than his Fianna Fail predecessor, Albert Reynolds. The return of somewhat more sympathetic and pragmatic 'partners' for Sinn Fein, in the form of a Labour government at Westminster and a Fianna Fail administration in Dublin, removed previous barriers to progress. The PIRA declared a ceasefire just two weeks after Ahern became Taoiseach on 20th July. Blair's government took a radically different approach to the Major government on the issue of decommissioning, relegating it to secondary importance compared to the need to get talks underway.[322] Consequently, Sinn Fein was admitted to talks purely on the basis of their acceptance of the Mitchell Principles of Non-Violence outlined by Senator George Mitchell during the previous year. These principles included an

end to paramilitary activity and, crucially, a willingness to abide by any outcome arising from multi-party talks. Sinn Fein's endorsement of these principles was highly significant. It meant that even if negotiations failed to yield a united Ireland (as would surely be the case) the party was required to adhere to the deal and eschew IRA violence.

Initially multi-party talks, from which the DUP excluded itself, progressed only slowly, and following the murder of loyalist paramilitary Billy Wright by the Irish National Liberation Army in the Maze prison at the end of 1997, loyalists were responsible for a series of 'revenge killings'.[323] Loyalist political prisoners then withdrew their support for the talks, with tension emerging between different factions[3]. British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mo Mowlam, took the decision to visit the loyalist prisoners in January 1998 in an attempt to convince them to reverse their decision. She was successful in this aim, though following the Ulster Freedom Fighters' admission that it was responsible for a number of killings, its political wing, the Ulster Democratic Party, was suspended from talks.

In February the RUC named the PIRA as responsible for two killings earlier that month in Belfast.[324] As a consequence Sinn Fein joined the UDP in being temporarily suspended from talks until the following month. Later in March, Senator Mitchell took the novel step of bringing forward the date for negotiations to be concluded. Parties were given a deadline of

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[3] There was a feud developing within loyalism at this point, especially between Wright's breakaway Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF) and his previous organisation, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF). The LVF appeared intent on continuing violence. The UVF and their political wing, the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP), were more disposed to the idea of talks than straightforward continuation of political violence. As a consequence, the UVF sentenced Wright to death after a series of LVF murders. However, Wright was subsequently imprisoned and then killed in the Maze Prison by the INLA. For further information, see Cusack, J. & McDonald, H. (2008) *UVF: The Endgame* (Dublin, Poolbeg)

9th April to conclude their negotiations. With talks going on until the last possible moment, a deal was eventually signed by Sinn Fein and other parties on 10th April 1998.

The Good Friday Agreement

The agreement contained three strands designed to inspire confidence and create stability. The first dealt with the internal situation in Northern Ireland, with the outcome being proposals for a 108 member assembly at Stormont. Weighted majorities were to be required in order to pass legislation, meaning that community domination was no longer a possibility. The second strand was the 'North-South' strand. This involved the creation of a North-South Ministerial Council whereby ministers from each of Ireland's jurisdictions would engage in order to generate cross-border co-operation. The final strand, the 'East-West' aspect, involved the creation of a British-Irish Council bringing together all the governments and devolved administrations throughout the British Isles.

Whilst the second strand of the agreement pertains to all-island institutions, and can be labelled a truly 'national' aspect of the deal from an Irish republican point of view, Sinn Fein showed less interest in this particular section of the agreement than in issues such as equality, policing and prisoner releases, all of which were of greater immediate salience to the local republican support base and as such, were aspects crucial to the selling of the deal.[325] The North-South Ministerial Council would see limited cross-border co-operation, with the consent of the newly created Northern Ireland Assembly required for further cooperation in the future. This was rather a modest return. Indeed, Murray and Tonge argue that perhaps republicans could have driven a harder bargain had they displayed interest in cross-border arrangements, which instead were items dealt with mainly by the

SDLP and the Irish government.[326] Sinn Fein had been steadfast in their demand that all republican prisoners should be released as part of the agreement. Despite this issue having the potential to 'fan the flames of unionist discontent',[327] the British government acquiesced and republican (and loyalist) prisoners were to be released within two years provided that their paramilitary organisations remained on ceasefire. Todd sees this lack of focus on constitutional issues as part of a shift towards a two-levelled ideological structure similar to that of the SDLP. The emphasis falls on 'first principles' such as democracy and equality, whilst the status of the quest for Irish unification became more ambiguous.[328] Whilst this shift in ideological emphasis is understandable in a climate where reunification looks impossible in the short term, the fact remains the modest all-island aspect of the agreement was disappointing from a republican perspective. That conflict resolution issues dominated Sinn Fein's thought at this time appears to indicate the party was focussed primarily on 'selling' the agreement to its core support. This would appear to have been to the detriment of short-term all-island ambitions.

The agreement was formally accepted by electorates North and South on 23rd May 1998. As well as accepting the terms of the agreement and its various institutions, voters in the Irish Republic accepted amendments to Articles 2 and 3 of its constitution. The articles were deemed offensive to unionists on the basis that they outlined an aspiration from the Irish Republic to force Irish unity upon unionists.[329][4] Voters in the Republic voted overwhelmingly in favour of the amendments and the implementation of the agreement, though the turnout

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[4] The Irish Constitution had included such phrases as *"The national territory consists of the whole island of Ireland"* and *"Pending the re-integration of the national territory, and without prejudice to the right of the parliament and government established by this constitution to exercise jurisdiction over the whole territory..."*. The proposed amendments explicitly stated that Irish unity could only come about *"by peaceful means with the consent of a majority of the people, expressed democratically, in both jurisdictions in the island."*.

was disappointing – only just over half of the electorate exercised their right to vote. In the North the 'yes' vote amounted to just over 70 per cent on an 81% turnout.[330] Crucially, a majority of unionists were also in favour, indicating both communities in the North as well as a majority in both parts of the island were supportive of the agreement. However, the Unionist majority was slight (57 per cent to 43 per cent)[331] and was to disappear in subsequent years, a lack of backing which, combined with continuing republican paramilitary activity, destabilised the early years of devolved power-sharing.

Republican Interpretations of the Agreement

In the context of a discussion about Sinn Fein's ongoing 'republican' credentials, there are two contrasting interpretations of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. The first, that favoured by those critical of Sinn Fein, is that it was an act of surrender by a group that had ceased to be truly 'republican'. Those that take this view claim that the cessation of military operations, the decision to accept the unionist veto and the entry into a Northern partitionist parliament were all key indicators of this 'surrender', a retreat by instalments which culminated in the disappearance of the PIRA and decommissioning of its weapons, in 2005, followed by support for the Police Service of Northern Ireland in 2007. The other view, that presented by Sinn Fein, is that rather than the Good Friday Agreement being a final act, it was the *beginning* of a new phase. The 'tactical' alterations in relation to military campaign, mode of self-determination and political participation, were all justifiable in that they were part of creating a dynamic towards Irish unity.[332] It is the validity of these rival claims that must be explored here.

The first issue to consider, that of an enduring military cessation, is the easiest to reconcile for Sinn Fein and its supporters. Armed struggle has never been a central principle of Irish republicanism, and to suggest otherwise is to conflate tactics with principles. The logic of engaging the British Army in a military conflict centred on the perception of the British sovereign claim to Northern Ireland equating to foreign occupation, thus denying Irish democratic rights. However, in the run-up to the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, the British Government had already declared itself neutral on the political future of Northern Ireland and the British and Irish governments deployed a chair of negotiations on the future of the region who was an outsider – Senator George Mitchell from the United States. The British Government had been anxious to disavow its supposed role as political oppressor. They had facilitated political talks between those concerned parties in Northern Ireland, and Sinn Fein recognised that the likely outcome of continued violence was a suspension from talks. Such a situation would have rendered the party impotent on the immediate political direction of Northern Ireland. Consequently, the dropping of armed struggle was logical, with the crucial caveat that there needed to be something significant to show at the conclusion of talks.

The second issue of major concern to a section of the republican movement was the acceptance of separate referenda North and South as a legitimate exercise in Irish self-determination. For years republicans had been steadfast in their rejection of the 'unionist veto'. Self-determination, it was argued, should involve the people of Ireland voting as a single unit on the future of the island. This commitment was abandoned as part of the Good Friday Agreement. There are those that try to downplay the partitionist manner in which self-determination was exercised. The editor of *An Phoblacht*, Peadar Whelan, explained:

It [the dual votes of the North and South] was a recognition that there was an all-island dimension [to the issue of Northern Ireland]. The overwhelming majority of people on the island voted for something, and the majority of unionists did too. It made clear that the six counties is not remote. It might be two states on the one island, but it is one nation ... I took a while to put the X in the box. However, we believe the Good Friday Agreement is a starting block, we didn't think it was the culmination of anything. Strategically, I see no problem. There's somewhere to go from here, though I did have to think about it.[333]

Effectively, Whelan claims that getting any vote on the Good Friday Agreement in the Irish Republic should be viewed as a success. He argues that whilst Ireland is two states, the fact that the people of both jurisdictions were involved in a vote shows it is one nation, and that this is recognised by the British government. Clearly the British government had at this stage recognised that the Irish Republic had a role in the North. However, the British government had acknowledged some role for the Irish government since its Green Paper of 1972, *The Future of Northern Ireland: A Paper for Discussion*,[334] which ultimately led to the failed Sunningdale Agreement. Whilst the relationship between the British and Irish governments was often strained in the early period of the troubles, the fact that the Council of Ireland was included as part of the power-sharing arrangement and the RUC and Irish police co-operated extensively were indications that the British government knew that the Irish Republic would have to be heavily involved with future policy on Northern Ireland.[335] Indeed, a very close working arrangement had been in existence since the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985. The involvement of all Ireland's citizens in this vote was not a significant softening of the British position. In fact, given its track-record over the previous twenty-five years, it was the least that might be expected.

Former Sinn Fein Lord Mayor of Belfast, Alex Maskey, is more accepting of the view that the mode of self-determination attached to the Good Friday Agreement was a disappointment to the republican movement, in declaring:

> **It [separate referenda] is not something we wanted as republicans. However, we couldn't stop it. It went ahead; we had a choice about what to do about it. We [Sinn Fein] have to find solutions to the same old problems. As a point of principle you might argue we could not support it, but what would that do? We want a united Ireland, but we have to actually do something about it.[336]**

Maskey acknowledges that the party was forced to fudge the issue of national self-determination. However, this in itself does not represent a clear 'sell-out' scenario. After all, Sinn Fein remains committed to Irish self-determination in the future, much as it does to a united Ireland. By using the Good Friday Agreement as the party's political starting point rather than its supposed lasting achievement, Sinn Fein could argue that tactical adjustment had allowed explicit confirmation of Ireland as a single nation, temporarily politically divided. This of course, was in essence the SDLP position.

The third issue of concern to republicans was the acceptance of a revamped Northern Irish Assembly. Bringing down Stormont was the movement's primary success in the 1970s. Indeed, had the assembly created as a result of the Sunningdale Agreement not been a failure due to widespread loyalist strikes, republicans' rejection of it would probably have collapsed it anyway. The inclusion of all significant actors is, as Chief of Staff to Tony Blair, Jonathan Powell, indicated, key to the creation of a lasting peace.[337] However, the most

important difference between 1974 and 1998 was the inclusion of Sinn Fein. The format of power-sharing and the limited influence of the South through all-island structures were reminiscent of the previous deal.

Comparisons between Sunningdale and the Good Friday Agreement presented two problems for Sinn Fein. The first relates to its rationale for the PIRA fighting on for two decades beyond Sunningdale, and the perceived immorality of sending many PIRA volunteers out on missions with distinct possibilities of being killed or imprisoned. In the period from 1974 to the signing of the Agreement in 1998 the IRA incurred significant losses, yet there was the option of accepting a Sunningdale Agreement remarkably similar, in constitutional architecture, to the Good Friday Agreement over twenty years earlier. The second is an ideological issue, since Northern Ireland was still seen by many republicans as an illegitimate 'statelet'. Qualms over both these issues are summed up by Marian Price, one of those republicans who broke away from the Provisional movement over its political path:

> **To suggest that a war was fought for what they have today, it diminishes anybody who partook in that war, anybody who died for it, and went out there and sacrificed their lives and their liberty. It diminishes all that to suggest that this is what it was fought for. In 1974 the Sunningdale Agreement was a much stronger agreement, and offered much more to republicans and nationalists, than the Good Friday Agreement and it was rejected outright by the republican movement. And there was a war fought for thirty years after that. After having rejected Sunningdale, to accept the Good Friday Agreement and suggest that that was what the war [was for], it's criminal, downright criminal, for them to suggest that...And when [the SDLP's] Seamus Mallon said that the Good Friday Agreement was Sunningdale for slow learners, he hit the nail on the head. It wasn't: it was Sunningdale for retards.**[338]

Price's passionate criticism of Sinn Fein's decision to accept the Good Friday Agreement makes uncomfortable reading for her former comrades. By arguing the agreement to be an inferior political deal to the one on offer many years earlier, she attacks both the morality of the IRA's post-1974 campaign, and the leadership's political nous in accepting a worse offer in 1998. Of course, this was not the first time Sinn Fein had moved from abstentionism to electoralism, and ultimately participation in a partitionist institution. However, acceptance of seats in a partitionist Southern state was justifiable on the basis that the British no longer had a sovereign claim there and the vast majority of Irish citizens had accepted Leinster House as 'their' parliament. To many republicans Stormont remained a symbol of British rule in Ireland, meaning the taking of seats at *that* institution a different proposition entirely. Indeed, even many loyal Sinn Fein members and ex-IRA volunteers found it a particularly bitter pill to swallow.[339]

Sinn Fein pointed to the positive aspects of the agreement for republicans. It had managed to secure the release of IRA prisoners within two years. Furthermore, there was the establishment of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission designed to eliminate discrimination, something republicans and nationalists had taken the brunt of in previous years. The agreement stated:

> **A new Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, with membership from Northern Ireland reflecting the community balance, will be established by Westminster legislation, independent of Government, with an extended and enhanced role beyond that currently exercised by the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights, to include keeping under review the adequacy and effectiveness of laws and practices,**

making recommendations to Government as necessary; providing information and promoting awareness of human rights; considering draft legislation referred to them by the new Assembly; and, in appropriate cases, bringing court proceedings or providing assistance to individuals doing so.[340]

On the issue of policing, Sinn Fein found some succour in the establishment of a Commission on Policing. The agreement outlined changes in this area as follows:

Taking account of the principles on policing as set out in the agreement, the Commission will inquire into policing in Northern Ireland and, on the basis of its findings, bring forward proposals for future policing structures and arrangements, including means of encouraging widespread community support for those arrangements. Its proposals on policing should be designed to ensure that policing arrangements, including composition, recruitment, training, culture, ethos and symbols, are such that in a new approach Northern Ireland has a police service that can enjoy widespread support from, and is seen as an integral part of, the community as a whole.[341]

Whilst these proposed changes certainly had scope to transform the lives of republicans and nationalists living in Northern Ireland, they could hardly be declared a victory for Sinn Fein in its negotiations with the British government and unionist political parties. There were positive aspects to the deal for Sinn Fein's supporters and a strong element of internal reform which exceeded that offered to the SDLP at Sunningdale, but there was little by way of progress towards Irish unity, nor even particularly strong cross-border institutions.

Analysing Change

It is necessary to work through a series of issues in evaluating republican 'departures' from core principles in 1998. First, did the party sacrifice genuine republican principles in order to forge a deal? Second, did the party make sufficient gains as a result of the agreement in order to justify the sacrifices it made? Third, following the signing of the agreement was there scope to achieve republicans' ultimate ambitions of national self-determination and Irish reunification? In addition to examining these specific facets of Sinn Fein's development and potential ramifications, an assessment of Sinn Fein's ideological proximity to the SDLP must also take place.

The first issue to consider in relation to Sinn Fein's policy alterations as part of the peace process is the cessation of military activities. In order to be involved in all-party talks and ultimately become signatories to a deal, the party had to abide by the *Mitchell Principles of Non-Violence*. Amongst the demands of those political parties involved in talks was an affirmation of commitment to 'democratic and exclusively peaceful means of resolving political issues'.[342] From British government and unionist perspectives, Sinn Fein's acceptance of these principles of non-violence was perhaps the most crucial development of all in the republican movement. However, renouncing violence was one of the least problematic revisions for republicans themselves; what is difficult to assess however, is the significance of its *permanent* repudiation in advance of any deal – and in the knowledge that an agreement was unlikely to fulfil republican objectives.

Despite the decision to halt the PIRA's campaign before the achievement of a united Ireland, one can reasonably conclude that the abandonment of armed struggle did not represent the

Provisional leadership presenting the dropping of a principled position as mere tactical alteration. Military opposition to the British government had only episodically been the foremost republican tactic, albeit one sustained from the 1970 until the 1990s. But, in a new era where republicans felt that Irish unity might be achievable without violence, perhaps even more likely to be achieved without it, one can argue that it was a strategic imperative that the republican movement ditched this counter-productive practice. Indeed, senior republicans had been saying as much for several years. As well as private acknowledgements that armed struggle was becoming increasingly problematic for Sinn Fein's electoral campaigns, there were public admissions saying as much. For example, Richard McAuley, Gerry Adams' press officer, was quoted in Fortnight magazine thus: 'We're not going to realise our full potential as long as the war is going on in the North and Sinn Fein is presented the way it is with regard to armed struggle and violence'.[343]

McAuley's admission acknowledged two realities. First, the military campaign to force the British government out of Ireland, originally by outright military victory and later by attempting to 'sicken the Brits' into withdrawing, was not going to yield success. Second, with the electoral arena seemingly the only area in which the republican movement could continue to operate successfully, the PIRA's continuation of an unwinnable war was a vote-loser for Sinn Fein, with high-profile disasters a distinct possibility.

Whilst Moloney claims the PIRA might yet have secured military victory had a crucial arms shipment from Libya not been intercepted in the late 1980s,[344] this seems unlikely. The British army's sheer size, as well as its intelligence capabilities, suggests that even a 'tet offensive' using new weaponry could have been resisted. By the time of the failed *Eksund*

shipment, the army had been operating in Northern Ireland for over fifteen years. There is little to suggest that 'one last push' would have resulted in British withdrawal.

In addition to an inability to overcome the British forces in Northern Ireland, it can also be argued that the PIRA's bombing campaign in England had been deemed insufficiently effective to bring about a situation whereby the British government would agree to withdraw. Indeed, McGladdery correctly points out that despite the bombs in England, people continued to commute to work; to shop; and generally go about their daily business as would be the case under 'normal' circumstances, as they had done for much of the time in Northern Ireland.[345] A lack of panic amongst the British public meant the government did not feel compelled to acquiesce to PIRA demands. Furthermore, bombs in England could on occasion result in very negative publicity for the republican movement, especially in the United States.[346] The bombs in London and Manchester after the first ceasefire in the 1990s broke down were an indication the PIRA could still cause significant damage. However, the fact that republicans did not persist with this tactic indicated they realised its utility was distinctly limited. Moreover, the arrests and imprisonment of members of its South Armagh unit in 1996-97 diminished the capacity to continue bombing England.

The end of the military campaign, whilst primarily influenced by the realisation that it was an inadequate method of achieving Irish unity through military victory, was also hastened by political realities. Quite simply, bombs might have influenced the British government, but they harmed the electoral performance of Sinn Fein. Bean points out that Sinn Fein's support, primarily underprivileged communities in Catholic ghettos, was changing. There was a rising Catholic middle class and increased investment in Catholic communities in Northern Ireland.[347] The feelings of social disadvantage and complete political

disengagement can be argued to have started ebbing away. Those emerging from prison acknowledged that they were not returning to ghettoised communities, but instead ones showing signs of social advance.[348] Thus, people were more interested in a political party representing their feelings than they were a paramilitary organisation. If Sinn Fein wanted to capture votes available to them amongst this stratum of Northern Irish society, it became clear the PIRA was a hindrance.

The dropping of armed struggle, therefore, was more an acknowledgement of the realities than any form of ideological u-turn. The PIRA was not in a strong position militarily yet there was scope for Sinn Fein growth, so republicans decided to sideline the less successful branch of the movement in favour of the potentially fruitful path of electoral success. It is in conjunction with other developments, however, that the decision to end the armed campaign must be considered in order to gauge the extent to which Sinn Fein remained 'true' to the overall principles of Irish Republicanism.

The decisions to accept 'co-determination' and to take seats at a revamped Stormont are defended as necessary tactical adjustments by Sinn Fein, rather than a repudiation of principles. Thus the logic behind entering Stormont was apparent according to Alex Maskey:

> We've been great for taking tactics and turning them into principles. I think that has often been our downfall...The point of the Good Friday Agreement is to shift the political axis from London to Belfast and Dublin.[349]

A Northern Irish assembly results in more say for republicans at a local level, and less for Westminster than would be the case under direct rule. However, two key points are overlooked in this contention. First, the United Kingdom had been reconstituted under the Labour government. An assembly in Wales and a parliament in Scotland were also created, with the rationale behind their creation being that these institutions would strengthen the Union[350]. Republicans tried to imply that the policy designed to strengthen the Union in other regions of the United Kingdom, was the method by which the Union would be weakened in the Northern Irish case. Second, the East-West strand of the Agreement receives no attention in this analysis. The British-Irish Council was set-up in order to encourage greater co-operation between various constituent parts of the British Isles, including between Ireland and parts of the United Kingdom. If anything, this might be a process by which ties between East and West are strengthened rather than weakened.

The duality of 'national' self-determination was, in effect, the 'unionist veto' maintained. As senior party figure Jim Gibney acknowledged:

> **Holding separate referenda in the two jurisdictions was an exercise in pragmatism. We still believe there is only one legitimate and acceptable plebiscite on Irish independence. We still work towards the goal of a plebiscite on the entire island.[351]**

Gibney acknowledges that in truth, the Good Friday Agreement did not involve the Irish people exercising their right to national self-determination in its truest form. He explains away the absence of an all-island vote by saying it is something that the party wishes to work towards. However, there was nothing in the agreement suggesting an all-island vote

on unity will *ever* be possible. Indeed, the agreement specifically states the opposite – that there can be no change in the status of Northern Ireland without the majority of its citizens wishing for such alteration.[352] Effectively, Sinn Fein has been forced to accept the 'unionist veto'.

The 'bus to Cork' example favoured by Gerry Adams is applicable here - 'if you're going to Cork, it doesn't really matter how you get there, just as long as you get there'.[353] Taking seats at Stormont in the short to medium term may be a step towards taking seats in a new all-island institution following the formation of a thirty-two county democratic Irish Republic. What does make the establishment of such a Republic unlikely is the acceptance of the unionist veto. Herein lies the difference between the two 'tactical' decisions. Taking seats at Stormont might appear to be the bigger step, since a working assembly containing Sinn Fein MLAs is a reminder that the Northern Irish 'statelet' cannot be wished away. However, it is actually the 'pragmatic' take on self-determination that may have represented a principle being quietly discarded.

Having accepted that a majority of people in Northern Ireland would have to favour Irish unity before it could ever come about, taking seats became an essential part of Sinn Fein strategy. It is evident that the party must convince a sizeable section of the unionist community that Irish reunification is in their best interests for it to ever come about. One way to do this is to enter the assembly, to work with unionist politicians, and to try to deliver for all the people of Northern Ireland in order to win support from people outside Sinn Fein's traditional support base. Continuing evidence showing polarisation between the identity, aspirations and political choices of the two communities indicates and their voting patterns in the lead up to the Good Friday Agreement indicated this might be an impossibly

tall order for Sinn Fein.[354] Furthermore, whilst Sinn Fein has embarked on a 'unionist outreach' programme, the successes of this have been mixed at best. A blog piece written by Rick Cairns for the Ulster Unionist Party's 'Young Unionists' section summed up one strand of unionist opinion on Sinn Fein's attempts to reach out to unionists:

> **We can also throw into the mix the 'unionist outreach' approach headed up by another convicted terrorist, Martina Anderson. What were Sinn Fein trying to achieve if not to wind up unionists?[355]**

Senior republicans insist that unionists can be convinced of the benefits of Irish unity. Alex Maskey claims that unionists, rather than being insistent upon remaining in the United Kingdom, simply need time to be given time to realise republicanism can accommodate them too:

> **I've spoken to a broad range of unionists and loyalists. I've asked what British culture is – Is it the monarchy? Is it Coronation Street? Manchester United? Morris dancing? The truth is a lot of them don't trust the British government. In fact, they probably trust them less than they trust us [republicans]. It's clear to me that a lot of unionists want the Stormont Assembly to work. Westminster, to them, is 'somewhere else'. When they're in England, they're paddies … I do accept that for the moment there are many unionists who favour the UK political framework. I have to convince them. I can't work on the basis of vague ideas about identity. What I can do is work with them, prove I want to be partners, prove I won't abuse power. I'll give them British passports as well as Irish ones if they want them. I can only tackle real issues, not mindsets.[356]**

Maskey's contention is that with time, and given appropriate concessions on issues such as dual passports, the unionist people of Northern Ireland will become more disposed to the reunification of Ireland. On this basis, the Good Friday Agreement is a success, since it makes Sinn Fein's task straightforward – convince unionists that a united Ireland would be tolerable to them, and Irish unity *will* be delivered. It assumes that an elite-level consociation, far from freezing ethnic division and the accruing competing identities, will erode them. Yet the Good Friday Agreement may be more likely to preserve rival identities but allow them to become less threatening – a scenario more likely to result in ever-growing acquiescence towards Northern Ireland amongst nationalists.

Following the implementation of the agreement, Gerry Adams tried to reach out to unionists on this very issue. He explained in a speech to the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly:

> **Sinn Féin is also currently engaged with unionists, and especially with disadvantaged unionist working class areas, to a greater extent than ever before. We need to address the genuine fears and concerns of unionists in a meaningful way. We need to look at what they mean by their 'sense of Britishness' and be willing to explore and to be open to new concepts. We need to look at ways in which the unionist people can find their place in a new Ireland ... However, it is worth noting that within the current British system unionists are fewer than two per cent of the population ... As twenty per cent of a new Ireland, unionists will be able to assert their full rights and entitlements and exercise real political power and influence. So Sinn Féin's vision of a new Ireland is of a shared Ireland; an integrated Ireland; an Ireland in which unionists have equal ownership; an Ireland in which there will be respect for cultural diversity, and a place in which there is political, social, economic and cultural equality. There is no desire on**

the part of Irish republicans to conquer or humiliate unionists ... Nationalists and republicans want our rights, but we do not seek to deny the rights of anybody else.[357]

Conciliatory in tone as this speech was, and with the 'incentive' of greater political power as 20 per cent of the Irish electorate rather than 2 per cent of the United Kingdom's voters on offer, the unionist response was underwhelming. The reaction printed in *News Letter* hardly inspired confidence that Sinn Fein's appeals to unionism were going to yield success:

The Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams has never understood unionists and his speech yesterday underlines that he is not learning ... Mr. Adams even went on to say that for unionists it needed to be 'their united Ireland'. And he added that there was no desire on the part of Irish republicans to conquer or humiliate unionists. Mr. Adams often quotes Irish history, but he clearly needs reminded that it was republican terrorists, many of them known to him, who murdered 60 per cent of the people who died during the Troubles. The survivors of what was often a campaign of ethnic cleansing will find his remarks offensive ... The Sinn Fein leader misses the most fundamental point of all. There are four main unionist parties ... All four parties have the word 'unionist' at their core and it is there for a reason. Unionists do not want a united Ireland. Any concept of a united Ireland is contrary to everything they stand for. Mr. Adams can bleat on all he wants about his vision. The truth is that the unionist population in Northern Ireland ... do not share his concept of the future. Mr. Adams – unionists are not going away, you know.[358]

Maskey's and Adams' sentiments are echoed by other senior republicans who state such things as "Most people do what is in their economic interests ... Most unionists would come round to the idea"[359] and "They should be given no special treatment, but we'd look at and

fairly deal with their fears over religion, Orange Order or anything of that sort. We don't want to create different classes".[360] However, the fundamental problem appears to be the lack of evidence of any shift in constitutional aspirations, as evidenced over time in successive Northern Ireland Life and Times Surveys.[361] The data contains little to suggest republicans' analysis of unionism and its support for Irish unity is accurate. A decade of data showed that the highest level of support seen for Irish unity amongst the entire population of Northern Ireland was 30%, whilst the most recent data available saw just 18% of all respondents favouring a united Ireland. Furthermore, Protestant support for a united Ireland had remained relatively stagnant in the decade following the signing of the Belfast Agreement. In 2008, just 4% of Protestants were in favour of Irish unity, whilst over one fifth of Protestant respondents said they would find Irish unity 'almost impossible to accept'. To republicans, unionists are Irish people of a mind to stay within the framework of the United Kingdom, unless they can be persuaded otherwise. The data suggests that persuading unionists may prove impossible.

Conclusion

The narrative Sinn Fein representatives prefer to use in describing their previous era of 'struggle' is one of "fighting the Brits to a standstill".[362] As such, inclusion of Sinn Fein in the talks leading to the Good Friday Agreement and the party's subsequent role in government can be attributed to the British government's realisation that the PIRA could not be beaten and concessions would need to be made to the republican movement. However, honest and open appraisal of the chronology of events suggests a more submissive role for the republican movement – albeit the chronology of the peace process was deliberately designed to avoid such a perception among the general population – particularly traditional republican supporters.

The republican movement can be argued to have gone through a series of stages since the eruption of the troubles in 1969. The first of these was a straightforward military campaign to force the British government to leave. This proved unsuccessful, and culminated in a lengthy ceasefire during which the British government regrouped militarily and gathered a significant amount of intelligence. From this point onwards, despite Moloney's claim that a 'Tet Offensive' in the 1980s using imported Libyan arms might yet have yielded victory had the main shipment not been intercepted,[363] outright military victory was never possible. The British government had shown that whilst it was unable to eradicate the republican threat through military action alone since there would always be a section of the community supportive of Irish unity, it was not going to be forced out of Northern Ireland. This left republicans locked in an awkward position – salvaging something from a conflict that they simply could not win. With the British government consistently talking of upholding democratic principles, Sinn Fein's only hope of republican gains lay in beating the established participatory political parties at their own game – through the ballot box and at the Assembly.

Sinn Fein's decision to enter the electoral arena, therefore, is one based on a desire to achieve some tangible success in the wake of the defeat of its quest for Irish self-determination and ultimate unity. When a military campaign cannot be won, all that remains is politics. When the political path is a movement's sole focus, all that remains is to win elections. Consequently, Sinn Fein has decided the only 'victory' still attainable for republicans is an electoral one. How this will subsequently be translated into a united Ireland is unclear.

The 'successes' of the Good Friday Agreement for Sinn Fein were reformist. Policing changes, prisoner releases, the establishment of a Human Rights Commission and the creation of modest cross-border bodies were all welcome from a republican point of view, but were non-constitutional. The party remained publicly committed to the ideal of a united Ireland, but there was little in the agreement to suggest it was achievable. Whilst undoubtedly the elements listed above offered hope of Northern Ireland being a kinder place to nationalists and republicans, they went no further than that.

The Good Friday Agreement did offer some mechanisms for constitutional change. Should it look as though a referendum on Irish reunification in Northern Ireland might yield a 'yes' vote, the Secretary of state for Northern Ireland would have the power to call such a vote. Even if it in fact yielded a 'no' vote, there could be a further poll seven years after the date of the first, a process which could continue.[364] There were, therefore, mechanisms for moving towards the elusive thirty-two county Republic, but these were dependent upon either dramatic change in the demographic inter-community balance in Northern Ireland (unlikely) or changes in the constitutional desires of the Unionist population (even more unlikely).

Whilst Sinn Fein could indeed argue its brand of republicanism was electorally relevant, the primary reason for its growth was that the party had transformed itself into a party whose policies and *modus operandi* had moved closer to those of the 'mainstream' SDLP. It had dropped its support for a military campaign and adopted a peaceful approach to politics, just as the SDLP had continually advocated. The party had also come to accept Hume's view that co-determination though separate referenda in each jurisdiction was the only way the people of Ireland were going to vote on the country's constitutional future. In essence, this

was Hume's 'agreed Ireland' policy. Furthermore, Sinn Fein, having previously labelled the SDLP 'collaborators' for seeking a power-sharing arrangement within the six counties, had now decided to take seats in that very state's legislative body.

Clear differences between the two nationalist parties were much diminished. Whilst the Provisional IRA still existed, punishment beatings and other instance of localised crime continued, but even these disappeared after 2005.[365] Ultimately, then, there appeared to be just two significant differences between the parties. Firstly, whilst the SDLP were in favour of Irish unity, it was not necessarily that party's *raison d'etre* despite the protestations of Margaret Ritchie, elected SDLP leader in 2010, that a united Ireland was the central goal of her party.[366] Consequently, having been successful in their aims of bringing about devolved power-sharing to Northern Ireland, the party was left with little momentum post-Good Friday Agreement. Sinn Fein, however, could set about overhauling its nationalist rival electorally. Secondly, Sinn Fein's analysis that the Good Friday Agreement was a success because it moved the political agenda away from Britain to Ireland was an easier position to argue given that the party is organised on an all-island basis. For the SDLP this was problematic, their growth stunted by the fact they were limited to the North. Indeed, ultimately the party talked of merger with one of the political parties in the Irish Republic.[5][367]

So, the structural differences between the two parties and the 'unfinished business' of the elusive republic were there, but there was little else with which to distinguish the two parties. Sinn Fein was no longer inflexible on the mode of self-determination, had ceased to

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[5] Whilst the SDLP MPs sit on Labour benches in the British House of Commons, at the time of writing the most likely merger appears to be with Fianna Fail rather than the Irish Labour Party

support a continuing paramilitary campaign and was willing to accept seats in both parliaments on the island of Ireland. Feeney saw the parties as having become so similar as to claim:

> **SDLP members gasp in amazement as Sinn Fein uses language the SDLP patented twenty years earlier and calmly presents SDLP policies as its own. When Sinn Fein accepted the Good Friday Agreement, which is a pale reflection of the Sunningdale Agreement that the IRA vowed to destroy, Seamus Mallon memorably described the Agreement as 'Sunningdale for slow learners'. But since the majority of the nationalist population is under twenty-five, Mallon's reference to Sunningdale was as obscure to them as mention of the Dungannon Convention of 1778 would have been.**[368]

Feeney argues that whilst the Good Friday Agreement could hardly be described as a republican success, Sinn Fein's ability to use its newfound power and influence in the aftermath of the agreement was going to be crucial to its status as the voice of Irish Republicanism. In order to do this it was going to need electoral success against the SDLP, and subsequently to make headway in its attempts to appeal to unionism. These are issues that will be explored in the following chapter.

CHAPTER SIX: NEW REPUBLICANISM? THE POLITICS OF ELECTORAL ADVANCEMENT SINCE THE SIGNING OF THE BELFAST AGREEMENT

Introduction

Sinn Fein's decision to enter Stormont, twelve years after opting to take seats at Leinster House, heralded the lifting of a ceiling on Sinn Fein support. The PIRA continued with punishment beatings and other acts of criminality, most notably the Northern Bank robbery in 2004 and the murder of Robert McCartney in early 2005. However, the 'war' against the British government, which had ostensibly been over for some time, was effectively ceased when Sinn Fein took seats in a revamped Northern Ireland Assembly. The desire to overthrow the state had officially been replaced by the intention to work within its institutions. This was confirmed when in July 2005 the PIRA formally called off its campaign and announced, two months later, that it had decommissioned its remaining weaponry. The 'struggle' has been played out solely in the political arena since Sinn Fein opted for a participatory approach to politics in the North, as well as the South, of Ireland.

In such circumstances electoral performance became ever more crucial. The decision to take seats without a decisive shift toward the elusive thirty-two county Irish Republic meant electoral success was vital; not only in terms of pushing the Republican agenda and showing that the movement was increasing its appeal; but Sinn Fein also needed to make gains in order to maintain internal unity. Becoming signatories of a deal that offered little by way of constitutional succour, only to falter in subsequent polls, would have left the party vulnerable to a damaging split. Therefore, amid ethnic pillar politics, the party needed to set about reining in the SDLP's lead over them in the polls, whilst in the South the party needed

to elevate its status from 'fringe' party by upping its number of TDs from the one seat captured in 1997.

This chapter will seek to assess the extent to which Sinn Fein has been successful in its electoral performances since 1998 and account for its electoral growth. Not only will this involve looking at overall number of votes, share of the poll and total representatives in a variety of elections, it will also take into account the demographics of its support base in both jurisdictions and the scope for further advances in the future. Furthermore, it will examine the utility of other initiatives such as the unionist outreach programme and attempts to appeal to the Irish Diaspora in Britain and the New World. It will also assess the extent to which any electoral performance, no matter how impressive, can be deemed relevant for a party whose ultimate ambition is to unite Ireland.

Rise to electoral dominance in Northern Ireland

Sinn Fein began attempting to capitalise on its new participatory approach in Northern Ireland from a better polling position than had been enjoyed at any time since the party began contesting elections in the modern era in the early 1980s. In the 1997 British general election, the party received a total of 126,000 votes and returned two MPs to Westminster. Gerry Adams regained the seat he lost in 1992 when he was returned as MP for Belfast West, whilst Martin McGuinness overhauled a large DUP majority to take Mid Ulster, though undoubtedly this was aided in part by boundary changes to the constituency.[369] Sinn Fein's support had reached a plateau at one-third of the nationalist population whilst the PIRA's campaign remained in place. Now, there was the possibility of Sinn Fein waging a much stronger intra-ethnic contest against the SDLP.

Sinn Fein had been participating on local councils for some time. However, in terms of representation on a national level, the first test of the new participatory Sinn Fein came in the form of the first Northern Irish Assembly elections in June 1998. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the SDLP fared particularly well, given that the Good Friday Agreement was generally perceived to have been largely constructed by John Hume and his colleagues.[370] That party, for the first time in their history, outpolled all their rivals by attracting 177,000 votes. As a consequence of the Single Transferable Vote (STV) electoral system, the party returned fewer MLAs to the Assembly than did the Ulster Unionists, but nevertheless this was a terrific performance.

Sinn Fein had originally proposed an electoral pact with the SDLP in the wake of the Good Friday Agreement,[371] perhaps an attempt to isolate anti-agreement elements as much as to guarantee a strong showing and to minimise the possibility of a significant republican split. The SDLP eventually dismissed the proposal on the basis that STV made it unnecessary.[372] One might reasonably argue that the Belfast Agreement was the SDLP's finest hour, and that its polling figures in the immediate aftermath were always likely to be a high water mark. Given that situation, the 142,000 votes and 17.6 per cent share that Sinn Fein attracted in the wake of the Agreement was a reasonable achievement, one which allowed Gerry Adams to reflect that, 'Republicans can look back on the year with some degree of satisfaction. We have built our political strength'.[373]

The 1998 Assembly result made it possible for Sinn Fein to present a dynamic of forward progression and increasing political influence, to be built upon in subsequent elections.
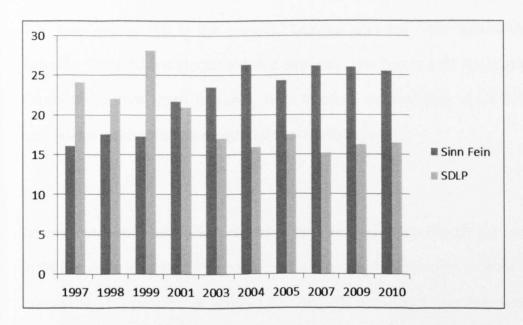
Within one year, the party had managed to outpoll the UUP in the 1999 European Elections. Sinn Fein's talking-up of the possibility of Mitchel McLaughlin attracting a similar number of first preference votes to Jim Nicholson had been branded overly ambitious by some, but proved accurate.[374] Whilst for years the Ulster Unionists had been the dominant force in Northern Irish politics, with Sinn Fein dismissed as 'extreme' and its representatives as 'terrorists' or 'apologists', the new participatory Sinn Fein managed to show it was now able to compete with its formerly omnipotent unionist rival, albeit in an election where the personal popularity of Ian Paisley always guaranteed a reduced vote for the UUP. Furthermore, by as early as 2001 the party had reined in the SDLP's lead amongst the nationalist electorate. The 175,000 votes collected by Sinn Fein were 6,000 more than the SDLP managed, whilst the party increased its number of MPs at Westminster from two to four. The SDLP remained on three seats, meaning they had fallen behind Sinn Fein in terms of both total votes and seats.[375]

Perhaps most pleasing for Sinn Fein, and galling for the SDLP, was the manner of the triumph in the West Tyrone constituency. The seat had been touted as crucial in the battle to be nationalism's main voice in Northern Ireland, whilst unionists still harboured hopes that a split in the nationalist vote might allow unionist victory.[376] However, despite predictions of a close contest, Sinn Fein's Pat Doherty outpolled his nationalist rival Brid Rodgers, an SDLP minister in the devolved executive, by over 5,000 votes.[377] This indicated that in what would appear to be an evenly matched contest between two similar parties, the electorate were willing to back the perceived stouter defender of their ethnic bloc's interest. This was a pattern that would prove familiar in the years that followed, on the unionist side of the political spectrum as well as the nationalist, and which has become accepted as likely in ethnically polarised communities such as Northern Ireland.[378]

Having gained the upper hand on its nationalist rival, Sinn Fein rammed home its advantage after 2001 by increasing its lead in subsequent elections. Furthermore, Sinn Fein continued to increase its number of representatives, often at the expense of the SDLP. Amongst the most notable examples came when, in 2004, Bairbre de Brun won one of the three Northern Irish seats available to the European Parliament. Traditionally the SDLP had fared extremely well in these elections, in no small part down to the personal popularity of its leader, John Hume, but by 2004 they were left trailing Sinn Fein badly in number of votes cast and without a representative elected.[379]

Sinn Fein did endure a minor electoral hiccup in 2005 when a British General Election held not long after both the murder of Robert McCartney by members of the PIRA and the Northern Bank robbery failed to deliver the significant gains that had been forthcoming over the previous seven years. Though in part this can be explained by a greater level of 'hardcore' support for the SDLP, it is also likely that much as PIRA violence had been deemed to be a vote-loser in the 1980s and early 1990s, its criminal activities may have hindered Sinn Fein in this electoral campaign, despite senior party figures' protestations that Sinn Fein had nothing to do with either incident.[380] Gerry Adams 'appealed' to the PIRA prior to the election, urging them to fully embrace political structures and to end criminality.[381] Unsurprisingly, it was this year that the PIRA officially ended its campaign by decommissioning its weaponry. It should be noted, however, that the party *did* still manage to increase its vote slightly.

Following the decommissioning of PIRA weapons and then the signing of the St. Andrews Agreement in 2006, Sinn Fein has maintained its position of communal superiority over the SDLP, though the latter has not been completely squeezed out of the Northern nationalist political landscape as yet. By the 2010 British General Election Sinn Fein could point to the 172,000 votes gained and five MPs elected as evidence of their political strength. Not only did this election show a lead over the SDLP over of over 60,000 votes, but it also saw the party gain 3,000 more votes than the leading unionist party, the DUP. The next electoral prize for Sinn Fein was to provide the First Minister of Northern Ireland. The graph below illustrates Sinn Fein's electoral growth by comparing the party's share of the vote with the percentage garnered by the SDLP in the same elections:

Figure 6.1 Sinn Fein and SDLP Percentage Vote Shares, Northern Ireland Elections 1997-2010

Steady Growth in the Irish Republic

Whilst consistently able to capture around one-third of the Catholic vote in Northern Ireland since the 1980s, Sinn Fein was much less strong in the Irish Republic. In the 1997 Irish General Election, the last before the Belfast Agreement was signed, Sinn Fein had polled 45,000 votes, 2.6 per cent of total votes cast.[382] Whilst such a small share of the vote was indicative of the party's position as a minor player in the Irish Republic, the election of the party's first TD was one cause for celebration. The first opportunity for the party to build upon this moderate success in the South after the Belfast Agreement came in 1999 in the form of the Irish Republic's elections to the European Parliament, in which the party upped its vote share to a more encouraging 6.3 per cent.

The party consolidated its improved position in the Irish General Election three years later when it attracted 121,000 first preference votes, 6.5% of votes cast, upping its number of TDs from one to five in the process. Twinned with the rapid improvement in electoral fortunes, Gerry Adams proclaimed that Sinn Fein now had 'a solid foundation from Cobh to Carrickmore, from Louth to Larne, from Wexford to Waterfoot, from Kerry to Derry, to continue to build political strength right across the island'.[383]

Adams' optimism seemed well-placed when the party broke the 10 per cent barrier in the 2004 European elections. The party took a total of 197,000 votes in the European poll, an impressive 11.1 per cent of ballots cast. This was the party's strongest ever showing in an election in the South, making it the third largest party, and saw Mary Lou McDonald elected to the European Parliament as a representative for Dublin.[384] Following the result even Bertie Ahern, leader of Fianna Fail and Taoiseach at the time, declared that the result

constituted a victory for Sinn Fein and a defeat for his own party.[385] Coupled with the result in the North where Bairbre de Brun had won a seat, the result demonstrated the potential for Sinn Fein to grow into one of the Republic's largest parties.

Since 2004, however, the party's electoral fortunes in the South have been mixed. Despite talk of increasing its number of representatives prior to the Irish General Election of 2007,[386] with the possibility of entering into a governing coalition that would mean it was in government in both Irish jurisdictions also mooted, the party actually lost a seat. Subsequently, it did not have the opportunity to enter government in the Irish Republic. Nevertheless, the party did collect over 20,000 more votes than it had in the previous General Election, an extra 0.4 per cent of the vote.[387] Whilst the electoral system may have worked against the party (it receives very few transfers from Fianna Fail and Fine Gael supporters) and perhaps its electoral strategy and seat targeting may have been somewhat lacking, Sinn Fein had continued to make progress in comparison to its two previous General Election performances.
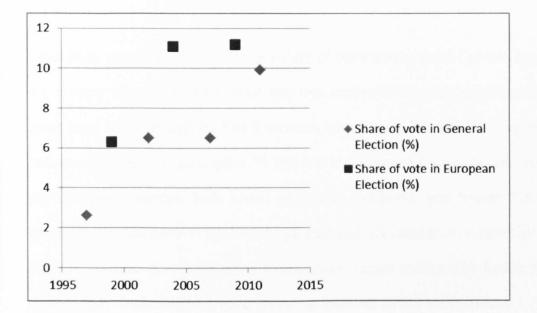
The party faced a similar situation two years later in the European Elections of 2009. Whilst it upped its total number of votes to an all-time high of 205,000, Mary Lou McDonald lost her Dublin seat, partly as a result of the number of seats for the region being reduced from four to three. Whilst the party emphasised the positive aspects of the election result, the result in McDonald's constituency looked like a rejection of the party.[388] The party's work in the underprivileged communities of Dublin had been thought to guarantee a strong working class support base. However, Joe Higgins of the Socialist Party took the seat with over 50,000 votes, indicating Sinn Fein's programme was of less interest to the Dublin proletariat than some in the party had anticipated. A debate of rare public frankness ensued within the

party over its electoral strategy in the Irish Republic. Eoin O'Broin, for example, feels the party has lost some working class votes in the Irish Republic in recent years because the media have begun to attack its social and economic policies rather than its links with the PIRA. The party, he argues, have not always done well enough when called to defend these policies.[389]

The 2011 General Election was significant in as much as Sinn Fein delivered a record number of votes, their highest ever share of the vote for this type of election and boosted its number of TDs to 14 in the process. It is reasonable to conclude this was as much or more down to the erosion of public confidence in Fianna Fail in the wake of chronic economic problems as it was about an upsurge in support for Sinn Fein. After all, Fianna Fail lost an astonishing 51 of the 71 seats it had held going into the election. Nevertheless, evidently a significant portion of those formerly voting for Fianna Fail saw Sinn Fein as a viable alternative, continuing the party's gradual growth in the southern jurisdiction. This growth is illustrated graphically below:

Figure 6.2 Sinn Fein Percentage Vote Shares in General and European Elections in the Irish Republic, 1997-2011

Examining electoral progress

Superficially satisfying as an increase both in vote number and share may be, rigorous examination of Sinn Fein's electoral experiences since 1998 reveals cause for caution as well as celebration for the party. The demography of Sinn Fein's support shows varying patterns. In studying the social class and age of Sinn Fein voters there is cause for optimism for the party. In looking at religion and previous voting (or non-voting) habits the most recent data is somewhat less encouraging.

Whilst Sinn Fein has boosted its polling figures greatly in Northern Ireland from the plateau reached in the 1980s and early 1990s, overtaking the SDLP in the process, it has done so in large part by mobilising previous non-voters. Rather than eating into their ethnic rival's

support, Sinn Fein has overtaken the SDLP *and* boosted the aggregate nationalist/republican vote significantly in the process.[390] Whilst the total nationalist vote in the early 1970s was little over 25%, it now accounts for over 40 per cent.[391]

Kevin Bean asserts that the transformation of communities from Catholic ghettos reliant on the militant 'defenders' of the PIRA into less impoverished areas where community politics could reign supreme lent itself to a situation whereby modification of Sinn Fein policy could deliver substantial electoral gains.[392] This has been proved correct by consistently improved electoral performances, both within traditional heartlands and former SDLP strongholds, though leaves the party in the knowledge that such an upsurge in support as enjoyed in the years when those previously prone to abstention began casting their ballots for Sinn Fein is unlikely to be replicated in coming years - at least not by the same means.

The desire to win support hitherto granted to the SDLP has led to Sinn Fein targeting middle-class voters in a manner impossible during the years of conflict. Ethnic valence now dominates Northern Irish party politics. Beyond the old constitutional questions, there is cross-community agreement over the desire for strong public services. The party chosen is the party seen as most competent in delivering those services. Sinn Fein is seen as the party which delivers in this respect.

In terms of the social class of the party's Northern Irish supporters, the data suggests the party is widening its appeal quite significantly. Evans and Tonge demonstrate that as well as seeing an increase in their vote among all social classes, Sinn Fein now enjoy a level of support among the salariat 'unthinkable in the pre-IRA ceasefire days'.[393] The Catholic

middle class, formerly resistant to casting their vote in favour of an armed group's political wing, are no longer driven away by a physical-force campaign. Since the PIRA fully decommissioned, therefore, Sinn Fein has been able to increase almost exponentially its middle class voting figures. Its support base is no structurally conditioned in the manner evident during previous decades. Whilst the party is still more favoured amongst the working-class than its middle-class counterpart, Evans and Tonge's multivariate modeling indicates how social class has diminished as the basis of intra-nationalist party affiliation.[394] Age, rather than social structure is more important.

The lengthy absence of a PIRA campaign, one found by many to be completely unjustifiable, assists too in explaining another facet of Sinn Fein's support, its youthful nature. As Sinn Fein entered the political arena in the North, it already drew the majority of its support from younger voters. Data from the Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) survey shows that, amongst the population as a whole, just 2 per cent of over 65s supported the party, it could count on the support of 15 per cent of 18-24 year-olds, the majority of whom were young Catholics. Sinn Fein has upped its share of the vote amongst all age brackets since 1998, but it is the young vote that has continued to be Sinn Fein's strongest area.[395] In contrast, the SDLP's membership[396] and supporter base[397] are both ageing.

The NILT data on age reinforces McAllister's claim that the primary driver of Sinn Fein's elevation to the dominant voice of Northern nationalism is an ability to mobilise new supporters. The SDLP's vote has held up reasonably well since 1998, but it is principally Sinn Fein's success in appealing to people formerly disengaged with the electoral system and young people newly eligible to vote that has propelled the party into its current position. Feeney shrewdly observes that whilst it is understandable the older generation often shun

Sinn Fein, remembering as they do the way the party backed PIRA violence aimed at wrecking any chance of an internal political settlement, this is of no concern to young voters in Northern Ireland. To them, the Sunningdale Agreement is an obscure moment in the past, with Sinn Fein's reaction to it all but irrelevant.[398] Of more concern to these voters is finding a party that best promotes or protects their interests. Sinn Fein has taken up this mantle, presenting itself as the 'greener' nationalist outfit, one that achieved reform in Northern Ireland and will continue to advance change. Coakley explains how parties like Sinn Fein are able to overtake established, less radical parties representing the same ethnic bloc, arguing that 'the most formidable challenge is offered by ethnic outbidders, since they tackle established parties on their own terms, presenting themselves as more committed and authentic alternatives to the tired parties of the past'.[399]

Tonge points out that Sinn Fein's advantages over the SDLP do not end with their perception as the 'greener' of the two in a totally polarised society. He claims that the structural differences between the parties allow Sinn Fein to present itself as an all-Ireland party with scope for further growth, whilst presenting the SDLP as a tired, entirely northern-based party whose principal objectives have already been achieved via the implementation of a devolved settlement, a point conceded even by the SDLP's own supporter.[400] Indeed, his conclusion on the SDLP's prospects for the future is particularly bleak:

> **Without change, however, the SDLP will continue to be seen as a green catholic nationalist six county party, unable to collect many votes from unionists and overlooked by northern nationalists who prefer a green nationalist 32 county party in the form of Sinn Fein**[401]

The evidence suggests that Sinn Fein's position as largest nationalist party in the North is irreversible. They have shown themselves capable of widening their class appeal following the end of the PIRA's campaign, they have mobilised previous abstainers, and most crucially young first-time voters are far more likely to support Sinn Fein than they are the SDLP. The latter relies on a loyal but nevertheless ageing support-base.

Both unionism and nationalism within Northern Ireland has undergone significant change since the Good Friday Agreement. The two parties perceived as moderate, the UUP and SDLP, have seen their electoral fortunes decline. Formerly the leaders in their respective ethnic blocs, they are now trailing the DUP and Sinn Fein respectively. However, the way in which either party's vote share has suffered is somewhat different. The UUP is suffering from an inability to mobilise its core vote – middle class Protestants. This suggests that electoral recovery is possible, though the party will need to improve its electoral appeal in terms of providing a credible alternative to the DUP's unionism and modernise its structure.

For the SDLP, recovery seems less likely. Rather than having a core support it is struggling to mobilise, the party's vote has held up reasonably well, but Sinn Fein has shown its ability to attract votes amongst young people. Moreover, it has also increased its popularity amongst the Catholic salariat, traditionally more wary about voting for Sinn Fein. This leaves the SDLP in a quandary. Its policies are now extremely similar to those of Sinn Fein, yet Sinn Fein attracts the greater number of votes as the party seen to be the stouter defender of the ethnic bloc and a party with greater potential due to its all-island structure. The SDLP might need to alter its political programme in order to distinguish itself from its nationalist rival. However, attempting to become the fiercer defender of nationalist interests is not a credible option, since this ground has long been held by Sinn Fein, notwithstanding its new

moderation (and dissidents offer an extreme version). The SDLP are unlikely to be taken seriously should they try to assume an uber-nationalist role. However, a return by the SDLP to its social democratic roots at the expense of some of its more openly nationalist policies would surely make it all the more clear that Sinn Fein are the more strident promoter of nationalist interests. Identity promotion remains of the utmost importance in Northern Irish politics. Rowing back from nationalism in an attempt to capture new votes is unlikely to prove fruitful. Though some modest efforts have been made to seek a merger with a party based in the Irish Republic, including talks with a range of parties ranging from Fianna Fail to the Irish Labour Party, the role of the SDLP in coming years may be to manage its own gradual decline. Certainly, there is little scope for electoral recovery due to the party's ideological constraints and Sinn Fein's structural advantages.

Sinn Fein's successful exercise in 'ethnically outbidding' their nationalist rivals may have delivered electoral advances, but it does have negative consequences. Evans and Tonge note that implementation of the Good Friday Agreement has resulted in communal identity in voting being more important than ever:

> **Ironically, despite a successful peace and political process, the diminution of distinctive structural internal bloc voting attributes within ethnic blocs may mean that the basic sectarian divide may be more important than ever in explaining voting in Northern Ireland[402]**

It is this type of entrenched sectarianism at the polls that has been advantageous to Sinn Fein in its quest to overhaul the SDLP, but conversely makes it almost impossible for the party to capture a sizeable section of the Protestant electorate's support. The necessity to

present itself as the stouter defender of its ethnic bloc makes Sinn Fein particularly unappealing to the Protestant community. Data on cross community transfers after the Good Friday Agreements supports this assertion, showing Sinn Fein is comfortably the least popular of any major party among the Protestant/Unionist community[403] with virtually no lower preference transfers going from UUP and DUP supporters across the ethnic divide (and vice-versa).
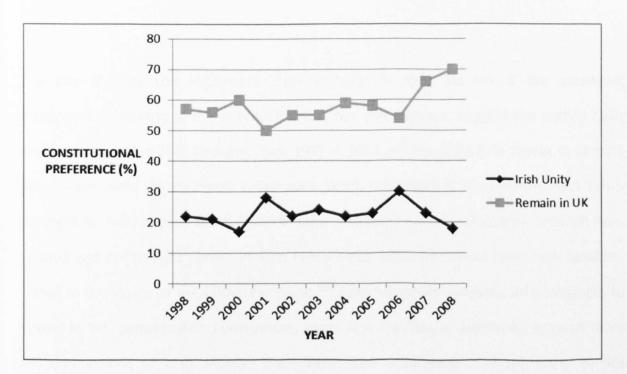
Frampton feels that despite the problems it causes in terms of the party's perception amongst unionists, Sinn Fein's strategy of overhauling the SDLP through ethnic outbidding is the correct one – and that it constitutes a continuation of republican values though adapted to a modern setting. Rather than seeking to appeal to unionism, he claims the party still sees it as 'an ideology to be defeated and destroyed'.[404] To make such allowances for unionism as to alter party policy is seen as anathema to a party seeking to represent as best it can the nationalist community. He also claims that such allowances are unnecessary, for Sinn Fein might be able to deliver Irish unity without softening its approach towards unionism:

> **The leadership's pragmatism, therefore, does not represent any eagerness to discard its underlying commitment to the key republican objective of Irish unity. On the contrary, on that fundamental issue the central figures of the leadership are avowed ideologues**[405]

Though Frampton is correct to acknowledge that republicans have often made pragmatic decisions in order to advance their cause, the way in which he takes the leadership at their word when they insist Irish unity is still the core goal may be naïve. Can electoral success,

even on a greater scale than that already enjoyed, ultimately equate to a victory for republicanism in the 21st century? The party may look well placed to become the largest party in the North, to deliver a Sinn Fein First Minister for Northern Ireland, to increase its number of TDs and enter into a governing coalition at the Dail, but one inescapable fact remains. The appetite for Irish unity in the North is no greater now than it was at the time the Good Friday Agreement was signed. The following NILT data makes grim reading for republicans on that front.[406] The strong aggregate preference remains for Northern Ireland to remain in the United Kingdom and there has been scant shift in the constitutional preferences of either community since the Agreement.

Figure 6.3 Constitutional Preference in Northern Ireland According to NILT 1998-2008

Frampton does not address the issue of how Sinn Fein would react if indeed they *did* recognise Irish unity was no longer possible. He assumes the party has not yet settled for mere communal domination in Northern Ireland, an arena in which the electoral prizes have now mostly been won.

Unlike in Northern Ireland, Sinn Fein's support in the South has not been drawn primarily around formerly militant ghettos in which the Provisionals had held a strong position since the 1970s. However, its vote has been concentrated in particular regions: primarily in border counties; and in Dublin. Furthermore, the party seemed to draw most of its support from the economically disadvantaged. In order to improve its standing in the South, the party would need to widen its geographical appeal, as well as to attract votes from a wider variety of social classes.

The loss of Mary Lou McDonald's European seat in 2009, on top of the somewhat disappointing showing in the General Election two years earlier, suggest the party's quite rapid growth in the Irish Republic from 1997 – 2004 will be difficult to repeat in coming years, even amid the economic catastrophe which has engulfed the country. Sinn Fein's attempts to make inroads into the middle class vote have run into difficulties. Criticism from centrist and centre-right parties of Sinn Fein's leftist approach, based upon high taxation, added to the legacy of the PIRA's campaign,[407] have hampered the party in its attempts to appeal to this demographic. Furthermore, when Sinn Fein has endeavoured to court more affluent sections of Irish society, there have been accusations that the party is less connected to the deprived communities in which it used to thrive.[408] Indeed, the strong showing by the Socialist Party in the 2009 European Election, as well as Sinn Fein's lack of progress in the Dublin area, would suggest the party may have sacrificed working class

votes for very little return by way of middle class ones. Even those supportive of the party accept that the inability to adequately articulate social and economic policies has been a weaknesses in recent years.[409]

International Unity Strategy

Aside from the quest for electoral success, the party also points to its appeal to the Irish Diaspora as part of its unity strategy. In addition to *Friends of Sinn Fein* acting both as a fundraising tool and as a means to generate support and recognition in Australia, Canada and principally the United States, where the number of people identifying either as Irish or as having some connection to Ireland was just under 36,000,000 in the 2006 Census,[410] the party has also held Irish Unity conferences in San Francisco, New York, Chicago and London, with plans afoot for further such events. In explaining the party's approach to internationalising the quest for unity, Sinn Fein's Pat Doherty explained:

> **We intend to have dialogue with the immigrant community anywhere we find it ... it's part of putting it up to the British government ... they have to take this on board ... they have already conceded the principle [of Irish unity] as part of the Good Friday Agreement but we want delivery on that principle. That, along with the ongoing dialogue with the unionist community, is part of the age-old and deeply seated question of the reunification of our country.[411]**

The party also retains links with political movements around the world, most notably in Palestine and the Basque Country. Sinn Fein continues to articulate the case for independent Basque and Palestinian homelands in the media and at Ardfheiseanna. This is reciprocated in each of those regions, particularly by Fatah[412] and Batasuna.[413]

Although support for Sinn Fein's objectives from outside Ireland, whether it comes financially or diplomatically, may be of some political use, the extent to which it forms part of an effective unity strategy is questionable. Mobilising the Irish Diaspora is of little direct utility in terms of delivering unity. Reunification depends either on an extraordinary demographic shift within Northern Ireland or some success in persuading the Unionist community in the North of its merits. However successful Sinn Fein is in building its strength abroad, it will have little effect in these areas. This notwithstanding, diaspora mobilisation continues to give the impression of further movement on the party's key objective.

Conclusion

Sinn Fein's electoral performances have been impressive in the twelve years since it became a fully participatory political party, though the party's progress has been somewhat less meteoric in the Irish Republic than in Northern Ireland. The party has come to dominate nationalist politics in the North, consistently outpolling the SDLP which seems now to be in slow, but potentially terminal, decline. Having consistently hovered between 10-15 per cent of the total vote in Northern Irish elections, Sinn Fein managed to up this to 15-18 per cent in the years immediately before and after the Belfast Agreement, and now polls close to 30 per cent. Sinn Fein's capture of the youth vote amongst nationalists bodes well for future elections, suggesting an even greater share of the vote is a possibility in the future.

Sinn Fein has been assisted by a 'peace dividend', by ethnic valence, by the durability of its leader and by the post-Agreement inadequacies of the SDLP. Modest demographic change has also boosted the party. High visibility at Stormont via its ministerial team has also

assisted Sinn Fein. It may advantage of the split in the unionist vote between the DUP and UUP to provide a Sinn Fein First Minister for Northern Ireland, a scenario to which the unionist parties and British Prime Minister David Cameron have expressed some resistance.[414] Beyond that, the gains achieved by electoral advancement confined to Northern Ireland are less apparent. Moreover, turnout has fallen sharply (by over 7 per cent) in nationalist areas in elections since 2007, hinting at a diminution of Sinn Fein's capacity to mobilise its electoral base in the impressive manner once evident.

Sinn Fein's polling figures in the Irish Republic, whilst less impressive than in Northern Ireland, remain a great improvement on what was being achieved prior to 1998. At that time the party had just one TD, and managed to attract fewer than 50,000 votes in the 1997 General Election. In the 2011 poll, the party was getting more than four times that number of votes, and had 14 TDs. This shows significant progress in less than fifteen years. At the last European Election, the party was the third best supported of those in the Republic of Ireland in terms of first preference votes.

The party's primary challenge in the Irish Republic remains convincing the electorate that it is truly a 32 county political party, rather than a predominantly Northern entity. Indeed, the party's role in the North which separates it from the other parties in the Irish Republic has, in the view of some commentators, left the party unable to challenge government effectively enough.[415] This has led to it losing votes to other more radical, Southern-based alternatives such as the Socialist Party.[416]

The question begged is the extent to which electoral advancement is converted into political gains. Clearly Sinn Fein's election successes have yielded key ministerial posts in Northern Ireland. Yet no matter how well Sinn Fein does in any election, support for Irish unity remains low. Electoral gains have provided momentum, yet even if Sinn Fein was to capture 100 per cent of the votes of the nationalist community in Northern Ireland and hold the balance of power in the Irish Republic, it is unclear how unfettered Irish self-determination, let alone the establishment of an indivisible 32 County Republic would be more easily attained. Naturally, Sinn Fein would argue that its participatory routes have achieved much relative to abstention and armed struggle. 'Dissident' republicans, whilst offering little in terms of an alternative strategy, remain unimpressed by such arguments. For dissidents, electoralism with participation in 'illegitimate' political institutions is a departure from republicanism, not the source of its advancement. The following chapter assesses these 'dissident' arguments.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE EMERGENCE OF DISSIDENT REPUBLICANISM AND ITS CHALLENGE TO PROVISIONALISM

One of the chief successes of the Provisional Republican movement has been its ability to maintain internal unity in the face of changing circumstances. Following its usurping the Official IRA as the principal representative of Republicanism in Ireland in the early 1970s, until the peace process of the 1990s, there was only one occasion on which a splinter group left the main body of the movement: the 1986 walkout and subsequent formation of Republican Sinn Fein (RSF) by those unwilling to embrace participatory politics. However, this was of relatively little significance given RSF's lack of support and the lack of military actions carried out by any group purporting to be the party's armed wing.

Although the advent of the peace process, the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, the participation in the government of Northern Ireland and ultimately the acceptance of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) all occurred alongside ever-improving electoral fortunes for Sinn Fein, since the mid-1990s there has gradually emerged a proliferation of 'dissident' Republican groups. These groups have offered fierce critiques of the mainstream republican movement and its strategy. They have also upped their levels of political activism, have been influential in orchestrating disorder in nationalist areas and some have also been responsible for violent acts resulting in military personnel and police officers being killed or wounded.

This chapter will identify and examine these 'dissident' groups, analysing the extent to which they have common goals beyond the desire for Irish unity and disaffection with Sinn Fein. It will also evaluate the capacity of these groups to grow into a meaningful challenge to

Provisionalism. This will involve looking at each of these groups, their goals and motivations, where applicable their military capabilities and electoral support, as well as the way in which they are perceived by the general population. Having investigated the 'dissident' Republican agendas and assessed their potential to grow, the extent to which these groups' claims that Sinn Fein has 'sold-out' can be justified will be addressed.

Dissidents provide one benchmark for the evaluation of whether Sinn Fein has maintained its republican credentials. Whilst there are academics such as Michael Freeden who emphasise the 'morphology' of political ideas,[417] or others such as Agnes Maillot who claim Republicanism has always been ideologically fluid,[418] the dissident narrative is one constructed in opposition to what they see as the stark U-turns performed by Sinn Fein. The party claim their political programme amounts to the application of long-held principles to a modern setting. However, the 'dissident' reading is that Sinn Fein's actions offer no greater likelihood of making Irish unity more likely than 'dissident' militarism. As such, there is no loss of utility in the perpetuation of violence, whilst principles are kept intact. For Sinn Fein, both readings are incorrect. Continuing violence will achieve no further gains and it elevates militarism to a principle rather than a tactic of republicanism.

Dissident Organisational and Political Eclecticism

Whilst the term 'dissident' is used for all those republican organisations hostile towards Sinn Fein's political programme, there are a large number of groups each with different agendas. Some have existed for many years, though they have upped activity levels in recent years. Others were only founded recently, having come about as a reaction to events such as the decision to fully decommission PIRA weaponry or Sinn Fein's recognition of the PSNI.

Furthermore, it is thought there is some crossover in membership, indicating that for some activists there are appealing aspects of more than one organisation.[419]

The earliest 'dissident' group to emerge out of the Provisional movement was RSF, formed in 1986. The party, led then by O'Bradaigh, favoured a more traditional or 'purist' brand of republicanism. Having eschewed participatory politics, the group has continued to advocate the policies and strategies favoured by the Provisionals in its early years. These include refusing to recognise either 'partitionist' institution on the island of Ireland[420] and upholding the right of the Irish people to take up arms in the face of British 'occupation'.[421] The group is informally linked to the Continuity Irish Republican Army (CIRA)[422], which was inactive whilst the PIRA's campaign continued into the 1990s, but has been responsible for a number of incidents, since 1996.

To its critics, the adherence to the abstentionist policy is a demonstration of RSF's inflexibility; an impractical 'theological' take on the issue of Irish freedom and unity. However, for RSF the decision to stay out of Leinster House, Stormont and Westminster is about more than a suspicion or dislike for parliamentary politics. Rather, the party insists that recognising partitionist institutions or the British government's right to jurisdiction in any part of Ireland is a betrayal of the Republic declared in 1916 and the Provisional government of 1919. Furthermore, RSF have consistently argued that fusing militarism with participatory politics constitutes an attempt to be revolutionary and reformist at the same time. This, the party claims, is impossible in the long-term and will ultimately lead to participation in and support for the very state that was supposed to be overthrown in the first place. As O'Bradaigh puts it, one cannot ride a horse going in two opposite directions.[423]

Although RSF's claim that the 'true' Army Council remains the legitimate government of all-Ireland is one viewed with derision by many within the republican tradition and is generally incomprehensible to those beyond, it is a not insignificant strand of thought within the movement. As the sole surviving member of the 1919 Dail, Tom Maguire was deemed the man with the authority to give the stamp of legitimacy to a physical force movement in Ireland. His endorsement was part of the reason the PIRA were able to usurp the OIRA in the early 1970s, effectively becoming *the* IRA from this point onwards.[424] Indeed, in 1986 the Provisionals were again eager to seek Maguire's backing. However, this was not forthcoming, with Maguire electing to support O'Bradaigh's RSF instead.[425] To RSF, this was proof that they remained the legitimate voice of physical force republicanism in Ireland and that Sinn Fein and the PIRA had 'sold-out'.

RSF's claims that eventually the Provisionals would become a fully integrated part of the political system without securing Irish unity have been borne out with time. Though it can be argued either that Sinn Fein continue to make gradual progress towards Irish unity, or that 'cashing military chips' in return for some gains was preferable to waging an unwinnable war, RSF take Sinn Fein's signing of the Good Friday and St. Andrews agreements, including the recognition of the PSNI required via the latter, as justification for maintaining their more orthodox, traditional brand of Republicanism since their prediction about the political direction of Sinn Fein has been vindicated.

The second group to emerge as a challenge to the Provisionals was the Real Irish Republican Army (RIRA), 'represented' politically by the 32 County Sovereignty Movement

(32 CSM). The 32 CSM had originally been formed as a pressure group within Sinn Fein, though its members broke away from the main body of the movement in disagreement with the PIRA's second ceasefire and imminent signing of the Good Friday Agreement.[426] These members had been willing to accept the Provisionals' recognition of Leinster House in 1986, as well as to focus primarily on realities in the North, but were unwilling to accept abandoning force without significant progress towards the desired united Ireland. The RIRA's military campaign began soon after its foundation, being responsible for incidents from January 1998. In more recent years there has also been a reported split in the organisation, with the splinter entitling itself Oglaigh na hEireann.

Above all, the 32 CSM and the RIRA are insistent that physical force is a necessity whilst the British government retain a presence in Ireland. Their ability to be pragmatic was evidenced in 1986 when they decided to stay with the Provisional movement in the wake of the decision to recognise Leinster House. In this sense, they differ from RSF and the CIRA. For the 32 CSM, Irish Republicanism is not a theological entity with a host of 'purist' commitments to be protected. However, nor is it an ideology compatible with accepting British authority in Ireland without offering armed resistance. Indeed, by abandoning violence without progress towards Irish unity it is argued by many within the movement that the memory of all those volunteers who were killed during the IRA's campaigns has been insulted.

There are also two stridently socialist 'dissident' groups campaigning for Irish unity, each critical of Sinn Fein. The first is the Irish Republican Socialist Party, a group formed by members of the Official movement who disagreed with the reformist path taken by that organisation. Its armed wing, the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), was responsible for

an armed campaign of its own throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Its activity levels dropped in the 1990s, with a ceasefire called in 1998. In 2009, the organisation formally stated it its goals would now be pursued by purely political means. It was later confirmed by the Independent Monitoring Commission (IMC) that the group was indeed adhering to this claim.[427] The second organisation, Eirigi, was founded in 2006 and became a fully-fledged political party in 2009. Like the IRSP, Eirigi does not advocate paramilitary violence. Originally organised as a campaign-group, it fuses revolutionary socialism with the desire for Irish unity. Neither the IRSP nor Eirigi recognise the PSNI, whilst both espouse a class-based analysis of the Irish conflict rather than employing the fusion of militarism and nationalism favoured by other groups. Eirigi challenge Sinn Fein's social and economic policies, as well as its strategy for Irish unity.

Republican Network for Unity (RNU) is another organisation often categorised as one of Ireland's 'dissident' Republican groups. Formerly known as 'Ex-POWs and Concerned Republicans against RUC-PSNI', the organisation is not a political party. Rather, it is a loose collection of Republicans of various persuasions. It does not have a manifesto or clearly defined political programme, instead declaring its intention to facilitate debate between like-minded republicans, trade unionists and ex-POWs. As with other 'dissident' groups, the RNU is clear about its opposition to the PSNI.

Inter and Intra Organisation Relations

Whilst the number of active Republicans disillusioned with Sinn Fein and subsequently involved with alternative organisations appears to have risen, notably since Sinn Fein's decision to recognise the PSNI, the sheer number of these alternatives suggests there is little to unite these activists beyond the desire for Irish unity and dissatisfaction with Sinn

Fein's approach. Those involved in the socialist Republican organisations, Eirigi and IRSP, are at odds with RSF/CIRA 'traditionalism' and 32 CSM/RIRA 'militarism'. Though the desire for Irish unity is at the forefront of these groups' political programmes, social and economic issues are of greater immediate concern than remaining dedicated to Republican orthodoxy or continuing an armed campaign irrespective of its chances of success.

The 'dissident' IRAs are alleged to have co-operated on occasion.[428] Moreover, the presence of a large number of small groups, not necessarily overlapping, may make penetration more difficult for the security services. Organisational heterogeneity may inhibit infiltration. However, there is a degree of antagonism between the CIRA and the RIRA. Whilst the latter are contemptuous of CIRA's perceived lack of military capability, the hostility is partly derived from the fundamental ideological discrepancies between the two organisations. For example, in the Easter Commemoration speech of April 2010, Emmet White of RSF stated:

> We have many groups who call themselves republicans. We have the so-called Real IRA who are fighting for a 32 county republic or so they say. What did they do between 1986 and 1997? They were willing to accept the provo agenda. They are traitors. They should put down their arms and go home. There can be no dilution of principle.[429]

It should be noted that this level of enmity is not ubiquitous amongst those involved with RIRA and CIRA and differences may reflect the varying levels of politicisation of those involved. Whilst scathing attacks on other 'dissident' political programmes are commonplace from RSF, there are those involved with each of the two group's armed wings who are less concerned with the nuances of republican ideology. This mirrors the republican split of

1969/70 when personal relationships often played more of a role in determining which paramilitary group one joined than particular policies. Indeed, some volunteers unaware that there were rival IRAs at that time.

Although RNU does welcome and encourage debate between Republicans from different organisations and none, it serves little purpose other than as a facilitator, reflecting the difficulty in uniting Republicans around a single programme. It further illustrates the magnitude of Sinn Fein's success in keeping the Provisional movement *fairly* united despite the significant policy operations over forty years. Indeed, though having emerged as relatively small splinter groups themselves, both the RIRA and CIRA have struggled to maintain internal unity. A small offshoot of the former, self-titled Oglaigh na hEireann, emerged in 2005 and has been responsible for a series of minor incidents.[430] It is believed to be based primarily around the Strabane area, with some members from further afield.[431] In the middle of 2010 there were claims that a new, Northern-based leadership had seized control of the CIRA.[432] This was denied by senior figures in RSF, but a split had nonetheless occurred.

Dissident activity: the persistence of physical force republicanism

Although the INLA was active up until the 1990s, there had been no armed campaign carried out by any PIRA splinter organisation until the CIRA were responsible for a series of operations from 1996. Although the group is linked to RSF, a group that had been founded eight years earlier, it was felt the need to employ military operations against British security forces was unnecessary whilst the PIRA's campaign was still ongoing. It was in response to the PIRA calling a ceasefire that the group began carrying out military operations, though

they were relatively minor from 1994 to 1997. However, from 1998 when it was clear Sinn Fein were about to accept seats at Stormont, the CIRA became far more active. It was responsible for a number of incidents, including bomb and mortar attacks.

The perception of 'dissident' Republicanism as a threat altered greatly in the aftermath of the Good Friday Agreement. In August 1998 the RIRA drew widespread revulsion when a bomb detonated in Omagh killed 29 civilians.[433] Sinn Fein's impressive political growth from 1998, combined with the lack of support for 'dissident' organisations, suggested those opposed to the Provisionals' political path were a marginalised tiny faction. Though the CIRA continued with occasional military actions, whilst in 2000 the RIRA announced it was calling an end to its ceasefire, neither were responsible for any particularly successful operations, though the RIRA attacks on the BBC and MI6 buildings in London did attract significant publicity.[434] Other incidents in which the two were involved included attempted kidnappings and bombings and the RIRA also killed a Territorial Army base worker. Amid foiled operations and a lack of support, the dissidents appeared in such disarray that, by October 2002 there were calls from RIRA prisoners for the organisation's Army Council to stand down. There had been a large number of senior members of the organisation arrested and imprisoned, including the 'leader' Michael McKevitt. Eventually McKevitt was expelled from the organisation,[435] whilst the armed campaign continued into 2003 and 2004. Thereafter there was a period of relative inactivity, even amid a political vacuum with Stormont suspended with the organisation believed to have been undergoing reorganisation.[436]

The fortunes and significance of 'dissident' organisations began to alter significantly due to the changing political landscape from 2005. The Provisional movement, intent on continuing the electoral success Sinn Fein had enjoyed over the previous seven years, embarked on its

most significant changes since recognising Stormont, under pressure from two events. The Northern Bank Robbery of December 2004 exposed ongoing PIRA criminality, whilst the murder of Robert McCartney by PIRA members suggested there was little regard for the rule of law amongst a section of the organisation's membership. The incidents drew international criticism, particularly from the United States,[437] hastening the Provisionals' move towards fully constitutional politics. In addition to the negative press for Sinn Fein after these incidents, the DUP also completed its destruction of the UUP in the British General Election of 2005.

These events acted as a catalyst for significant change in Provisionalism, culminating with the full integration into the democratic process and the repudiation of any form of violence or criminality whatsoever. The DUP displacing the UUP as Unionism's primary voice negated the potential for outflanking amongst unionists. Thus, Sinn Fein knew that any agreement reached with traditional political adversaries could not be undermined by a more hard-line alternative. This made it possible to consider policy alterations without fear of being isolated or losing political ground.

The first major development came in 2005 when Gerry Adams made a pre-election call for the PIRA to stand down. The PIRA agreed and in July issued the following statement:

> **The leadership of Oglaigh na hEireann [PIRA] has formally ordered an end to the armed campaign. This will take effect from 4 p.m. this afternoon. All IRA units have been ordered to dump arms. All volunteers have been instructed to assist the**

development of purely political and democratic programs through exclusively peaceful means[438]

Ultimately it was established that the PIRA had fully decommissioned its remaining weaponry on 26th September that year. This showed a lasting commitment to exclusively peaceful politics, a prerequisite for negotiations with the DUP and a policy likely to play well with the middle-class voters Sinn Fein was courting. The second set of crucial incidents occurred at the end of 2006 and beginning of 2007. This saw Sinn Fein sign the St. Andrews Agreement along with the other major political parties in Northern Ireland and the British and Irish governments. The agreement was aimed at restoring devolution, with the vital caveat being that Sinn Fein agreed to support the PSNI. The decision was ratified in January 2007 when the decision was put to a vote at a specifically convened Sinn Fein *Ard Fheis.*

It was amid these developments that the upsurge in dissident activity began. Eirigi's foundation in 2006 was followed by extensive community activism and fierce criticism of the Sinn Fein's decision to accept the Good Friday Agreement, but particularly to accept the PSNI. This was echoed by the RNU, which included disaffected former members of Sinn Fein, as well as those connected with other groups including RSF and 32 CSM and disaffected Republicans belonging to no organisation. However, the most significant happening amongst 'dissident' Republicans was the upsurge in both RIRA and CIRA military activity.

In 2008 the RIRA issued a statement declaring that after three years of reorganisation, it was ready to 'go back to war'.[439] A series of attacks were attributed to the group in the

following months, primarily involving the targeting of PSNI officers or stations. The CIRA too upped their activity levels from 2008 having only rarely been operative over the previous two years. In addition to targeting police officers, the group was also accused of orchestrating rioting in nationalist areas. Moreover, community workers cooperating with the PSNI in Belfast were threatened by members of the CIRA.[440]

The seriousness of 'dissident' actions increased greatly the following year. The murder of two British soldiers at the Massereene barracks by the RIRA in March 2009 was the first time British soldiers had been killed by Republicans in over a decade. Though the attack was widely condemned, it did achieve international attention for the group. Consequently, it raised the organisation's profile, gave the impression to outsiders that the situation in Northern Ireland was unstable, and also gave the impression the RIRA were not a small band of irrelevant hardliners, but a group capable of causing serious damage and perhaps increasing its membership.[441]

Two days later the CIRA killed a PSNI officer, the first casualty since the foundation of the police force. Thereafter, there were several more attacks on police stations and individual officers, including one in which an officer lost a leg and another in which a female officer discovered a device under her car as she carried her child. Both RIRA and CIRA were believed to be involved in orchestrating riots in nationalist areas during marching season in 2009 and 2010. Indeed, members of the RIRA are believed to have fired shots at the PSNI during one such case of disorder in Ardoyne.[442]

Do 'dissidents' have any support?

The unwillingness of 'dissident' groups to fully engage with the electoral process makes the levels of support they command difficult to quantify. One organisation that has put forward candidates in recent years is RSF. However, given the party's refusal to register with the Electoral Commission, candidates have stood under the banner of Independent. This is as a result of the Elected Authorities Act introduced by the British government, requiring all parties standing in elections to renounce acts of political violence. The party felt unable to do so, given it would be a repudiation of the right of the Irish people to resist the British occupation by force.

In the 2007 Northern Ireland Assembly Elections, the party's six candidates garnered a total of a mere 2,522 first preference votes. This equated to around 1 per cent of the vote in those constituencies contested. Given those constituencies contested were those in which the party was felt to have a better chance of success, the result suggested there was very little support for RSF's traditional physical-force Republicanism. Other dissident candidates did marginally better, the best performance being that of the independent republican, Peggy O'Hara (mother of a hunger striker who lost his life) who attracted 1,789 votes in Foyle, approximately 8 per cent of the nationalist vote. Two years later in the Irish Republic's local elections, an RSF candidate was elected: Tomas O'Curraoin with 8.4 per cent. All other candidates were unsuccessful, indicating support for RSF in the South was similarly paltry.

Given these poor results in both jurisdictions, combined with a lack of engagement with the political institutions by other groups, there is no electoral evidence to suggest 'dissident' Republicanism represents a significant section of the population. However, there have been

signs of some latent sympathy for 'dissident' organisations, or at least a lack of comfort with unfolding political developments, on both sides of the Irish border. Whilst the ratification of the Good Friday Agreement via referenda was hailed as a success in the process of delivering peace to Northern Ireland, the vote in the Irish Republic suggested there was a section of the population unwilling to accept the terms of the agreement and/or the drop the constitutional claim to the North. Whilst those voting were overwhelmingly in favour, the 5.6 per cent voting 'No' constituted over 85,000 people. Moreover, there were an unusually high number of spoiled ballot papers. Just over 1.1% of ballots fell into this category. This compares with just 0.2% in the Northern Irish referendum. There was a low turnout for the referendum in the Irish Republic. Constitutional referenda held earlier in the decade concerning divorce and abortion saw well over 60 per cent of those eligible casting a vote, whilst for the Belfast Agreement turnout little over 56 per cent. Votes in the 2000s on changing citizenship laws and endorsing the Lisbon Treaty (second vote) also attracted higher turnouts than had been the case in 1998.

Four years later, in the context of sporadic 'dissident' violence, a poll conducted for BBC Northern Ireland *Hearts and Minds* programme gave further encouragement to those opponents of Sinn Fein's strategy. The poll listed RSF and 32 CSM as options in a survey designed to gauge which political parties best represented the Northern Irish electorate's views. The parties accounted for 7.1 per cent of Nationalist preferences.[443] This was a surprisingly high figure, especially given that respondents are often prone to offering 'socially acceptable' answers to pollsters when asked about their political preferences.[444] A poll conducted for the same programme four years later returned similar figures for both parties.

More recently, the ESRC 2010 Northern Ireland Election Survey has revealed further evidence that 'dissidents' might not be quite as marginalised as electoral results would suggest. A total of 1,002 people were asked (in face-to-face interviews) whether they had any sympathy with the reasons for the CIRA/RIRA violence. With 4.4 per cent of respondents saying they had 'a lot of sympathy' and 3.8 per cent declaring 'a little sympathy',[445] there seems to be some evidence that dissident violence has a 'hardcore' base of sympathy, small but *not* negligible. Indeed, with almost all of those sympathetic to 'dissident' military activity being from the nationalist community, this equates to around 14 per cent of nationalists questioned having at least some sympathy with the reasons for the dissidents' actions. Though sympathy is not the same as support, the figures remain significant in that they demonstrate there is a modest section of the nationalist community who have not totally eschewed the violence that was commonplace in the 1970s and 1980s.

The second piece of notable data unearthed by the 2010 survey relates to the way in which the PSNI is regarded. All of the 'dissident' organisations, including the non-violent protest movements, reject the PSNI and criticise Sinn Fein's decision to recognise the rule of law. The data suggests there is a small section of the community who agree with these sentiments. 1.5 per cent of respondents claimed to 'strongly oppose' the PSNI, with another 2.3 per cent saying they 'oppose' the force.[446] The vast majority of those opposing the PSNI are from the nationalist community. So, nearly 8 per cent of those questioned from a nationalist background oppose the police force, despite Sinn Fein having recognised the PSNI three years earlier. There were also 11.2 per cent who agreed that the PSNI is 'very similar' to the old RUC,[447] around 18 per cent of those from a nationalist background.

For 32 CSM, and particularly RSF, the survey provided some encouragement. When respondents were asked to choose a phrase describing how they felt about each organisation, 3.8 per cent of those asked said they 'liked' or 'strongly liked' 32 CSM.[448] This equates to around 7 per cent of those from a nationalist background. The corresponding figure for RSF was 7.8 per cent,[449] approximately 13 per cent of those from a nationalist background.

So despite negligible electoral support, CIRA and RIRA violence attracts a small amount of sympathy from amongst the nationalist community, whilst Sinn Fein's decision to recognise the PSNI is also a source of concern to a small minority within Northern Ireland. This information may represent an obstacle to Sinn Fein in its attempts to carry the nationalist community with its political programme, although there is no prospect of any 'dissident' organisation displacing Sinn Fein as the dominant Republican voice. Rather, a lack of movement towards Irish unity in coming years may reinforce 'dissident' claims of a Provisional 'sell-out'. Whilst there is little to indicate any imminent exponential increase in 'dissident' support, there is evidence of minor growth in the membership numbers and subsequent expansion of military capabilities.

Indeed, the 2010 election survey figures relating to the perceived severity of the 'dissident' threat indicate it is of great concern to the Northern Irish population. When asked how much of a threat 'dissident' violence was to the 'peace and security' of Northern Ireland, 63.6 per cent said they felt it was a threat, 35.9 per cent of whom felt it was a 'major threat'. The percentage stating 'no threat' was in single figures. It seems that the murders of British soldiers, PSNI officers and the disruption perpetrated has led to a common perception that 'dissidents' have some capability. The threat is much more of an issue for

the Protestant population, more than half of whom categorised 'dissident' violence as a 'major threat', compared to the much lower figure of 17 per cent of Roman Catholics.

Sinn Fein Reaction to the Dissident Threat

Sinn Fein's reaction to 'dissident' organisations has altered quite significantly since the decision to recognise the PSNI. In January 2007 at the Sinn Fein *Ard Fheis*, during which the decision to accept the PSNI was ratified, Martin McGuinness taunted 'dissident' protestors by stating, 'the [P]IRA fought the British administration and the RUC to a standstill ... yet we are being criticised by groups who have yet to fight them to a start!'[450] This dismissive attitude towards the CIRA and RIRA was indicative of a confidence in Sinn Fein's ability to maintain community dominance, as well as scepticism about the 'dissident' groups' ability to mount any sort of meaningful armed campaign.

Two years later in March 2009, McGuinness took a different approach. In reaction to the murder of the two British soldiers and the PSNI officer by the RIRA and CIRA respectively, he described those responsible as 'traitors to the island of Ireland'.[451] This more aggressive tone suggested a desire to discredit political enemies whom Sinn Fein now regarded as a more serious threat to its political goals. In summer 2010 Sinn Fein's President Gerry Adams wrote to 'dissident' organisations appealing to them to cease their armed campaigns. This was a further indication that the party now took the 'dissident' threat more seriously. Having first taunted, then attacked RSF and 32 CSM, the party appeared to have concluded it was necessary to engage with these organisations in an attempt to halt the ongoing violence. However, attempts in respect of RSF proved unsuccessful. The new RSF President, Des Dalton, issued a terse rejection of Adams' approach:

Unfortunately Gerry Adams chose at that point [embarkation on the peace process] not to listen to that advice and chose to embark on the road which was forecast where it would end up is where they are today ... Gerry Adams and his organisation are now fully absorbed into the apparatus of British rule in Ireland and we feel we have absolutely nothing to say to them on that basis.[452]

The leadership of 32 CSM also rejected the opportunity to engage in talks with the Provisionals. Many figures now acknowledged that engagement in dialogue with a view to ending or at least reducing 'dissident' activity might be useful. Alex Maskey, for example, stated that 'We [Sinn Fein] would like the opportunity to argue with those who disagree with our view and our analysis and believe we can convince some of those people there is a way forward without engaging in armed activity'.[453] McGuinness did claim, however, that he 'knew for a fact' that the 'dissident' organisations were in talks with both the British and Irish governments.[454] This was flatly denied both by the Northern Ireland Office and by RSF's Dalton, though there was media speculation that there had indeed been some contact.[455]

Since engaging in the peace process in the early 1990s, Sinn Fein has attracted a great deal of support from previous non-voters and a certain amount from the Catholic middle-class previously more predisposed to vote for the SDLP. However, alongside this improvement in fortunes among moderate nationalists, the party may have lost a small amount of support from traditional Republican supporters. This is evidenced by a number of defections of formerly senior Provisionals. For example, in October 2010 the *Sunday Tribune* carried an

article detailing the defections of Brian Arthurs and Peter McCaughey in which it claimed that five Sinn Fein cummain and 90 per cent of the East Tyrone brigade had left the Provisional movement.[456] For those who have become disillusioned with the Provisionals, this is evidence growing perception of the watering-down of Republican principles in an effort to seize votes and political power within a partitioned Ireland. What may be emergent is that Sinn Fein's powers of mobilisation seem to be on the wane,[457] suggesting somewhat less enthusiasm for the party's political strategy than in previous years. For example, turnout fell by at least 10 per cent in four of the five seats Sinn Fein held at the 2010 British General Election. The one exception, an extremely close three way contest in Fermanagh-South Tyrone, still saw a drop of 7 per cent.[458]

Particular aspects of Republican dogma are more cherished by some than others. For the socialist Republicans of Eirigi and IRSP, the abandonment of socialist ideals is as much a concern as is, for example, the recognition of the PSNI. For the CIRA, the party's recognition of British-imposed partitionist institutions is an affront to Republican ideals. The RIRA, on the other hand, are unconcerned by the taking of seats at Leinster House, but disagree strongly with the repudiation of the right of the Irish people to use force in resistance to British occupiers its police force charged with upholding the rule of law. This shows that 'dissidents' are united mainly in their rejection of the Provisional movement's approach, repudiation of the legitimacy of the PSNI and in the belief in the endgame of Irish unity, although this lattermost aspect is still claimed by Sinn Fein. Though neither the CIRA nor the RIRA accept Sinn Fein as a legitimate representative of Republicanism in Ireland, it is also true to say that both Sinn Fein and 32 CSM/RIRA reject the RSF/CIRA brand of Republicanism. In short, whilst sharing contemptuous attitudes towards Sinn Fein and a desire for Irish unity, there is also a great deal that divides 'dissident' groups.

One area beyond the goal of a united Ireland in which all the groups are united is in their consideration (or lack thereof) for loyalism. Each 'dissident' organisation employs a colonial analysis of the Irish conflict, tending to define it as being between the British government and the Irish people as a whole. This completely fails to address the issue of Ulster loyalism. The view that the loyalist community's feelings of Britishness would dissipate after the withdrawal of the British government from Northern Ireland is unrealistic. However, none of the 'dissident' organisations have conjured up any alternative ideas which might either placate the loyalist community, or convince members of that community of the need for Irish unity. In truth, there is no indication that loyalists are becoming more accepting of the prospect of a united Ireland, whilst any attempt to coerce them into such a situation would almost certainly be met with paramilitary violence. For many within the loyalist community it is their willingness to physically fight for their identity that marks them out as unique.[459] That republicans ignore this reality exposes a serious shortcoming in their political and historical analysis of the conflict. RSF's preferred 'solution', the federal Eire Nua proposal, assumes, without evidence, that an Ulster federal parliament will be to the satisfaction of loyalists, since it offers a degree of autonomy. Sinn Fein has struggled with how to accommodate Unionists, but shares power at the elite level and has embarked upon its unionist outreach programme. Moreover, at the local level, particularly at sectarian interfaces, has engaged in dialogue with loyalists. This should not be conflated with acceptance of the legitimacy of the rival tradition, but it is more accommodationist than was the case pre-Good Friday Agreement. Despite denials, the 'dissident' form of republicanism appears to be more absorbtionist than accommodationist.

Dissident durability: historical determinism

The longevity and durability of 'dissident' Irish Republicans' armed campaigns have been a source of surprise to many, not least the security services, which have admitted to complacency in dealing with such groups. In September 2010 the head of MI5, Jonathan Evans, confirmed this when he addressed the issue of 'dissident' groups in a speech on national security:

> **The Security Service ... assumed the lead responsibility for national security intelligence work in Northern Ireland in October 2007. At that point our working assumption was that the residual threat from terrorism in Northern Ireland was low and likely to decline further as time went on ... Sadly that has not proved to be the case ... [and] we have seen a persistent rise in terrorist activity and ambition in Northern Ireland over the last three years. Whilst at present the dissidents campaign is focused in Northern Ireland we cannot exclude the possibility that they might seek to extend their attack to Great Britain as violent Republican groups have traditionally done.**[460]

Though it was unlikely armed resistance to British rule in Ireland was ever going to be *completely* eradicated, the belief that violence could be kept to such low levels as to be almost negligible has been proven misplaced. The number of violent incidents for which 'dissident' groups have been responsible has been on the rise recently. Furthermore, data suggests that the political wings of these organisations may attract slightly more sympathy than had previously been the case.

Reliant upon historical determinism and possessing a mandate from the dead, not the living, dissident republicans offer ideological certainties and faith in the longevity of their cause. Ruairi O'Bradaigh claims that despite occasional lulls in paramilitarism, Republican violence will always pose a risk to security forces given the nature of the conflict. This view was restated in an interview immediately after the murder of two British soldiers and a police officer in 2009:

> **I have always said that anyone with an acquaintance with Irish history would realise what happens. Ireland was invaded by England and colonised and this was met with resistance. That resistance has been the way for hundreds of years. So I would feel that what happened last weekend [the murder of two British soldiers and a PSNI officer] could have happened and will happen at any time.[461]**

Dismissed by some as an unscientific, teleological view of Irish history, O'Bradaigh's analysis nevertheless seems to have been buttressed by recent events. Despite the rise in strength of a nationalist party in a revamped Northern parliament, as well as significant improvements in the social and economic conditions faced by that community, physical force Republicanism seems to be slowly growing both in terms of military capacity and levels of support. Indeed, Evans himself lent weight to this interpretation when stating,

> **Perhaps we were giving insufficient weight to the pattern of history over the last hundred years which shows that whenever the main body of Irish republicanism has reached a political accommodation and rejoined constitutional politics, a hardliner rejectionist group would fragment off and continue with the so called 'armed struggle'.[462]**

This grudging acceptance from the head of the British intelligence service that republican violence will continue, perhaps ad infinitum, seems to suggest that these 'ultra' groups cannot be crushed, nor absorbed into 'mainstream' constitutional politics without a new paramilitary group taking up their mantle. In this sense, Republican 'purists' would claim history (perhaps most notably 1969/70) is repeating itself. Furthermore, Evans would appear to be advancing an 'inevitable level of violence' thesis.

'Dissident' republicans may now recover from the disastrous events of 1998. Sympathy for their actions is small but significant and the popularity of their political wings likewise; they also have enough military capability and expertise to carry out an increasing number of operations, including some leading to security service fatalities.

Conclusion: dissident versus mainstream republicanism

Crucially to the purpose of this thesis, what are the implications of dissidence for the ideological and political development of Sinn Fein? Is it the case that sympathy for 'dissident' groups is on the rise due to a realisation that Sinn Fein cannot deliver on their long-term unity pledge? If so, do 'dissidents' offer a viable alternative approach? Or does the increase in violent activity represent little more than a minor fluctuation in the internal dynamics of the nationalist/republican political sphere in which Sinn Fein are undoubtedly now dominant? The answer to these questions may lie in the relationship between 'dissident' organisations discussed earlier in the chapter, as well as the prospects for any of these groups in terms of achieving stated political and constitutional aims.

Sinn Fein's disdain for the lack of military clout and the absence of political direction possessed by their rivals is apparent. In terms of the realisation of the republican goal of delivering a 32 county Irish Republic, occasional killing or maiming is unlikely to sufficiently perturb the British government given it resisted a full-scale armed insurrection in the 1970s and continued to resist calls for withdrawal thereafter. Given that 'dissident' groups must in the main accept this, one might conclude that members of these groups have elevated armed struggle to the status of Republican core principle, even if conditions for successful armed rebellion are not fertile. Of course, the counter argument is that conditions for armed struggle from 1798 onwards have *never* seemed fertile, though in as much as social and economic conditions play a part in leading to violence it seems less appropriate now than ever. For Sinn Fein there is the obvious difficulty of explaining why violence from 1970 until 1997 was acceptable, but is immediately rendered unacceptable from April 1998 onwards, after a deal which did not yield the result which the violence was supposed to bring about. The arguments proffered of 'context' may not convince all. Moreover, the assertion that republicans are in a 'better place' may be true, but they remain in a British place. Of course to disavow three decades of violence would be to render that 'struggle' as pointless or illegitimate, a course of retrospection unpalatable to Sinn Fein.

For the proponents of the armed campaign, however, there are legitimate reasons for carrying on the struggle. The first, one in which combatants can claim to have been reasonably successful, is that violence prevents the normalisation of society. Whilst rarely visible, a British Army presence remains in Northern Ireland and 'normalisation' has been hindered by the 'dissident' campaign. That a majority of Protestants seem to regard the campaign as a genuine threat to the peace process demonstrates as much. The second is that keeping the armed campaign going is essential in giving potential new supporters the inspiration and impetus to get involved in militant republicanism. Moreover, should such

support arrive, an ongoing armed struggle drawing new supporters will claim to be a bigger threat to the British government than will a reformist political group without weaponry. Therefore, it is argued, armed resistance has to continue. Finally, and this relates to the previous rationale, there is the potential to draw the British security services into excessive force by carrying on an armed campaign. This in turn might increase resentment of the British state and support for the 'dissident' militants factions. All the while, the current lack of popular support is cast aside as a matter of no significance.[463]

Hayes and McAllister offer *some* support for these 'dissident' hypotheses. They claim that "... exposure to political violence is often a cause of further violence, through support for paramilitarism and by a disinclination to support the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons".[464] They also claim that the only way to purge a society of this tendency to support or become involved in violence is a lengthy period of peace, as demonstrated by the Irish Republic in the 20th century.[465] On this basis, the continuation of the armed campaign has a crude logic, since it keeps paramilitary violence in the realm of the 'normal' and might encourage others to join the resistance to British rule. However, Hayes and McAllister also present some less encouraging arguments for 'dissidents'. The first is that "... the decision whether or not to use constitutional or extra-constitutional methods is less a moral one than a matter of expediency and practicality; if violence is seen to have the greatest chance of achieving the required political goals, then it will be utilized".[466] Thus RIRA and CIRA are unlikely to see a huge upsurge in recruits unless there is a growing belief they can remove the sovereign claim to Northern Ireland by force. Since there is no indication that this is possible, the ability of these groups to mobilise their population looks doubtful. Moreover, their 'principled' political positions are of little interest to general population, who take a far more pragmatic approach.

Sinn Fein's scorn for other 'dissident' claims is a rational electoral position for the party to adopt. The likelihood of masses of new volunteers joining the RIRA or CIRA seems very low. The social and economic conditions in 2010 are extremely different to those of the early 1970s. People do not live in Catholic ghettos and thus, generally, do not wish to be represented by an armed militia rather than democratically elected politicians. Moreover, the British security forces and the reformed police are extremely unlikely to use excessive force as was the case in previous eras. Lessons have been learned about the counter-productive nature of 'hard-line' tactics such as curfew and internment. The prospect of the British Army being drawn into a situation whereby it fires indiscriminately at innocent civilians seems utterly remote in the modern era.

Despite this pertinent condemnation of its rivals, Sinn Fein too is vulnerable to powerful criticisms of its approach. Notwithstanding the fact the party argue it has made tangible gains for its community, as well as moderate constitutional success in terms of moving the political focus away from London and introducing cross-border and all-island bodies (though these structures were largely proposed and negotiated by the SDLP), it faces what seem to be insurmountable obstacles to its goals in the shape of the requirement to gain unionist support for the notion of a united Ireland. In order to maintain an influence on the affairs of Northern Ireland, the party has been required to fully integrate itself into the mainstream political sphere, including helping to administer British rule by accepting and upholding the rule of law. There is little to suggest that Irish unity is any closer to being achieved through Sinn Fein's actions. The 'unionist veto' has been entrenched after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement and there is no credible military threat to British authority.

The party highlight that this new phase of republicanism, the participatory period, is a mere 12 years old. Previous unsuccessful stages, namely the armed struggle and the abstentionist era, went on for many years without yielding the desired Irish unity. Consequently this approach has to be permitted time to develop in order to see if it can deliver results. Sinn Fein may point out that 12 years is a very short period of time for a political ideology over 200 years old, yet the party's claims about needing time to pursue a unity strategy are somewhat unconvincing. The party has frontloaded equality rather than liberty and it remains unclear how a northern state working better will make Irish unity more appealing.

Whilst this generation of republicans have, in common with their predecessors, come from an ideological background centring on delivering Irish unity, 'tactical' alterations have resulted in dilution of traditional Irish Republicanism to such an extent as to become a subtly different ideology rather than an updated version of the same doctrine. In this sense a worthy comparison is the political movements that have come out of traditional socialism. Though socialism originally demanded an entirely planned economy and widespread redistribution of wealth, when it became clear this was achievable neither by revolution nor reformist politics (much like Irish unity), social democracy acted as a revisionist method and outcome.

Sinn Fein can at least argue it is following a course of action likely to deliver a settlement somewhat closer to a united Ireland than can any of the 'dissident' groups. Supporters of 32CSM and especially Republican Sinn Fein may feel they are truer to Irish Republican ideology, but their refusal to adapt to changing circumstances leaves them unable to influence policy at all. Disheartening though it would be to admit as much publically, Sinn Fein's willingness to acknowledge its limitations and revise (some would say 'downgrade') its

brand of republicanism has at least permitted the party to press on with some welcome reforms of benefit to those who, in an ideal world, would favour a united Ireland. Therein lies the party's strength and the reason for its continued strong electoral performances. Though Sinn Fein may have changed more than any of the other proponents of Irish Republicanism since 1969, it is also the only party in a position to advance the republican agenda at all. In this sense, it's a better representative of republicanism than any of the alternatives.

The following chapter summarising the findings of the thesis will make an assessment as to the success of Sinn Fein in subtly concealing their divergence from traditional republicanism, as well as the extent to which they can be argued to have been successful in their political activities given they were locked into an unwinnable conflict with the British state and the Northern unionist community. This will include a final appraisal of the party's electoral battle with the SDLP, the constitutional gains the party has secured and which marginal elements of the traditional republican agenda the party might realistically still hope to deliver given their inability to secure a united Ireland.

CONCLUSION: ONWARD MARCH OR ABANDONMENT; SINN FEIN POLICY AS A CONTINUING 'REPUBLICANISM'?

Throughout the course of this thesis a number of key research questions have been addressed in order to determine the extent to which Sinn Fein policy remains consistent with fundamental republican principles. In so doing, the thesis has also considered the distinctions between Sinn Fein's ideological and political approaches and those of the SDLP and 'dissident' republicans. This summarising chapter will detail the conclusions drawn after exploring these issues. This will entail restating those questions asked in the introductory part of the thesis and delivering a clear answer to each. This will allow an overview of those principles found to be at the core of Irish Republicanism in the early part of the thesis, the extent to which nationalist convergence has been down to Sinn Fein emulation of the SDLP or vice versa and the prospects for realisation of traditional republican goals following the Good Friday and St Andrews Agreements. This has involved analysis of the republican core of Sinn Fein; assessing the importance of Sinn Fein electoral performances, political attitudes within the party and beyond and the rationale behind the condemnation by Sinn Fein of 'dissident' republican activities carried out using what was once the Provisionals' *modus operandi*. In order to remain true to republican principles, any organisation must be following a course of action likely to increase the possibility of a united independent Ireland. Whilst electoral success or structural improvements are welcome for such a group, they must be playing some role in the transition towards the movement's central aim. With this having been established, it was possible to gauge the extent to which Sinn Fein's more flexible approach and modern policies can be labelled 'republican'.

What, if any, are the core principles of Irish republicanism?

Careful consideration of the many strands of the republican movement made it possible to discount such marginal elements as socialism, Gaelicism and Catholicism. Though each of these have been of particular significance to republicans at various times through history, they are not absolutely central to the movement. One need not be a socialist, Catholic or Gaelic cultural enthusiast to be an Irish republican. Moreover, some Republicans have been hostile to one or more of these aspects of republican thinking.

The peripheral nature of these ideological tenets is demonstrated by the reverence by republicans in all eras of divergent figures, such as James Connolly, Padraig Pearse or even Sean MacStiofain, all of whom had differing views on these marginal elements of republican thinking. Connolly's brand of republicanism was heavily influenced by Marxist thinking. However, many fellow republicans, including Sinn Fein's constructor Arthur Griffith, found such leftist ideology distasteful. Moreover, in later eras Republicans economic policies oscillated between Marxism, socialism, social democracy and centrist Catholic-influenced philosophy. Consequently, socialism must be discounted as a potential 'core principle' of Irish Republicanism, despite it being consistently favoured and articulated by a large portion of the Irish Republican movement.

For Pearse, the revival of Gaelic culture was at the forefront of his political agenda. However, for many of his contemporaries and successors, a republicanism designed to unite Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter was not helped by such veneration of Gaelicism. Indeed, it was unhelpful in attracting support for Irish unity from those Protestants likely to be more predisposed to unionism. Moreover, most Irish Republicans, especially those in Sinn Fein's

northern base, have been unable to speak Gaelic and remain uninterested in reviving the language and culture. Again, the existence of so many republicans unsupportive of Gaelic revivalism reveals the fringe nature of its significance to republicanism.

Sean MacStiofain provides an example of a republican influenced by Catholic, often sectarian, impulses, used to justify physical force republicanism. His desire to 'defend' Catholic areas was crucial in his decision to assist in the formation of the Provisional movement in late 1969. However, strained relations between the republican movement and the Catholic Church, as well as the presence of many non-Catholic republicans, with origins back to Tone and the United Irishmen, have often indicated the marginality of Catholicism to the republican project. Most republicans, whilst influenced by Catholicism and prone to sectarianism given the nature of inter-communal rivalries in the North, have long argued for a full separation of Church from State.

Though anti-monarchism is an important strand of Republicanism, it was not the original position of Sinn Fein under its founder, but in modern times is of little salience as an issue, other than opposition to monarchy being one of the few items that unites all shades of republicans. Of greater importance is the republican interpretation of British colonialism.

Whilst republicans strongly desire independence for Ireland, some acknowledge that the relationship between (Northern) Ireland and England is comparable to that of Scotland or Wales. That is, though denied full independence, it is perhaps not a colonial relationship *per se*. Rather than being directly coerced into the United Kingdom, the Irish Parliament voted to dissolve itself as a precursor to the Act of Union in 1801. Admittedly, the Catholic

population of the country were not permitted to vote at this time, whilst many members of the parliament were offered sizeable monetary incentives to acquiesce to political union with Britain, but nevertheless this remains a somewhat unusual chronology of events in the colonisation of one country by another. Thereafter, Irish MPs were offered seats at Westminster and the country was a fully integrated part of the United Kingdom. This differs greatly from the relationship between Britain and its African and Asian colonies.

Irish republicans and nationalists of different hues concur that the British government must take historical responsibility for the troubles in Ireland, but differ over whether Britain is a modern colonial aggressor. Long-standing constitutional republicans, such as those found in Fianna Fail accept the assertion that Britain has no selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland. Sinn Fein has moved towards tacit acceptance of this position. Dissident republicans reject such contentions and argue that Northern Ireland remains a country occupied for reasons of British prestige.

At the absolute core of mainstream republican ideology, if this label can now be applied to Sinn Fein, is the desire to break the connection with Britain and establish a 32 County Irish State free from British rule. Motivations above and beyond this desire, whilst often widely shared by republicans, are not central to the movement. This has been confirmed not only through widespread study of historical and contemporary republican literature, but also through face to face interviews with politicians and other representatives. Modern republicans who 'fought the war' and had either strong nationalist tendencies,[467] or strong socialist credentials,[468] accept this to be the case. This cause of separation helps distinguish Irish Republicanism from Irish Nationalism. Whilst the aims of the two often coincide, nationalists are not necessarily separatists. Rather, they seek protection or greater

recognition for their national language, culture or other characteristics. Though this often makes independence an attractive prospect for nationalists, it is not a requirement. Republicans often favour similar policies to nationalists in relation to culture and language, though such policies are not a republican's primary concern, unlike the desire for Irish unity free from British rule.

On which ideological commitments has Sinn Fein overseen a significant change in the republican movement?

Sinn Fein's republican principles were based upon the need for Irish self-determination. In order to achieve the end of breaking the connection with Britain, Republicans seek to utilise the means of a national plebiscite. Traditionally Republicans have demanded the Irish people be given the right to determine the nation's future as a single unit. Yet this demand was diluted under the influence of the northern nationalism of the SDLP. Sinn Fein's original interpretation rested upon ethno-geographical determinism, which perceived the nation and state as coterminous 32 county entities. This position denies nationhood to Unionists beyond the Irish framework. Its reinterpretation marks a new departure, to a more civic and pluralist republicanism, which attempts to accommodate the cultural and political diversity of two separate traditions (mainstream republicans still struggle with the concept of 'two nations') on the island. For republican diehards, such accommodation legitimises a unionist constitutional veto.

The issue of self-determination and the way in which it came to be viewed by Republicans represented one of the most radical departures from Republican orthodoxy by Sinn Fein. The SDLP had for some years under John Hume's leadership articulated 'co-determination'

as a legitimate form of Irish self-determination. That is, the people of Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic voting concurrently, though separately, on the constitutional future of the island. Sinn Fein had disparaged this view, dismissing it as tantamount to acceptance of the 'unionist veto'. However, in the wake of the Hume-Adams talks of the late 1980s and the publishing of *Towards a Lasting Peace* in 1992, the Sinn Fein leadership came to accept an exercise in self-determination identical to that the SDLP had been suggesting for years.

This changing definition of self-determination is a demonstration of the way in which Sinn Fein's brand of Republicanism has as often been situational as it has ideational. The party recognised that the all-island plebiscite they desired was unachievable. Given this, the decision was taken to support the Good Friday Agreement in order to take its seats in a reformed Stormont. The party, previously hostile to the European Union on the grounds of its undermining of national sovereignty, began to cite ongoing European integration as one justification for downgrading an all-island referendum on Irish unity to aspiration, rather than minimum requirement. John Hume had been claiming for some time that the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic was of less significance in modern Europe. Instead of continuing demands for immediate territorial sovereignty by way of all-island vote, Sinn Fein decided to take a similar stance to Hume focused instead on 'sovereignty of the people'.

This was a prime example of Sinn Fein reacting to circumstances and taking decisions appropriately, rather than sticking by a rigid interpretation of republican orthodoxy and losing the political momentum the party was seeking to build. Just as the decision to begin contesting elections came about after the sudden arousal of nationalist sentiment in the wake of the hunger strikes, or as the decision to recognise Leinster House was taken in

order to deliver relevance and a greater vote share, Sinn Fein regularly displayed sufficient flexibility of thought and fluidity of ideas to change its tactics in accordance with altering circumstances. This is a strength and a weakness of the party: the strength lies in the ability to strive for immediate goals without getting bogged down by inconvenient realities regarding traditional demands; the weakness is the vulnerability to criticism of revisionism.

What is it, if anything, that distinguishes Sinn Fein from the SDLP today?

Having outlined a theoretical framework by which to reference republicanism and nationalism in Ireland, from the third chapter onwards the thesis began to look at the specific relationship between the two primary representatives of these traditions - Sinn Fein and the SDLP. The relationship between the parties is often characterised as one between a moderate, measured, reformist SDLP and a more 'extreme' Sinn Fein. Moreover the question begged is whether over time Sinn Fein came to 'steal' the SDLP's policies and rhetoric as part of a quest to usurp it electorally; a quest in which it has been successful. However, analysis of the two parties' histories revealed significant evidence to suggest that both the characterisation of the parties, and the general consensus about the dynamics between them, is somewhat inaccurate.

At their births in 1970, the two parties were broadly as described above, which in turn ties in with the definitions of republicanism and nationalism forwarded earlier. Sinn Fein were in full support of the PIRA's campaign to first bring down Stormont, then push for full British withdrawal and the establishment of a united Ireland. The party showed no interest in participating in any of the political institutions for which it was eligible. Indeed, it did not even contest elections to such institutions. This is in contrast to the SDLP, the foundation of

which was primarily about improving representation of the nationalist population and bringing about reform within Northern Ireland. The party even went as far as to state that immediate reunification of the island would be counter-productive, since it would not permit an opportunity for unionists and nationalists to build trust and improve community relations.

Broadly speaking, this remained the case until the destruction of the power-sharing arrangement introduced as a result of the Sunningdale Agreement. The SDLP had shown a willingness to employ abstentionism when it withdrew as the official opposition at Stormont in 1971, as well as to flirt with a colonial interpretation of the conflict more commonly associated with Sinn Fein at this time, but nevertheless the party sought reform within Northern Ireland and desired political representation within these new arrangements. Sinn Fein was consistent in its support for the PIRA's campaign. Although it was loyalist strikes that eventually brought down the Sunningdale Agreement, in large part down to fears about the Council of Ireland's powers and implications for the future of Northern Ireland, it had been the PIRA's intention to destroy the arrangement.

From 1974 onwards, however, there is a body of evidence suggesting the SDLP have been historically misevaluated. The party seemed to undergo a 'greening' process whereby it upgraded the Irish dimension to its primary concern ahead of working with unionists in order build trust between the two traditions on the island. Not only was a motion passed at the party's 1978 annual conference stating that British withdrawal was "inevitable and desirable", but the party rejected the opportunity to engage in talks on power-sharing once it became clear an all-island dimension would not be an option. This was much to the chagrin of the party's leader at the time, Gerry Fitt, who had wanted to continue with the

policy of working with unionists within Northern Ireland. Fitt resigned shortly afterwards, with John Hume taking over.

In short then, the claim that Sinn Fein eventually came to emulate the SDLP in almost every respect, which explains nationalist convergence in Northern Ireland, implies a consistency in SDLP policy that was not always there. The SDLP was more 'red' than 'green' at its foundation, but by the late 1970s this had changed. The party's rhetoric was more ambiguous, perhaps in an attempt to be more attractive to those with republican leanings, whilst participation had been eschewed on the basis it would not deliver a sufficiently 'green' settlement. Though Sinn Fein later modified many of its policies to such an extent that they became similar to those of the SDLP, particularly after the Hume-Adams talks of the late 1980s, this merely mirrored a process which had begun a decade earlier with the roles reversed.

Have the numerous changes in Sinn Fein policy over the years been an adaptation of republican principles to a modern setting, or has the republican movement merely embarked upon a quest for electoral success and power in which 'republicanism' is defined by what the party does?

Having established that there has been a process of nationalist convergence as a result of both Sinn Fein *and* SDLP policy alterations, the thesis then went on to interpret Sinn Fein's changing policies with reference to its republican historical commitments. This involved looking at the decisions to begin contesting elections, then recognising Leinster House and later Stormont. These political decisions were accompanied by the abandonment of support

for 'armed' struggle', leading to the decommissioning of PIRA weapons in 2005, followed by recognition of the reformed police force in 2007.

Sinn Fein can reasonably be argued to have prioritised both electoral supremacy over the SDLP and the quest for internal equality over the desire for immediate Irish liberty. After the poor post-Hunger Strike electoral performances of the mid 1980s, the party openly stated it needed to recognise Leinster House in order to improve its electoral fortunes in the Irish Republic. The fact this parliament was British-imposed and its recognition would lend it legitimacy was deemed less important than was the quest to gather an increased number of votes. Moreover, having started contesting elections in the modern era, ignoring Leinster House on the basis of a 'mandate' handed to the PIRA Army council by Tom Maguire seemed illogical. Finally the party acknowledged it was not a 'government in waiting', but one of many competing for power in Ireland.

Later the party stressed the need for PIRA caution in its operations for the benefit of Sinn Fein's electoral campaigns. The primary example of the PIRA's activities negatively affecting Sinn Fein's electoral performances came after the Remembrance Day bombing in Enniskillen of 1987. The incident drew widespread revulsion and even the party's own publication, *An Phoblacht*, carried an article outlining the importance of the PIRA acting with caution in order not to sabotage Sinn Fein's electoral chances. Sinn Fein demonstrated the extent of its policy changes when it endorsed the notion of separate referenda being a legitimate exercise in Irish self-determination. Previously labelled the 'unionist veto', by 1998 it was deemed an exercise in 'co-determination', whereby all the Irish people voting on the island's political future, even separately, was satisfactory. As admitted by senior party figures, this

decision was taken in order to advance short-term political goals, even though it was clearly not in line with traditional republican principles.[469]

The all-island structures attached to the power-sharing settlement at Stormont are fairly modest in terms of their scope and significance.[470] They were largely negotiated by the SDLP and are little more extensive than those attached to the Sunningdale Agreement of 1973 (less so in respect of policing) which Sinn Fein sought to destroy. Rather than push for a better deal constitutionally, Sinn Fein was more concerned with issues such as PIRA prisoner releases. In large part this can be explained as an attempt to keep the movement united at a time when a serious split would be particularly damaging. Consequently, one can assert that short-term pragmatism had taken precedence over attempts to deliver a greater degree of all-island government.

In terms of electoral fortunes in the North, Sinn Fein policy revisions have enabled the party to grow significantly in the wake of the Good Friday Agreement. After a high point in the SDLP's vote in the first election after the signing of the agreement, Sinn Fein managed to catch up its nationalist rival and subsequently began consistently outpolling it from 2001. Though the SDLP's vote has proven to be reasonably resilient, Sinn Fein has managed to mobilise supporters better than any other party in Northern Ireland. Moreover, its support amongst the middle class/salariat has risen almost exponentially. This has enabled the party to dominate the vote from within its own community and even to challenge the DUP as Northern Ireland's largest party. In 2010 it outpolled all of its rivals, leading to speculation that unionist electoral pacts might be required in order to deny Martin McGuinness of the opportunity to become Northern Ireland's First Minister after the 2011 assembly elections.

Recently turnout has begun to fall in nationalist areas, but Sinn Fein's 'new republicanism' retains considerable appeal.

In the Irish Republic too there has been some progress, although the party's growth has been far less impressive than in Northern Ireland. The party started from a low support base, having captured only 2.6% of the vote in the 1997 Irish General Election and returned a single TD to the Dail. By 2009 the party's share of the vote was over 10%, with over 200,000 supporting the party in the elections to the European Parliament. Despite the respectable overall levels of support, the party lost its sole European seat when beaten by socialist candidate Joe Higgins. This was in part down to a reduction in the number of seats offered to Irish parties at the parliament. Having also improved its total number of votes whilst losing a seat in the previous General Election, this was a familiar situation for the party. So, despite the negative impact of boundary changes and possible errors in electoral strategy, the party's support has risen to respectable levels and continues to be on a general upward trajectory.

Modern Sinn Fein: Still 'Republican'?

Sinn Fein point to the electoral success they have enjoyed since 1998 as evidence that the population of the North are confident in Sinn Fein's ability to deliver on its promises. However, having established that above all the quest for Irish unity must be the priority for any group true to republican core principles, the party is vulnerable to criticism over the extent and nature of its political changes. The acceptance of 'co-determination' on the constitutional future of Ireland gives the unionist community the power to block any transitional moves towards Irish unity. However, despite its outreach programme, the party

have failed to make any meaningful progress in appealing to the unionist community, with data suggesting communal identity remains of the utmost importance for voters.[471] Moreover, in as much as there are cross-community transfers, unionists tend to choose the SDLP over Sinn Fein. This is despite *elite* level cooperation with former enemies having been relatively fruitful, with the power-sharing agreement remaining in place and stable.

The decommissioning of PIRA weapons and the ultimate recognition of the PSNI has led to a proliferation in 'dissident' groups, some advocating the continuation of violence against the police and British security services. These groups are varied in their general political outlooks, with only uniting features being dissatisfaction with Sinn Fein's political strategy, a total disregard for loyalism and the ultimate desire for an independent united Ireland. The fact there is such hostility towards the Provisional movement from a number of sources, including from former members and supporters now in alternative organisations, calls into question the group's republican credentials.

These 'dissident' groups, however, are susceptible to having their own political programmes deconstructed. Above all, in order for any group to be considered truly republican, it must be following a course of action likely to bring about the establishment of the united Irish Republic. The likelihood of the aggressive socialism of Eirigi or the IRSP succeeding in uniting Irish people of all political persuasions around the quest for Irish unity appears slim to nil. Indeed, it was a political vision remarkably similar to this that caused the split between the Official and Provisional movements at the very beginning of the 'troubles'. Subsequent events make a grim blueprint for Eirigi and IRSP ambitions. The 'purist' RSF and its military wing are seen by most as an outdated, fundamentalist group with little military clout. Finally, the 32 CSM and RIRA are in many ways like the pre-1998 Provisional

movement, only with fewer members and less military might. Considering the Provisionals themselves abandoned the armed campaign and embraced participatory politics after concluding there was no chance the British government were to going to be forced to withdraw by republican violence, the notion that the RIRA have any opportunity of doing so appears absurd.

Given these circumstances, it seems clear that 'dissidents' have a strong case in highlighting the weaknesses of Sinn Fein's supposed unity strategy, though they fail to offer a viable alternative path to the elusive Republic. This leads to the conclusion that of the many competing republicanisms in Ireland, none can claim to be the one and true form of the movement, since not one of the various guises looks to have any prospect of uniting Ireland. Sinn Fein at least can point to some gains as a result of their strategy, not least having significant influence over the administration of the North of Ireland, as well as having secured the release of those prisoners who fought the war against the British government.

It is the willingness to support actions against those with different republican methodologies which also detracts from Sinn Fein's continuing claim to be 'republican'. The party upholds the rule of law, participates in the Northern state and accepts the right of the unionist community to veto any move towards a united Ireland. However, what the party can legitimately claim in the face of fierce criticism from 'dissident' organisations is that it is in the best position to secure a set of circumstances most amenable to those people traditionally inclined to republican beliefs. The party's success in building a large, well-supported political party capable of challenging the largest unionist party as the biggest in Northern Ireland puts it in a position whereby it can have a significant influence on policy-making in the North. However, to accept this form of republicanism is to accept both

aggression towards other variations of the ideology, as well as support for the notion of 'co-determination' as a legitimate means to make decisions on Ireland's future. Such a diluted form of republican doctrine as that Sinn Fein are offering may be argued to be stretching the republican concept beyond elasticity. It is progress (or lack thereof) towards the stated central aim of unity that will continue to determine the legitimacy of the republican tag the party continues to adopt.

As a consequence of the investigations outlined above, it has been possible to draw a number of firm conclusions, each of which makes a significant contribution to academic understanding of modern Irish Republicanism and Nationalism. The first relates to the way in which Sinn Fein and the SDLP have influenced one another over a forty year period. The second outlines the SDLP's uphill battle in retaining an independent, relevant political agenda in the modern era. The third addresses the fundamental question posed at the beginning of this thesis – can Sinn Fein policy still be considered 'republican'?

Sinn Fein, though it has had a great deal of electoral success, particularly in the North, has seen a growing threat to its political strategy from 'dissident' Republicanism. Though these 'dissident' organisations have offered little in terms of viable alternatives, they have been effective in identifying weaknesses in Sinn Fein's unity strategy. They have had particular success in criticising the PIRA's decision to disarm and Sinn Fein's recognition of the PSNI. Sinn Fein's ability to refute these allegations of 'sell-out' will depend largely on delivering on core republican goals further in the future. Members of the party are right to point out that they will need time in order to realise these goals. They are, after all, only just over a decade into the participatory non-violent phase of 'struggle'. However, should convincing unionists of the merits of Irish unity prove impossible, the party's brand of unarmed,

participatory republicanism in which separate referenda on Ireland's constitutional future is accepted as legitimate may be viewed by many as a failure. That is not to say there are any alternatives which appear more, or even as, likely to yield success. Rather, it indicates that republicans of all hues look powerless in their attempts to realise core goals.

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