

WHERE SINN FEIN STANDS

PRICE, 2p

THE following statement was issued subsequent to a meeting of the Caretaker Executive of Sinn Fein on January 17, 1970.

We, the Caretaker Executive of the Sinn Fein organisation, wish to explain to the Irish people why almost half the delegates to the recent Ard-Fheis "walked out" from the Intercontinental Hotel on Sunday, January 11, and resumed the Ard-Fheis in the Kevin Barry Hall, 44 Parnell Square, Dublin. There they elected us as a Caretaker Executive pending the re-convening of a full Ard-Fheis.

There are five major reasons for the walk-out. Each is explained in detail in the following paragraphs:

RECOGNITION OF PARLIAMENTS

The Sinn Fein organisation, since its foundation in 1905, has consistently denied the right of the British Parliament to rule in Ireland. Similarly, Sinn Fein has refused to recognise the two partition parliaments at Stormont and Leinster House, forced on the Irish people under the British Government of Ireland Act, 1920, and the Treaty of Surrender of 1921.

Sinn Fein's alternative to these British institutions of government was the All-Ireland Republican Dail which it assembled in January, 1919. It remains the task of Sinn Fein today to lead the Irish people away from British, Six-County and 26-County parliaments and towards the re-assembly of the 32-County Dail which will then legislate for and rule all Ireland.

Those who remained in the Intercontinental Hotel on Sunday, January 11, 1970, sought to reverse this basic principle of the Sinn Fein organisation down the years and to participate in all three existing parliaments. That sitting and participating in the affairs of these assemblies constitutes "recognition" of them, all reasonable people will agree without hesitation.

Those who walked out stand by the Constitution and Rules of the Sinn Fein organisation and claim the historic name of Sinn Fein, while those who remained sought, without success to alter that Constitution and change a National Movement into yet another political party seeking votes at all costs.

Having failed to secure the necessary two-thirds majority to effect these changes they then pressed on the Ard-Fheis a resolution requiring a simple majority only, viz.: "expressing allegiance to an I.R.A. leadership" which had prior to the Ard-Fheis adopted recognition of Westminster, Stormont and Leinster House as policy.

This the delegates loyal to a 32-County Parliament could not tolerate and since the resolution in question seemed likely to be carried, they took the only action open to them if they were not to be compromised—they walked out and resumed the Ard-Fheis elsewhere.

THE BACKGROUND

The background to these events is not as well known as the events themselves. Six years ago certain persons came into the Republican Movement from the Irish Workers' Party and the Connolly Association in England. Early in 1965 a "Conference to discuss political tactics, policy and internal organisation and make recommendations", was established.

Most of the ten points which emerged were turned down at an Extraordinary Ard-Fheis in June, 1965, notably one which sought to have Sinn Fein recognise Westminster, Stormont and Leinster House. Another which was also turned down but was later accepted by a further Ard-Fheis, looked for "co-operation with other radical groups" in pursuit of limited objectives. These groups included the Communist Party of Northern Ireland on one side of the Border, the Irish Workers' Party

and Connolly Youth Movement on the other, and the Connolly Association in England.

Fifteen months ago after the "parliamentary" idea had been rejected by an I.R.A. Convention by a majority of three to one and the continuation of "co-operation with the other radical groups" already named, carried once more by a slender majority, a "Commission" was set up to examine again all the policies of the Republican Movement and make recommendations. The Commission was to tour the country and take evidence at local centres.

In spite of the developments North of the Border since October 5, 1968, in Derry and the escalation of events throughout the Six Counties all through the first half of 1969, the "Commission" remained blind to what was obvious to even outside observers. The terror of August 1969 in Belfast, Derry, Armagh, Dungannon and other places was not foreseen when the "Commission" reported finally in July, nor was anything of the kind considered or provided against.

A FORMAL ALLIANCE

The recommendations which were made were two in number:

- (a) That the relationship with "other radical groups" involving co-operation for the achievement of limited objectives be now brought a stage further; that it be formalised into an alliance to be known for the sake of convenience as the "National Liberation Front".
- (b) That subject to certain conditions, etc., Republican elected representatives should participate in Westminster, Leinster House and Stormont.

Some of those who came into the Movement from the Irish Workers' Party were prominent on both the "Conference" of 1965 and the "Commission" of 1968-'69. In point of fact, by 1969 they had, with the aid of a few long-standing members, become the "master-minds" and policy-makers of the Republican Movement. One of them in particular had been in charge of an "education department" for the stated purpose of educating new members and re-educating older members into certain social and economic policies.

The historical background to the Movement and the fundamental Republican position were, needless to say, not part of these educational courses, so that for four or five years many young people came into the Republican Movement without knowing many of the basic tenets of Irish Republicanism. By 1969 the process of infiltration and take-over was nearing completion, as will be seen.

EXTREME SOCIALISM

There is no doubt that an extreme form of Socialism was being pushed on the Movement by the "policy-makers" referred to and their aides. This was a further reason for the "walk-out". While we, who went to Parnell Square, believe in a Democratic Socialist Republic for All Ireland, it seems certain that the ultimate objective of the leadership which remained at the Intercontinental Hotel is nothing but a totalitarian dictatorship of the Left.

It was admitted that the "National Liberation Front" would eventually involve a merger and amalgamation with the "radical groups" mentioned, since all would be working for "the same ultimate objective". Meanwhile, it was stated, joint educational classes involving members of the Communist Party of Northern Ireland and the Irish Workers' Party could be held. "While we were strong on practice and weak in theory, the reverse was true of them and they could educate us on theory", was how this was put.

Furthermore, in the opinion of the "master-minds" there was no need for establishing a Republican Youth Organisation when the Connolly Youth Movement existed, nor was there any need for the Republican "Clann na hEireann" in Britain since the Connolly Association was there.

It is of interest to note that the entire Cumann na mBan organisation was expelled from the Movement because it objected to these "radical groups" with their banners taking part in the Bodenstown parade of 1968. The Sligo town Cumann of Sinn Fein, which included the Mayor, the late Councillor Norbert Ferguson, was disbanded in 1969 because they objected to the local Connolly Youth Movement marching as a body in uniform in the annual Easter Commemoration parade. After the Republicans were thrown out without their side of the case being heard, a new Cumann was formed consisting almost entirely of the Connolly Youth members.

We leave it to the people of Ireland to draw their own conclusions in regard to this point. We know that in other countries which have come under the control of organisations similar to these "radical groups", totalitarian dictatorship has been the outcome. We have no reason to believe that the result would be any different in Ireland.

INTERNAL METHODS

We believe that the delegates who "walked-out" had long been disgusted with the internal methods in operation in the Movement for some time and indeed with the general atmosphere at the Ard-Fheis.

In 1966 the entire North Kerry Comhairle Ceantair of Sinn Fein, embracing 13 Cumainn and 250 members and including three local Councillors and leading figures such as Miss May Daly (sister of Charlie Daly, executed at Drumboe, Donegal, in 1923), John Joe Rice, Sinn Fein T.D., 1957-'61 and John Joe Sheehy, veteran Republican and Kerry footballer, were ousted from the organisation. The underlying issue was the uncompromising stand of Kerry in refusing recognition to Westminster, Leinster House and Stormont.

Others in Cork and Kildare resigned in disgust at what was happening. We have already dealt with the Sligo case and that of Cumann na mBan, but Northern Republicans were not to be exempt. Jimmy Steele of Belfast, who has suffered almost 20 years actual imprisonment in Crumlin Road Jail for the Republican cause, was expelled last July because he dared to criticise ultra-left policies in his oration at the re-interment of Peter Barnes and James McCormack in Mullingar.

Sean Keenan of Derry City, another veteran Republican who was Chairman of the Derry Defence Association last August and has been very active on behalf of Civil Rights in the North, was expelled in December last while on a tour of America. His first notification of this action came when a friend showed him a four days' old copy of the *Irish Times* which contained a news report of his expulsion from the Republican Movement. These are but the most notable cases.

There is no doubt that all this formed part of a plan to push out certain members who opposed the "master-minds"—in other words who showed they had minds of their own—and replace them with others. Around the country some people of mature years who had displayed no interest whatever in the Republican Movement heretofore, now joined its ranks and were quickly promoted to positions of influence. Such individuals had invariably had previous connections with the "radical groups" already mentioned.

The basic method of procedure was stated to be that the ultimate objective was the only principle. Everything else was merely a tactic—truth and justice and many other things were to go by the board apparently. At the Ard-Fheis itself elaborate precautions were taken regarding the admission of delegates known to be opposed to "recognition". Where an organiser would report a Cumann to be in favour or indecisive, receipts for affiliation fees and delegates cards were forwarded even up to the eve of the Ard-Fheis. The affiliation fees of long-standing Cumainn, well-known to be "against" were returned

with the excuse that they were too late. In Belfast, three Republican Clubs were denied representation on the grounds that they had been "inactive" since August last. We leave it to the public to assess the validity of this last subterfuge, bearing in mind the circumstances of Belfast for the past six months. It seems hardly likely that any Republican would be inactive. In all this harassment of the delegates opposed to "recognition", many of the full-time paid officials of the organisation were unduly active.

LET DOWN OF NORTH

This was an underlying reason for the "walk-out". Despite repeated warnings from last May on, sufficient priority was not given to this matter, with results too well known to require enumeration. The leadership of the Movement was obsessed with the "Commission" and getting its recommendations adopted and preparations for the defence of our people did not receive the necessary attention. We will not dwell at length on this matter since it is self-evident to any observer of the Northern scene. We might add that we feel particularly strong on this point.

ABOLITION OF STORMONT

We find absolutely incomprehensible from any Republican stand-point the campaigning in favour of retaining the Stormont parliament in August, September and October last when it was in danger of being abolished altogether by the British Government.

In any future struggle for freedom it would surely be preferable to have a direct confrontation with the British Government on Irish soil without the Stormont junta being interposed. In any event, the taking away of the Orange Order's power block would surely be a step forward rather than backward.

The line of policy adopted at the time was, of course, yet another product of the "policy-makers" who by this time must have felt really secure and able to dictate.

OUR SOCIALISM

At this stage it is necessary to give an indication of our views on social and economic questions, because "extreme Socialism" has been listed as one of the main points of difference.

Our Socialism envisages the nationalisation of the monetary system, commercial banks and insurance companies, key industries, mines, building land and fishing rights; the division of large ranches; an upper limit on the amount of land to be owned by any one individual; the setting up of worker-owner co-operatives on a wide scale in industry, agriculture, fishing and distribution, but still leaving ample room for private initiative under state supervision. The extension and development of Credit Unions is also included.

What the junta which remained in control in the Intercontinental Hotel seek would lead to dictatorship and in this they travel the same road as the Communist Party of Northern Ireland, the Irish Workers' Party and the Connolly Youth Movement.

As an example, they tried to knock RTE cameras during the walk-out and assaulted several of the delegates who were leaving, showing that they would deny free speech to anybody who disagreed with them.

Ours is a Socialism based on the native Irish tradition of Comhar na gComharsan, which is founded on the right of worker-ownership and on our Irish and Christian values. It is hoped to expand and explain this in the near future.

Many of those who left the Intercontinental Hotel and went to Parnell Square have worked hard in Housing Action Committees, the National Waters Restoration League, Land Leagues and such like and will continue to do so. We believe in the need for an Economic Resistance Movement to arrest the decline and take-over of our country and we will continue on constitutional lines to organise the people to achieve our objectives of Irish freedom, political, economic, social and cultural.

We have played and will continue to play our part in the struggle for Civil Rights in the Six Counties.

We believe in vigorous local government representation and we have the support of the majority of Sinn Fein local councillors in our present stand. We seek to build an alternative 32-County State structure which will draw off support from the existing British-imposed partition system within which our objectives are unattainable.

WRONG ASSUMPTIONS

A number of assumptions and impressions exist in the public mind due to speculative and inaccurate reporting:—

- (a) That we are militarists who will promote "border raids" is untrue. We will, nonetheless, support all efforts to defend our people in the Six Counties.
- (b) It is said that we are "wild men", whose policies are crude and old-fashioned, while those now in opposition to us are reasonable people. To this we reply that while we adhere to basic principles we believe in forward-looking policies as have been outlined in this statement.
- (c) The generalisation that those who intend recognising Westminster, Stormont and Leinster House are "progressives", while we are "traditionalists" is also false. They will at best end up in parliamentary blind alleys as have the other splinters from the Republican Movement—Cumann na nGaedheal (now Fine Gael), Fianna Fail and Clann na Poblachta, not to mention the Northern Nationalist Party. This was the British intention in imposing the "settlement" of 1921 and after 50 years the constitutional framework has failed and frustrated the Irish people. While we take our inspiration and experience from the past we are realistic as to what will strengthen the people's will to resist British Imperialism and what will weaken that will. Participation in the institutions designed to frustrate our people's progress to full freedom is certain to weaken that will to resist.

We are unanimous in that there can be no question of rapprochement or of meetings with those who are opposed to us. For their part, their attitude before and during the Ard-Fheis was as could be expected. On Saturday morning, January 10, the opening day of the Ard-Fheis, a Dublin morning paper carried an alleged "Northern Command" statement which said in reference to those against recognition "the divisive tactics of these few malcontents" and "it is being openly suggested that Fianna Fail has already succeeded in planting one of its agents in this group". The smear tactic was early in

use. On Saturday night before the Commission recommendations could be considered by the Ard-Fheis delegates, a statement was read from the already compromised "Army Council" which urged the delegates to accept the proposals. It spoke in typically hard-line terms of the Provisional Army Council and its supporters, saying that "if they persisted in error, then all sentiment must be put aside in dealing with them". This dogmatist attitude is surely worthy of the Inquisition of many years ago in its dealings with "heretics".

The same source said later regarding recognition that "as long as they advanced one step in revolutionary theory, it did not matter if they slipped back two in "organisation". Again, on the Saturday night, "Minorities" which would not carry out whatever policies were adopted were told that they would have to "get out".

So much for the attitude of the new parliamentarians before Sunday, January 11. Since then they have found our support to be nation-wide and decisive. They talk of "healing the split" now that they are on the defensive. We reject their overtures for the reasons given in this statement. We believe that what divides us is fundamental and runs very deep.

We call on them to cease describing themselves as "Sinn Fein". That honoured name has never belonged in Westminster, Stormont or Leinster House. Let them join with their new-found friends in their "National Liberation Front" or whatever they wish to call it and leave the Republican Movement alone.

We call on those who would follow a leadership which flies in the face of all reason and experience of Irish conditions. We say to them: "Think again. The road to Westminster, Stormont and Leinster House is paved with the good intentions of erstwhile Republicans. To-morrow may be too late. Give your support now to the Republican Movement which will last. Do not throw your efforts away on yet another parliamentary debacle".

We have the support of Republicans in almost all the country outside of sections in Dublin and Wicklow and a small number of scattered individuals elsewhere. We are going ahead and one of our first steps is the launching of a new Republican monthly newspaper which will be called "AN PHOBLACHT", the first edition of which is expected on February 1.

For a number of years now those involved in the take-over bid have traded on the good name of Sinn Fein—a name respected for honesty, integrity, sincerity and national ideals by Irishmen everywhere. Now that that umbrella has been removed from them, they stand exposed and the Irish people in their own way can now form their judgement.

We are content to leave it at that.

THESE ARE THE PROVISIONALS DAVID GEORGE

From the NEW STATESMAN November 19, 1971

Who are the Provisionals? Terrorists, thugs and assassins, of course. Also the greatest propagandists since Colman Prentis and Varley; men of such persuasive charm that they must be banned from British television screens lest their case contradicts Mr. Maudling's. But what are their politics? Is there a social philosophy behind their M1 carbines?

Are they leftists or rightists? Revolutionaries or counter-revolutionaries? Conor Cruise O'Brien says they are Green Fascists. Garret Fitzgerald, the most articulate opposition spokesman in the Dail, compares them with the Nazis and the OAS (but in Dr. Fitzgerald's looking-glass world the conservative Fine Gael party to which he himself belongs, is 'social democratic', so where does that leave us?). The 'official' wing of the IRA which calls itself Marxist, lines up with O'Brien and Fitzgerald in denouncing the Provisionals as ultra-rightists. Only the Provisionals, it seems, dissent. They say they are "democratic socialists".

This confusion has its origin in the controversy which split the republican movement two years ago. In the aftermath of the British army's traumatic intervention in Belfast and Derry, proposals for a "new departure" in republican strategy were put to both a secret IRA convention and an open conference of the IRA's political wing, Sinn Fein. The new departure involved the merging of the republican movement into a national liberation front with Irish communists and militant socialist groups. The front was conceived as a constitutional movement aiming to capture parliamentary seats in Dublin, Belfast and Westminster. This was a dramatic reversal of the IRA's traditional refusal to recognise "partition parliaments", and by the movement's constitution it requires a two-thirds majority. This was duly notched up at the IRA convention, thus committing the Military wing to constitutional politics; but the required majority wasn't forthcoming at the Sinn Fein conference, with the comic-opera result that Sinn Fein

was lumbered with a commitment to go on supporting methods of armed struggle which the IRA itself had just abandoned. So the movement split. Supporters of the new departure took possession of the "official" IRA and Sinn Fein, while opponents set up a Provisional Army Council (harking back to the 1916 Proclamation of the "Provisional Government of the Irish Republic") with its own Provisional Sinn Fein.

The circumstances of the split gave rise to the myth that the "officials" are Marxist politicians and the Provisionals mere gun-toting political illiterates devoid of social ideas. Certainly the "officials" have leaders who are passably fluent in pidgin-Marxism but that doesn't get anyone very far along the road to revolution. In the North, the "officials" have been able to avoid total displacement by the Provisionals only by abandoning their new departure and falling back on half-hearted imitations of Provisional armed struggle. In the South, the upsurge of popular sympathy for Provisional "freedom-fighters" has been accompanied by a marked decline in support for "official" agitation on social issues.

The "official" IRA, in allying itself to the worthy but insignificant Irish Communist Party (all chiefs, desperate to enrol a few Indians), has thrown away its potential for real mass support, without which its claims to revolutionary purity are worthless. The Provisionals, on the other hand, have retained mass support and a potential for increasing it further. By their opposition to the new departure they can properly claim to be the legatees of traditional republicanism. But that legacy is full of agonising contradictions which several generations of republicans have failed to resolve.

Arthur Griffiths, who founded Sinn Fein at the turn of the century, was a fanatical champion of private enterprise and a bitter opponent of trade unionism. James Connolly, martyr of 1916, was a revolutionary socialist and a bitter opponent of Irish as well as British capitalism. The two irreconcilable sets of attitudes were both incorporated in the remodelled Sinn Fein and IRA which emerged after 1916. In one sense—its acceptance of class collaboration and a corporate social philosophy—the IRA was right wing. But in another—its emphasis on national liberation—it was firmly on the Left. While some of its leaders dabbled in the corporatist notions which were soon to be systematised by Italian fascism, others represented the movement at successive world congresses of the Anti-Imperialist League, where they secured promises of "whole-hearted backing" for the "revolutionary organisation in Ireland" to their attempt "to organise Ireland's life in accordance with working-class ideals".

It has been widely assumed that the 1970 split at long last separated the Right from the Left. It did nothing of the kind. Many left wingers who might have been expected to support the "officials" in fact joined the Provisionals, believing both that the new departure would alienate mass (Catholic) support, and that recognition of "partition parliaments" involved in unacceptable compromise with the institutions of British and Irish capitalism. This was, if anything, an ultra-left rather than a right-wing posture.

Certainly the provisionals have gone to some pains to underline their claim to be a movement of the Left. Their new "Social and Economic Programme" begins with the statement that they advocate "not merely the complete overthrow of English rule in Ireland, but also the setting up of a Democratic Socialist Republic". The expulsion of British rule from the North is described as "not an end in itself but a means to restore the ownership of Ireland to the people of Ireland". Patrick Pearse is approvingly quoted in his assertion that "all rights to private property must be subordinated to the public right and welfare".

This might be nothing more than ritual deference to the rhetoric of the men of 1916, to whose ideals all factions of Irish politics—O'Brien and Lynch, no less than the Provisionals—must pay lip service. But the "Social and Economic Programme" goes on and on in the same vein, well beyond the requirements of due obeisance

to the founding fathers.

The means of production, distribution and exchange must be controlled by the people and administered democratically . . . Finance and insurance and all key industries must be brought under State control . . . Large ranches will be taken over and leased to groups of families to run on co-operative lines . . . Private enterprise will have no place in key industries and State incentives will favour co-operative projects . . . Here is real industrial democracy . . . Power blocs such as NATO and the Warsaw Pact will be avoided. We have more in common with the developing countries than we have with the rich club of former colonial powers . . .

And so on. Accepting that a movement doesn't become socialist by the mere repetition of socialist slogans, it must also be conceded that this doesn't read like Green Fascism. The contradictions, nevertheless, remain. The Provisionals' annual conference last month passed resolutions calling for militant trade union activity (including what were described as UCS-style take-overs of contracting industries), but went straight on to proscribe "members of the Communist Party or any radical group". (It occurs to me that the contradiction will be easily comprehensible to readers familiar with the ways of the British Labour Party). Again, separation of Church and State is accepted policy, but some Provisional leaders tell you they would not legalise contraceptives.

Other stresses are apparent within the movement, not least marked differences of temperament and tactics between North and South. The conference only narrowly averted a bitter split on the thorny old question of the oath of allegiance to the British Crown. Northern delegates urged that men who had signed the oath under duress to hold teaching and similar jobs in the Six Counties should not thereby be disqualified from IRA and Sinn Fein membership. The Southern leadership sternly refused any concession on what has traditionally been regarded as the touchstone of true republicanism, but the North supported the heretical resolution en bloc. To them, the practical needs of 1971 take precedence over the dogmas of 1916.

But it is not by reference to their conference decisions that the Provisionals claim to be Ireland's revolutionary vanguard. That claim rests on their "armed struggle against British occupation of the Six Counties": that is, in their war against British soldiers, Ulster policemen and collaborators. The Provisionals recognise, as the "official" IRA and its allies have failed to recognise that the national question must take precedence over the social question: not because nationalism is more important than socialism, but because social liberation is impossible without national liberation and must follow rather than precede it. Connolly knew this. It was his distinctive contribution to revolutionary socialist theory. The Provisionals know it too.

It is this single insight, rather than the specifically socialist formulations of their policy documents and conference resolutions, which make the provisionals, like them, or loath them, the only serious revolutionary movement on the Irish Left.

The "official" IRA, the Irish Communist Party, People's Democracy, all tried to switch emphasis from the seemingly moribund national question to what seemed the more relevant social question. The Provisionals said they were wrong. Ruairi O Bradaigh, their President, speaks with the authentic voice of Connolly when he asserts that "the foreign body must be removed before the nation's wounds can be bound up".

National liberation struggles and revolutions are not made by theoreticians isolated from the people: nor by New Left trendies, however many Che posters they have on their walls, nor by Hampstead or Great Turnstile (or Ebbw Vale) socialists. Nor are they made by pure idealists. They are the work of desperate men who have perforce, closed their hearts and minds to liberal values. Such are the Provisionals: terrorists, thugs and (like all soldiers) assassins, certainly. But Ireland's only real revolutionaries.

The NEW STATESMAN is published weekly in London

Published by Sinn Fein, 2A Lr. Kevin Street, Dublin 8 and Printed by The Clare Champion Ltd., Ennis Co. Clare

Title: Where Sinn Féin Stands

Organisation: Sinn Féin

Date: 1972 c.

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