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rhetic about the necessity of leaving
dictatorial power in Sadat's hands in
the interests of a nonexistent struggle
against the Israeli occupation of Egypt
than land is less effective.
The student movement appears to
be in a stage of political germina-
tion. The desire for political democ-
racy is universal; how to achieve it
is under debate. The political con-
fusion rampant in the movement is
a function on the one hand of the
decrepitude of Nasserism, and on the
other of the failure of any significant
tendency to systematically go beyond

it. But increasingly as the students
press for democracy, the tendency to
introduce even broader social ques-
tions will deepen. When the Egyptian
trade-union movement begins to ac-
tively enter the struggle, the police
will be insufficient for carrying out
repression. At some point, Sadat is
sure to resort to the army itself.

Unless the workers and students can
develop sufficient strength and a suf-
ficiently sophisticated leadership in
time, the Egyptian people will then
face an Iraqi-style military dictator-
ship. □

Official Republicans Meet in Dublin

A Step Forward for the Irish Vanguard

By Gerry Foley

"An important Ard-Fheis," the Jan-
uary 5 issue of the prestigious Dublin
biweekly *Hibernia* said in describing
the December 16-17 convention of
Sinn Féin, the political wing of the
Official republican movement. Most of
the Irish press seemed to agree that
the Official gathering had been an
"important" event but at the same time
showed confusion as to the precise
nature of its "importance."

The bewilderment of the bourgeois
journalists is understandable. Irish re-
publicanism is unique. It is a tra-
ditional movement that continues the
age-old struggle against the social re-
lations introduced by the conquest of
Ireland, a fight so ancient that its
motivations are more instinctive than
conscious. It combines bits and pieces
of contradictory philosophies and out-
looks whose implications have never
been developed in a consistent way.

At the same time, the bourgeois jour-
nalists could not help noticing a new
ferment of ideas at the *ard fheis* and
vague rumbles of profound shifts. In
the past the big papers, as well as
the small far-left groups, have gen-
erally tended to jump to conclusions
about internal struggles between sup-
posedly well-defined groups and in-
dividuals allegedly identified with def-
inite positions. Such hypotheses were
put forward again on this occasion
by various observers.

In fact, no consistent political line
was projected by any group or indi-
vidual at the *ard fheis*. All of the
expressed positions were either vague
or contradictory in important respects.
In general, it seems premature to talk
about crystallized ideological tenden-
cies or groupings in the Official re-
publican movement.

Although the traditional structures
of republicanism are evidently being
strained by the rising pressure of po-
litical debate, they appear to be still
holding together an ideologically di-
verse group that is going through
a complex and painful learning pro-
cess.

About 800 delegates and visitors
were at the Official Sinn Féin con-
vention in the Mansion House in Dub-
lin. The attendance appeared to me
to be about the same in size and com-
position as the last *ard fheis* in Oc-
tober 1971 — mostly young people,
with a fair sprinkling of older repub-
licans. The most obvious difference
from last year was in organization —
a change for the better.

The sale of political literature also
seemed to have been expanded. The
selection was more international, in-
cluding among other things a book
by the American Trotskyist Farrell
Dobbs on the Minneapolis general
strike of 1934 as well as the book
Land or Death by the Peruvian rev-

olutionist Hugo Blanco. My two pam-
phlets, *Ireland in Rebellion* and *Prob-
lems of the Irish Revolution*, were also
on sale.

In tone, the convention was sober
but optimistic, as if the movement had
come through a difficult period but
had managed to consolidate itself
somewhat and was beginning to look
forward to better times. There was
general confidence, although a lot of
criticism of republican trade-union
work was voiced, that the movement
was beginning to win some real in-
fluence among sections of the orga-
nized workers. The emphasis was on
reexamining some basic strategic con-
ceptions and improving the level of
organization. The Official Sinn Féin
seems to have become solid enough
to raise substantial amounts of money
from its ranks for an important ex-
pansion of the movement's apparatus,
no small achievement in view of the
traditional difficulty in raising funds
in Ireland.

"The past year has been a record
one from the point of view of finance,"
the treasurer's report said. "Our in-
come has more than doubled over
the previous year. . . ."

"The Ard Comhairle [national com-
mittee] plans for the building [the Dub-
lin headquarters] include a modern
walk-around bookshop, new offices
for the 'United Irishman' and Sinn
Fein Secretariat. A Library room
open to all members of the Move-
ment, a room for press conferences
and Cumainn [cell] meetings. An au-
ditorium will be built at the rear and
the present printing shop expanded."

Such organizational improvements,
of course, would have only minor
importance if the Officials proved in-
capable of recognizing and solving
serious political problems that have
arisen since last year, resulting among
other things, as the leadership ac-
knowledged at several points, in the
movement's losing its previous "mo-
mentum."

In the area of political analysis,
important progress has been regis-
tered in breaking with conceptions that
proved one-sided or overly rigid in
the past period. In particular, there
was a reassessment of the movement's
approach to the national question.
The most important document in the
republican discussion, the preamble
to a resolution redefining policy on
the Northern question, said among
other things:

January 22, 1973

"In this country more and more the events of the past few years demonstrate that the struggle for democracy is also the national struggle since it is British power and influence that maintains the undemocratic structures and it is the Nationalist population that suffers under this system. . . .

"Correct or not, but the feeling is abroad, that a lot of people in the country and many of our members have the idea that we are not in favour of the 'National Struggle' or the ending of this 'Struggle.' This is one reason why the Provos are still a force today and why they will not fade away for a long time yet. We must begin to show people and demonstrate clearly to all that our objectives are National Unity and Independence and the Socialist Republic." (Emphasis in original.)

The same document criticized economic radicals who blamed the civil-rights movement for dividing Protestant and Catholic workers. It noted that the struggle of the minority for their rights was bound to alienate the Protestant workers, corrupted as they are by a caste mentality deliberately fostered by the British authorities and shaped by the historic system of imperialist rule in Ireland. At the same time it condemned as "utter stupidity" the failure to recognize the role of other factors than the directly economic in shaping history. The document stressed the oneness of the national and social struggle as the basis of revolutionary strategy in Ireland.

This document is symptomatic of a lot of new thinking going on in the republican leadership, the outcome of which cannot yet be predicted with certainty. Among other things, it is not at all clear what implications have been drawn from some of the new ideas that have been developing. To some extent, for example, the movement appears to be still paying the price of past political weaknesses on key questions, such as the failure to settle accounts on a realistic basis with the terrorist traditions of the Irish Republican Army.

In general, the political debate inside the republican movement is still being conducted within a largely traditional rather than scientific framework. This was reflected, for example, in the fact that the highest-level discussion took place on the women's liberation question, which is entirely

new to the movement. On the other hand, the worst discussion was undoubtedly on the cultural resolutions. The question of culture, in effect the role of the Irish language, is probably the area where the most metaphysical clutter has accumulated.

Nonetheless, within the still largely traditionalist context of republican politics, there was a sharper polarization at this *ard fheis* than at the last one, and this is probably what made the bourgeois journalists prick up their ears, while at the same time confusing them as to the nature of the issues.

Ironically, the vague division followed the same general lines as the split that led to formation of the Provisional IRA three years ago, that is, a division between a "metaphysical tendency" and an "analytical tendency." Of course, these are by no means factional groupings or even clear ideological tendencies, and the lines are still shifting. But the Stalinist-trained elements, as well as individuals influenced by other types of economicism, seemed inclined to line up with those older republicans who continue to follow the traditional metaphysical approach of the IRA in a left form.

This trend is natural, since the abstract dogmatic formulas of vulgar Marxists tend to reduce socialist principles to a kind of metaphysics translated into economic terms, the category of the good being changed from the "national people" to the "working class." The irony lies in the fact that the metaphysicians, who have been most vociferous and absolutist in their condemnations of the Provisionals, tended to follow the same basic intellectual method as the ideologists of republican traditionalism who fostered and justified the split.

The same type of absolutist, moralistic condemnations that the Provisional leadership has hurled at the Officials found a counterpart, for example, in the presidential address of Tomás Mac Giolla, who placed full responsibility for a year of defeats on the rival republican organization. In the section of his speech given in Irish, he said:

"Anyone who thinks of the progress that could have been made if it were not for the madness of the Provisionals will understand the way the present generation of Irish people has been betrayed by the politicians of Fianna

Fáil [the ruling party in Dublin, a wing of which encouraged the Provisional split]. They will understand how important it is to say again and again and again that the madness of the Provisionals does not stem from republicanism but from the chiefs of Fianna Fáil, the new Redmondites [the old "constitutional" home-rule party that opposed the struggle for independence], who support the connection with England for the sake of their class interests."

These lines were not repeated in the English part of the speech, or in the summary printed in the January issue of the *United Irishman*, and thus were probably not grasped by the majority of the delegates and visitors.

But although the formulations in the main part of the speech were more positive, they still tended to present the Provisionals with an outright ultimatum that they recognize the error of their ways and return to the fold. "This was the purpose for which the Provisional Alliance was formed by Messrs. Blaney and Haughey with the approval of Lynch [i. e., to divert the struggle in the North]. They even took the name Sinn Féin, the better to distort our policies and objectives and create confusion amongst the people. Mr. Blaney has now openly admitted his part in splitting the Republican Movement and setting up the Provisionals. Mr. Haughey remains silent as he tries to crawl back to the seats of power and together with his *Taca* [the financial backers of Fianna Fáil] henchmen transfers his [real-estate] speculative activities to Belfast, where property is now going cheap as a result of the bombings which they did so much to finance and promote. . . .

"These men and their leader, Lynch, bear more responsibility for the bombs and violence in the North than do the brave but misguided people who plant them. And so do men like Tim Pat Coogan, editor of the *Irish Press*, who was the chief publicist for the Provisionals and not only turned the *Press* into a propaganda organ for them but sang their praises on Radio and Television. Like Fianna Fáil he has now dropped them and is at present reputed to be writing a book about them to exploit, for his own private profit, the sufferings which he helped to create.

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visionals are and that their to be not on I would appe may have b distortions, to and policies. will find there Movement, or stands uncom] ularism and Tone, with th cialism of Pe they will find i

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not repeated in the speech, or in the January 1973 *Irishman*, and thus grasped by the delegates and visitors formulations in the speech were intended to present an outright recognition of the error return to the fold purpose for which was formed and Haughey with [i.e., to divert] orth]. They even Fein, the better and objective amongst the people now openly admitting the Republic setting up the Haughey remain rawl back to the together with his backers of Fianna sfers his [real-ities to Belfast now going cheap bombings which finance and pro

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visionals are being clearly exposed and that their policies are being shown to be not only futile but disastrous, I would appeal to their members who may have been misled by lies and distortions, to examine our actions and policies. I am confident that they will find there is only one Republican Movement, only one Sinn Fein which stands uncompromisingly with the secularism and non-sectarianism of Tone, with the Separatism and Socialism of Pearse and Connolly and they will find it here."

Even when Mac Giolla seems to try to strike the most conciliatory note, he takes an abstract moralistic approach:

"Our enemy is Imperialism and Capitalism and their supporters in Ireland — Unionism which supports direct colonialism and Free Stateism which supports neo-colonialism. It is important to clearly identify our enemies; otherwise we may confuse them with our friends. When we say Unionism is the enemy, we must not regard every supporter of Unionism now as the enemy, just as when we say Free Stateism or neo-colonialism is the enemy we must not regard every supporter of Fianna Fail or Fine Gael as an enemy. To do so would be to say that the majority of people in Ireland, both Catholic and Protestant, are enemies. The working class is never the enemy, no matter to whom they give their allegiance at this time.

"We must therefore have precisely the same outlook towards the Protestant working class who support Unionism as we have toward the Catholic working class who support Fianna Fail . . ."

This passage directly follows the appeal to the Provisional ranks to renounce their errors, but strangely it does not say that they are not the enemy either (perhaps it includes them under "the Catholic working class who support Fianna Fail"), although this might have helped reassure some members of the rival grouping.

In any case, every principle of politics indicates that such appeals are bound to provoke a negative response from the Provisionals. Such general denunciations, moreover, cannot educate the Official rank and file about the real political weaknesses of the Provisionals.

The failure of these absolutist pronouncements to help educate the Of-

ficial ranks politically was shown at the *ard fheis* quite clearly, not only by a flood of resolutions that condemned the sort of dogmatic Stalinoid articles against the Provisionals and the "Provo/Trots" that appeared in the *United Irishman* in the period of disorientation from May to September, but by other resolutions that implicitly or explicitly denied the existence of political differences between the two republican organizations.

A more fruitful approach would be a concrete and rigorously objective analysis of the Provisionals' composition and political dynamic, and a corresponding explanation of the differences separating the two groupings (which would mean coming to grips with some of the ambiguities of the stand of the Official leadership, such as on the question of terrorism). At the same time precise areas ought to be marked out where the interests of all who lay claim to the republican tradition come together and where cooperation is possible and necessary, as in the fight against repression.

"Condemnations" of the "Provisional Alliance," which have become almost a ritual in the Official Sinn Féin, serve no rational political purpose. Not only does such essentially moralistic, metaphysical absolutism have the practical effect of weakening the militant nationalist current in general; it tends to clog all the channels of thought in the Official movement itself, to poison discussion and introduce an atmosphere of dogmatism and suspicion. In particular, blaming all the defeats of the past year on the Provisionals is unpleasantly reminiscent of the Stalinist practice of looking for "traitors" when things go wrong. A more materialistic approach would be to analyze objectively the factors that enabled the Provisionals to grow and to play the "disastrous" role Mac Giolla ascribes to them, especially the errors of the Official movement that contributed to the growth of the rival grouping. A step in that direction was taken in the preamble of the resolution on the Northern question, and that was one of the most hopeful signs at the *ard fheis*.

The Official leadership has seen how harmful the growth of dogmatism can be, as manifested by, among other things, the reaction of its own members to the excesses that appeared for a while in the *United Irishman*. What-

ever the role of individuals or groups in fostering dogmatism, it was facilitated by the atmosphere of hysteria created, in essence, by the Officials' failure to deal politically with the problem of the Provisionals.

One of the most ominous aspects of this problem was the tendency of a de facto combination to develop between young republicans influenced by ultraleft currents, opposed in principle to any cooperation with "middle-class nationalists," and romanticizers of the "tough" methods of Stalinism, whose concept of political struggle consisted of issuing denunciations and lurid threats. The Stalinoid romantic posturing in particular was unpleasantly reminiscent of the attitude of the German Communist party in its ultraleft period, when it threatened to "liquidate" the Social Democratic workers at the very time the fascists were preparing in fact to liquidate both the CP and the Social Democrats.

The fact that for the first time some one-sided formulas, which seemed virtually sacrosanct in the Official movement over the past period, were challenged at the *ard fheis* was thus a very hopeful sign. It indicates that the Official republican movement has resumed its development and that the dogmatic carry-overs and tendencies may be surmounted.

But at the same time the metaphysical approach was still strong enough at this year's *ard fheis* to cost the Officials another important opportunity. The confusion of the journalists reporting the convention illustrates this failure. The Officials got little apparent benefit from the press coverage, just the dubious honor of some foggy speculation about internal power struggles. But if they had used the occasion to project a clear appeal to the Provisionals for united action against the Dublin government's repression, this could have carried powerful impact. As a new initiative, it would have helped substantially to clear away the dogmatic tendencies in Irish politics that have promoted the worst attitudes among the Provisionals as well as the Officials.

Nonetheless, there is every reason to believe that the Official republicans will be able to reorient themselves in a positive direction. After all, they built the most effective united-front campaign in modern Irish history, the civil-rights movement.

[To be continued.]

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Author: Gerry Foley

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