

The politics of

revolution

*The main speeches and debates
from the 1986 Sinn Féin Ard-Fheis
including the presidential address
of Gerry Adams*



The politics of revolution

OVER THE WEEKEND of October 31st, November 1st and 2nd 1986, one of the most important Sinn Féin Ard-Fheiseanna took place in the historic Mansion House, Dublin. An issue which in the past had proved a divisive subject for debate, the issue of abstentionism from Leinster House, was once again on the Clar.

Similar proposals in the past – in 1926 and in 1969/70 – had led to great rifts in the Republican Movement, but the 1986 proposals, which were successfully carried, were distinguished from those previous contexts by several major factors. Firstly, the decision was taken by a mature organisation after the issue was thoroughly aired. Secondly, it was taken by both the IRA and Sinn Féin who could appreciate and examine passionately and dispassionately, subjectively and objectively, the differences between 1926, 1969 and 1986. Thirdly, the decision was taken against the background of a unique and continuing armed struggle to which the IRA is not only committed, but which it pledges will be intensified until Britain declares that it is withdrawing from Ireland. Fourthly, the demand for change came not from middle-class opportunists (as with de Valera and Fianna Fail), or reformists (as with the Sticks in 1969), or against a background of defeat (after the Civil War or after the 1969 pogroms). The pressure for change came equally from the republican grassroots and the republican leadership, and from those most associated with successfully prosecuting the struggle – those over whose commitment there can be no question marks, like the active

service Volunteers and those in jail serving heavy prison sentences.

The ending of Leinster House abstentionism does not represent Sinn Fein becoming 'slightly constitutional'. Parliamentarianism is not being counterposed as a substitution for revolutionary political activity but as an addition to it. It is aimed at making Sinn Fein more relevant and less isolated, more influential and more mainstream, forcing the formulation of radical and realistic policies as well as promulgating Sinn Fein's internationalism and its commitment to socialism.

One casualty at the ending of abstentionism was that some delegates, who were a minority *even among those who voted against the decision*, refused to accept the democratic vote, and walked out of the Ard-Fheis. Among those who later joined them are people who have deep-seated republican reservations about the change in policy which they believe will inevitably lead to a run-down of the armed struggle. In the months and years ahead we look forward to the return of these comrades whose fears will be amply assuaged in the passage of time by the sacrifices of those IRA Volunteers and Sinn Fein activists who single-mindedly pursue the revolutionary goal of a democratic, socialist republic.

In this pamphlet we reproduce the major contributions to the 1986 Ard-Fheis which reflect the thinking of the leadership of the Republican Movement on the issue of abstentionism (as well as some other issues) and the current Hillsborough Agreement which failed in its intention of isolating republicans.

These contributions from republicans who have been through thick and thin, and who span many generations, reflect a confident leadership whose strategy for success is the product of hard-earned experience and much reflection.

It is such flexibility combined with total commitment which makes the membership of today's Republican Movement so feared by the establishments, North and South, and so certain of achieving victory.





Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams

Óráid an Uachtaráin Gearóid Mac Adhaimh.
don 82ú Ard-Fheis do Shinn.Féin

Presidential address by Gerry Adams to the 82nd Annual Sinn Féin Ard-Fheis

AR DTÚS ba mhaith liom ag an Ard Fheis seo, a chur in iúl do chimí pholaitiúla ar fud an domhain go bhfuil muid ag seasamh leo. Ba mhaith liom, go mór mhór, ar dtacaíocht a chur in iúl do cimí pholaitiúla na hÉireann atá i mbraighdeanas san nEoraip, Meiriceá, agus ar fud na Breataine a bhfuil ualach ar leith curtha ar a muintir sa bhaile.

To begin with, I would like to express, on your behalf, from this Ard-Fheis, our solidarity with political prisoners throughout the world and especially to Irish political prisoners in jails in Ireland, the USA, Europe and in Britain, where prisoners' families endure special hardships. Of them all, I would like to single out for special mention the long-term prisoners who have served and are serving unprecedented sentences in Portlaoise, Limerick, Long Kesh, Maghaberry and Armagh prisons, and in prisons in Britain itself. I would also like to welcome home those who were recently released.

I wasn't going to mention any names for fear of leaving some out, but after ten years in Armagh I would like to welcome home, Mairead Farrell, along with all those released from the H-Blocks, in England and others from Portlaoise who have come back to the struggle. Fáilte abhaile.

The effects of long-term imprisonment on those prisoners still incarcerated, including many young prisoners who were sentenced as juveniles and who are now in their early thirties, has yet to be seen but their continued imprisonment gives a revealing insight into the cruelty and arrogance of the British and Irish establishments and a clear indication of their hypocrisy when they appeal, for example, to the South African regime for the release of Nelson Mandela.

The families of those long-term prisoners deserve special consideration from us. It is they, in many ways more than the prisoners themselves, who suffer, on a daily basis, from the cruelty of separation from loved ones, from archaic visiting regulations; and it is the women who, in many cases at great sacrifice, have had to raise families and keep homes together under such pressures.

Sé an rud atá coitianta i dtír ina bhfuil an lámh in uachtar ag na fir go mbíonn na mná sa chúla agus faoi scáth na bhfear. Le blianta beaga anuas tugadh níos mó poiblíochta don drochbhail a bhí ar cimí polaitiúla ná do drochbhail a clann. Tharla seo in amanna de thairbhe gur iarr na clann iad féin seo.

It is up to us, as an organisation and despite our limitations, to

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develop even further the relationship which we enjoy with our imprisoned comrades and their families and it is also up to us, as individuals, and along with our other responsibilities, to agitate and organise on their behalf.

Much has happened since we assembled here last year. Sean MacManus, our party chairperson, dealt in detail with many of these developments in his address last night and I will make only passing references to some of the most important ones here.

One thing, however, has to be said, and said loudly so that the whole world can hear: *We are still around.*

Despite all the best efforts of the British and Dublin governments, despite all the bluster of Fine Gael or their Northern representatives, the SDLP, despite the bullies of the DUP, Sinn Fein has not gone away. Tá muid ann agus fanfaigh muid ann go mbeidh bua again.

The IRA is also still around. The Volunteer soldiers of Oglai na hEireann, now 17 years in the field, have demonstrated, time and again in the past 12 months, that they are unbeaten and unbroken. Their tenacity, in the face of a numerically stronger and much better equipped enemy, has become a legend among freedom-loving people throughout the world.

It is no accident that when Conor Cruise O'Brien was quite properly chased ignominiously out of South Africa by students they chanted: "*Victory to the ANC! Victory to the IRA!*" We share their contempt for Dr O'Brien and we also share their solidarity in our common struggles. We extend that solidarity to national liberation armies throughout the world. We especially extend that solidarity to the men and women Volunteers of Oglai na hEireann.

Within our own organisation, I would like to single out for special mention Roinn an Chultuir Sinn Fein. This department in particular, and republican Gaelgeoiri in general, deserve special congratulations for the sterling work they have accomplished in the Gaelic revival. And they have won praise, even from those who would normally be slow to praise Sinn Fein, for their pioneering efforts.

Their involvement in the vanguard of the Gaelic revival, the publishing of *Saoirse* and the weekly *Nuacht Feirste*, and the organisation of a Slogadh, the first-ever party political conference to be conducted entirely in Irish, shows what can be done. On your behalf, I congratulate everyone involved.

Perhaps the clearest recognition of this work is to be found, ironically enough, in a confidential letter released by Ian Paisley, PRO at Maryfield House, from the British minister, Richard Needham, which also gives an interesting insight into the Hillsborough Treaty. He said, and I quote:

"I gather that the Irish (he means, the Dublin government) place heavy significance on early progress in removing the prohibition of the use of any language other than English in street signs. Apparently they consider that this would help to reduce the publicity and support which Sinn Fein has obtained through the use of street names in Irish."

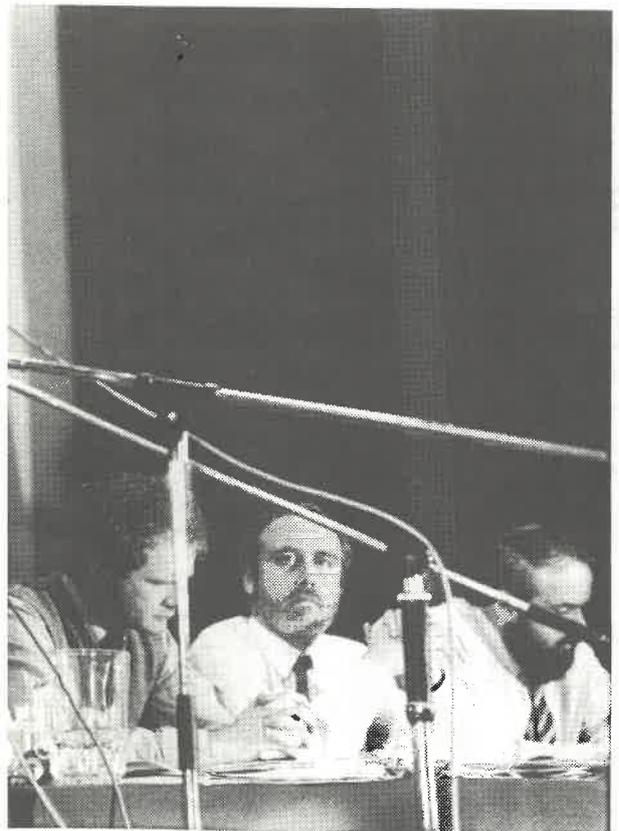
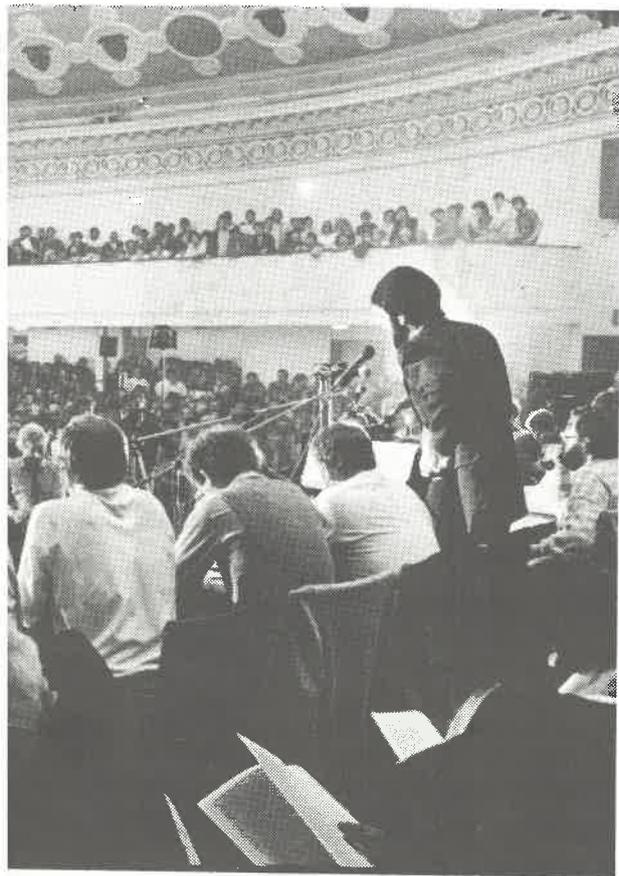
He goes on to say that the removal of this prohibition would be insufficient and, I quote again:

"Sinn Fein would continue to make the running in areas where they have influence."

No mention of the SDLP at all, at all.

While on this theme, and on a rather parochial note, I would also like to congratulate the people of West Belfast who swept the boards in this year's Glor na nGael competition. They won first prize in this prestigious competition and congratulations and thanks for this achievement





are due to all the people of West Belfast. That Camloch, Dun Padraig and Doire also won prizes is proof that the 6 Counties are to the fore in the struggle against cultural imperialism. If you think that is boastful wait until Tyrone do the needful in Croke Park – then there will be no sticking us. The last time I mentioned Tyrone winning the Sam Maguire Cup was on the Saturday before the All-Ireland, at the Slogadh Weekend. A Kerryman came up to me afterwards and said ‘will you put your money on that?’ I did, and I lost.

By the way – I also had to pay for my tickets.

There was no sticking Paddy O’Toole, the anti-Gaeltacht minister who intimidated the Irish-speaking community of Rathcairn. Mr O’Toole is to be praised for ensuring that our Slogadh was an outstanding success. He needs little excuse for withdrawing grants or facilities from Gaeltachtaí. It is his function to do this anyway, whether Sinn Fein is involved or not.

On a more serious note, the struggle for the past 12 months has been carried at a great cost by republican activists.

IRA Volunteers Tony Gough, Seamus McElwain and Jim McKernan were killed in action and Volunteer ‘Dipper’ Dempsey was killed on active service. Their funerals, in the 6 or 26 Counties, were reminiscent of anti-apartheid activists’ funerals in South African townships. State harassment of the dead, their families and friends is now a regular occurrence. We also remember Volunteer Fadgey McFadden, who died in a boating accident. Of them all, the deafening silence of the establishment after the killing by a British soldier of Volunteer McKernan, who was clearly unarmed, was despicable.

Other republicans have died of natural causes, some of them veterans of the struggle, others young people like Volunteer ‘Pudger’ O’Hagan. We remember them all and rededicate ourselves to finish the work they have left for us.

Go ndéanfáidh dia trocaire ar a n’anam dílse.

ABSTENTIONISM

One of the most important debates so far in this phase of our struggle will take place tomorrow when the Ard-Fheis will address itself to the question of abstentionism.

You will be asked to consider and support a motion from the Ard Chomhairle, and from cumainn and comhairlí ceantair throughout Ireland, calling for a change in our abstentionist attitude to Leinster House.

Before addressing this issue directly, I would like to take this opportunity to address myself to the debate and to the mood and conditions in which I think it should be conducted. Of course, I cannot force these conditions upon anyone. When delegates address the Ard-Fheis they are free to do so in whatever way they choose, but I appeal to you all, regardless of what view you hold on this issue, to remember that we are comrades in struggle and should conduct ourselves accordingly.

We are a political organisation and political organisations must, by their very nature, discuss and debate issues which they consider pertinent. We cannot do so properly unless all sides of the argument are articulated, unless all sides are accorded equal respect and consideration and unless all are bound by the democratic wishes of their comrades. The Ard-Fheis is the supreme authority in Sinn Fein – not the Ard Chomhairle, not the Coiste Seasta, not the president. The assembled delegates of an Ard-Fheis are the authority. *You* are the leadership. And whatever you decide on this issue, as on any other issue, is binding on us all. None of us can predict or anticipate tomorrow’s vote; none of

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us, on our own, can decide which way this party is going to vote, but each of us can decide as individuals what we are going to do when the vote is counted. And we can make that decision today.

Tá fhios agam go bhfuil poblachtóirí anseo a chreideann go láidir sa staonadh parlaiminte. Tuigim dona daoine sin. Ach, cuma cén dearcadh atá ag poblachtóir, níl sé de cheart ag duine ar bith seans a thabhairt dár naimhde a rá go bhfuil Sinn Féin ag 'scoilt'. Tá dualgas orainn uilig seasamh le chéile. Tá an troid seo níos mó ná duine ar bith againn. Ní chaithfidh muid a bheith ag aontú fá gach polasaí atá againn ach caithfidh muid uilig a bheith ag cur le chéile i gcónaí.

Many republicans have deep and justifiably strong feelings about abstentionism. I share and I understand those feelings. But none of us, regardless of the strength of our views, has the right to present the establishment and our opponents with the opportunity to project internationally the spectacle of yet another republican 'split'. Indeed, we have a duty to deny them such an opportunity. This struggle is bigger than all of us and it demands of us, as a basic requirement of our involvement, that we develop the ability and maturity to agree to disagree, even on fundamentals, and to unite in the great struggle for the reconquest of our country.

Unity is strength. Not a conditional unity or a qualified unity but a total commitment to a unified acceptance of the democratic mandate of this Ard-Fheis.

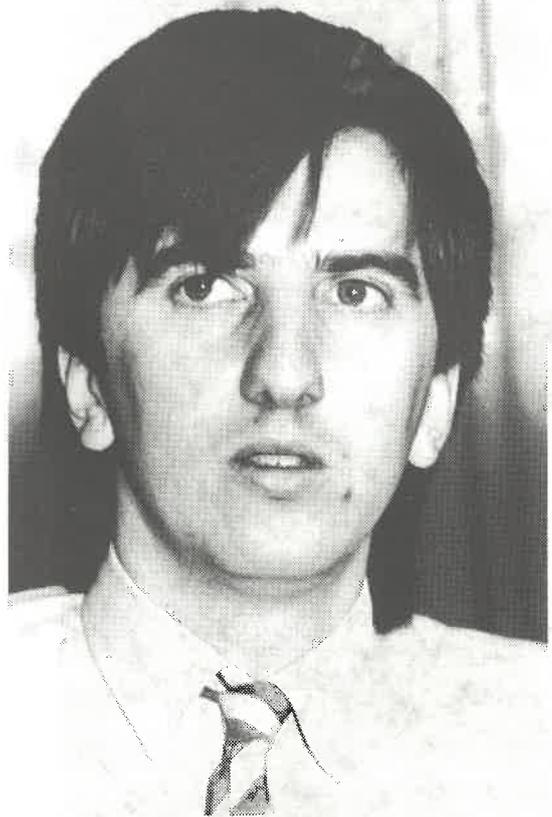
I can understand that some comrades view a change of the abstentionist policy as a betrayal of republican principles. Some of you may feel that a republican organisation making such a change can no longer call itself 'republican'. If there are delegates here who feel like this I would remind you that another republican organisation has already done what you fear we are going to do tomorrow. I would remind you that the Army Authority of Oglagh na hEirean, the rank and file volunteers, assembled in the General Army Convention, has democratically made a judgement on this issue and that Oglagh na hEireann has remained united in its determination to pursue the armed struggle and is united in its confidence in us and in our ability to pursue the political struggle.

There was no walk-out from the IRA by IRA Volunteers.

Garret FitzGerald's spurious propaganda claims that Sinn Fein is ordered by the IRA to do its bidding is nonsense, as any informed observer of republican politics will testify. That may be the way the Fine Gael leadership conducts its business, or it may be a good description of Fine Gael as the Irish political wing of Margaret Thatcher's British army, but as a description of how Sinn Fein conducts its business, it is rubbish.

The decisions of a General Army Convention are not binding on Sinn Fein Ard-Fheiseanna, but the logic of those who would consider withdrawing support from Sinn Fein if we change the abstentionist policy must be applied also to your attitude to the Army. And the logic which would dictate withdrawal of support from Sinn Fein if decisions go against you means that you have already decided to withdraw solidarity and support from the IRA and the armed struggle. It means that you have decided to stop supporting captured republicans incarcerated in British or Free State prisons or in prisons in Europe and the USA. I do not believe that any republican could take such a decision and then attend this Ard-Fheis.

For my part, I can tell you that, although I am supporting the Ard Chomhairle motion, if the vote goes against us I will be as much a part of this struggle after that vote as I am today before that vote, and I will continue to work for this organisation with total commitment and



Mairtin O'Muilleoir, Cultural Officer



Denise Cregan, General Secretary



Vice-president John Joe McGirl



Rita O'Hare, Ard Chomhairle

single-minded determination.

There is going to be no split in Sinn Féin on this or any other issue. Some comrades may decide to leave us. Perhaps they have already decided to do so. Some may have decided already if the vote goes against them that they will publicly walk out tomorrow. This is a wrong course of action for anyone to take. It means they want us to accept their vote but that they won't accept ours. If this is so, it is something I deeply regret.

Have people walked in here just to walk out? Has anyone here booked an hotel? As well as telling the media they have a duty to tell us, if this is their intention. I have spoken privately to some of the main supporters of abstentionism from Leinster House and I am firmly convinced that anyone who leaves us over this issue will regret their decision in the years ahead.

To leave Sinn Féin is to leave the struggle.

This phase of the struggle is the greatest one republicans have ever been engaged in. We all have a part to play in it and those of us who remain committed to it will ensure, regardless of the dangers it holds for us, that this struggle is going to continue until Irish independence is won. That is no idle boast.

The spectre of a 'split' is being raised to panic and intimidate us. It is aimed at unnerving people who want to remove abstentionism but who don't want the price for this to be a split. Talk or speculation about the split is aimed at making these people draw back.

This leadership is not going to be blackmailed by any such speculation. We have been elected by you to give leadership and will not be found lacking in the task of leading and uniting this party. It was never our intention to turn this debate into a leadership crisis. We intended, as we did with Eire Nua and with Federalism, to come to this Ard-Fheis and, if necessary, again and again to future Ard-Fheiseanna until we had persuaded you or you had persuaded us by the logic of comradely discussion. I heard, courtesy of the British media, that the resignation of this leadership was being sought if this vote went against them. I was surprised that this should come to us via the British media.

I suppose I should not have been surprised, there have been so many surprising, abusive, sad, untruthful and personalised things said on the British establishment media by those who should know better and who should know why they are being given a facility now that they were denied for so long.

This Ard-Fheis elects its leadership, not the owners of the *Irish Times*, *Belfast News Letter*, *Irish Press*, BBC1, BBC2, BBC3-RTE, or UTV.

If you wish to elect a new or a former leadership, as with every other issue, I will abide by your wishes.

I consider the Ard Chomhairle motion to be a most important one because of the clear direction it gives in relation to future strategy, but I consider it also as opening up, in a formal sense, the internal debate which commenced a few Ard-Fheiseanna ago.

While last year's debate was also an important one, it was academic. Whether one holds abstentionism as a principle or a tactic cannot be changed by a vote, regardless of how large the majority. We do not seek to change the personal principles of any delegate here.

A WIDER QUESTION

In the course of a debate, one may, of course, review, change or alter one's opinions, but it is the quality of the debate and not the vote

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which has that effect. The question is wider than one of principle or tactic and it is not unique to Ireland nor post-partition Ireland.

It is a question of whether a struggle such as ours can be advanced by opening up another front in a parliament of the establishment which oppresses us and the interests we seek to represent. As such, this question of electoralism as a means of revolutionary struggle has affected all struggles in areas where parliaments with universal suffrage exist. As with all such questions, the answer lies in the people's attitudes to those institutions.

Our experience has taught us that our struggle — and this affects every aspect of the struggle for national liberation — cannot be built merely on the republican perception of things. We have had to consistently pitch our struggle at the level of people's understanding and we have had to develop it from this common denominator, taking into account, in an objective way, all the forces and factors involved.

It would be much easier, of course, if all the Irish people, or a large section of them, were born with our perception and our view of things, but this is not the case. If it was, there would be little need for a republican struggle. But there is such a need and if we want to win then there is a fundamental need to make it a people's struggle. Of course, if we have no concept of winning we can remain as we are — a party apart from the people, proud of our past but with little involvement in the present and only dreams for the future.

If this is so, it is easy to ignore this problem or to let our own republican view of things blind us to realities. If nothing else, republicans must be realistic, especially about the people's perception (as opposed to our perception) of things. In the 6 Counties, in regards to Stormont or Westminster, a sizeable section of nationalists and republicans feel no affinity with those institutions. In the 26 Counties, it is different. It is a massive mistake to presume that our republican attitude to Leinster House is shared by any more than a very small section of our people, especially the citizens of this state, who might otherwise be open to our policies on all other issues. It must also be clear that the reconquest of Ireland, much less a British withdrawal, cannot be completed without the support of more of these people.

Of course we have a duty to point out to these people the shortcomings and the history of the present system, and we have a duty to win them to our view, but we can only do so at *their* level of understanding and we can only proceed from the objective reality of their consciousness.

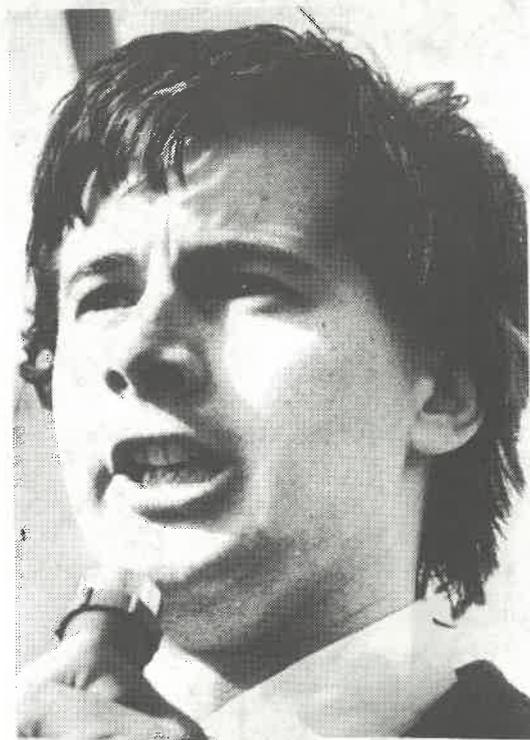
James Connolly dealt with this issue in 1897, in a criticism of abstentionism in the *Shan Van Vocht*. In an editorial, the *Shan Van Vocht* rejected Connolly's views because an oath of allegiance was involved, but they also called for the question to be debated and they recorded their agreement with Connolly's views on the labour and social questions. Earlier, the IRB had debated this issue and a section of them actually attempted to develop a ballot box and dynamite strategy. At this time, unlike 1916 or today, they failed to develop their phase of armed struggle.

I give these examples merely to show that the debate among revolutionaries about participation in parliaments predates partition. Partition has merely reinforced the problem and distorted it in much the same way as it has affected every other aspect of life on this island.

Connolly's criticism of abstentionism in 1897 and his implicit approval of it in the 1916 Proclamation, which established a provisional government until "*the establishment of a permanent national government, representative of the whole people of Ireland and elected by the suffrage of all her men and women*", shows that republicans should



Tom Hartley, General Secretary



Sean Crowe, Ard Chomhairle



Danny Morrison, Ard Chomhairle



Martin McGuinness, Ard Chomhairle

not be dogmatic and inflexible on this question. Those who first articulated abstentionism could not foresee the political developments that were to take place, nor could they, or did they, lay down a course of action with a stipulation that it could never be changed.

Their political responses were defined by the political conditions that confronted them or that they were able to create. This applies to those living 70 or 80 or indeed 200 years ago. As the political conditions change so must republican strategy change. Therefore present political conditions continue to be the dominant factor in producing a republican response to those conditions. Our experience teaches us that, as a group, we are often successful when we have a flexible approach. We are at our weakest when we are forced into a static political position where the more powerful forces of imperialism can be employed to isolate us.

We should not reject participation out of hand, but we should always be aware that such rejection may become essential. It all depends on the objective reality and conditions of the time.

1918 was such a time. The strategy of 1918 was the correct one. It was a dual power situation. It was much more than merely refusing to attend any enemy parliament. It meant withholding our consent to be governed by the British when the people— not us, but the people — established an alternative to Dail Eireann. But even then republicans made a mistake. To a large degree many of those politicians who represented us in Dail Eireann were not republicans. They did not reflect the interests of the mass of people and they certainly did not represent the interests of the people doing the actual fighting. Thus a majority of them found it possible, if not easy, to accept the Treaty arrangement.

It was in their own class interests to do so. For this reason they implemented the Treaty with a terrible ferocity. And they defeated us. With animal savagery, great cruelty and brutality, they imposed the British partition of Ireland upon this nation and they established the Free State and, within a modernised neo-colonial arrangement, they continue to represent those interests which crucify the Irish people.

At that time, many republicans refused to co-operate in any way with the new Free State set-up. At that time, unlike today, abstentionism meant the withholding of all consent to be governed by the new state. As in 1918, this meant much more than merely abstaining from taking their seats.

It meant refusing to co-operate in any way with the new state. It meant a refusal to recognise any aspect of the Free State, its courts (in both civil and political cases), its education system, its labour and agricultural schemes, limited though they were, or even its postal system, republicans refused even to pay for stamps and later some refused to use the new passports. But unlike 1918, no political alternative existed during the Treaty period and Liam Mellows' *Notes from Mountjoy*, which pointed in a clear political direction, was never implemented. By the time the 'soldiers of the rearguard' dumped their weapons — not in surrender but in exhaustion and in weary anticipation of another round of hostilities — the offensive was with the Free State. Armed struggle had been the only manifestation of republican resistance. Once that armed struggle ceased, as it had to, there was no other form of organised resistance relevant to the needs of ordinary people.

In 1924, Sinn Fein fought its last meaningful election on an abstentionist policy in the Free State. Given the destabilising effect that abstentionism had on a young Free State, plus the widespread though mistaken belief that partition would not last, and coupled with the support that we continued to enjoy despite the vicious cruelty of the Civil War counter-revolution, it can be argued that abstentionism was

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the correct approach at that time. If so, the emergence of Fianna Fail, and its subsequent electoral successes with republican support, marked the end of abstentionism as a viable policy in this state. The coercive policies of the Fianna Fail leadership in government are a matter of historical record.

They are rarely heard of today outside of republican circles. An English hangman, patronage and the widespread and vicious repression of republicans was the order of the day. For many republicans this behaviour by the very people they supported in elections was a confirmation of their distrust of 'politics and politicians'. They should have expected nothing else. Once again those who wrapped themselves in a republican mantle were not republicans. They accepted the reality of the new state and hijacked republican rhetoric for electoral purposes.

SIGNIFICANT PERIOD

This period is significant not just because of the emergence of Fianna Fail but also, and more significantly, because Fianna Fail received support from many of those who remained committed to republican objectives.

The IRA leadership and a depleted Sinn Fein organisation remained on the high ground of abstentionism but yet, at the same time, they were prepared to give at least passive support to another party which was not only prepared to attend Leinster House but was committed to becoming part of the partitionist system. They failed to present the people with any realistic political alternative.

I have talked and listened to men and women who have fought for the Republic since 1914 to the present day. In the last 20 years, in all parts of this country, I have enjoyed the hospitality of republican households which sheltered the Countess Markievicz, James Connolly, Liam Mellows, Joe McKelvey, George Plant, Frank Ryan, Charlie Kerins, Sean McCaughey, Tom Smith and many others.

I have spoken at monuments to the heroic victims of Free Stateism and knelt in prayer at lonely graves in Kerry and Donegal. I know many of those invincibles who spent years in Free State dungeons not just in the '20s, '30s, '40s and '50s but in the '70s and '80s. Some of them are present here today.

I share their abhorrence of neo-colonialism and their detestation of those who govern this part of Ireland in the interests of imperialism. My family were opposed to the Treaty and the Partition Act. Like many Northern republicans, they suffered for their beliefs at that time, not only in the 6 Counties but in later years in the glasshouse of the Curragh Concentration Camp and other Free State prisons.

They witnessed the rise of Clann na Poblachta, which received republican support when many republicans again made the mistake of leaving the 'politics' to those outside our movement. Sometimes I ask myself if we will ever learn. The central issue is not abstentionism. It is merely a problematic, deeply-rooted and emotive symptom of the lack of republican politics and the failure of successive generations of republicans to grasp the centrality, the primacy and the fundamental need for republican politics. This truth must be grasped. It is a difficult one for many to accept given the conspiratorial and repressive nature of our past, our distrust for 'politics and politicians' and a belief that 'politics' is inherently corrupt. But once it is grasped then everything else follows logically, especially the need to develop our struggle at the level of people's understanding.

Too often republicans have appeared dogmatic on the question of abstentionism and yet successive leaderships and generations of republicans have at least passively, and in many cases actively, support-



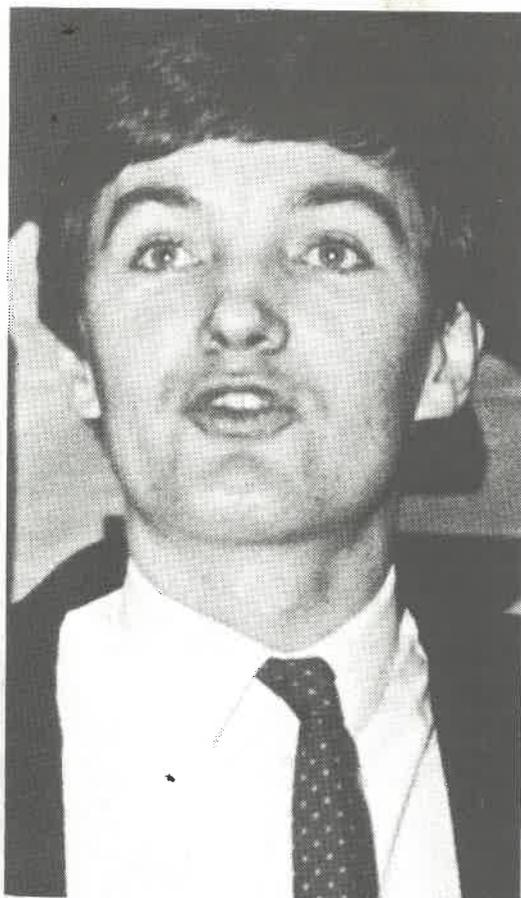
Alan Curran, Youth Officer



Mary McGing, Ard Chomhairle



Sile Fanning, Women's Department



Brian McDonald, Publicity Officer

ed other political organisations in election campaigns. This is certainly the case with Fianna Fail in the Free State general election of 1932, later with Clann na Poblachta, and in our own time with the late Frank Maguire, Frank McManus and Bernadette McAliskey and — although some of them will deny it now — it was also the case with Gerry Fitt, Paddy Devlin and Paddy Kennedy. They would not have been so successful on their entry into politics without republican support and in some of the above cases I was witness to, and in most cases opposed to, that support or at least to a 'standing aside' being agreed.

Some republicans believe that politics is the property of the establishment, that so-called 'constitutionalism' and politics are the same thing and thus that politics are inherently corrupt and corrupting. The logic of this is that de Valera was okay until he went into Leinster House, or that the opportunism of the Clann na Poblachta leadership only occurred after their entry into the Free State parliament. If we still believe that, then we don't know our own history and we have little concept of the class nature of this struggle.

The great and most recent example of the corrupting nature of 'politics' which is often quoted by some of our membership is the Sticks. Indeed, in the past few weeks some republicans who should know better have actually referred to some people on this platform as Stickies. Oh ye of little faith! Of course, it is easy to hurl abuse — sticks and stone may break our bones — it makes headlines in the media but it also makes this problem more difficult to resolve. To compare us with the Stickies is an obscenity. To talk of 'only the personalities being changed' and of 'some people believing that the British can be talked out of Ireland' is contemptible.

It is a sign of the maturity of this leadership that we have refrained from publicly answering these remarks and it is a sign of our comradeship that we forgive those who made such remarks.

For anyone who has eyes to see, it is clear that the Sticky leadership had abandoned armed struggle as a form of resistance to British rule as part of their historic new departure into British and Free State constitutionality. Any vestige of armed struggle that continued after this decision was localised and mainly on the initiative of elements which later formed the now almost defunct INLA.

For our part, this leadership has been actively involved in the longest phase ever of resistance to the British presence. Our record speaks for itself. We have led from the front and from within the occupied area. We have learned that to be victorious a struggle for freedom must be a struggle of the people. We have said many times that even the most successful armed struggle in the 6 Counties — and the struggle there is not merely an armed one — cannot achieve the Republic. The aspiration for the Republic has never been defeated, not even when the republican forces were defeated and the legitimate government of the Republic was overthrown. It is not vested merely in governmental structures. It is not vested merely in proclamations or in parliaments of the past. It cannot be voted, negotiated or coerced away.

Even if the Ireland of today was only created yesterday, even if our colonial history only started yesterday, the right to the Republic exists today in the right of the Irish nation to sovereignty, independence and national self-determination. It is up to us to make that Republic a reality.

We must develop a 32-County-wide political struggle. This is the most important task facing us at present. While consolidating our base in the 6 Counties, we must develop a popular struggle here in the 26 Counties to complement the struggle in the 6-County area. Of necessity

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this means, in order to advance at the level of people's consciousness, the removal of abstentionism in regard to Leinster House. You may not do this tomorrow but one thing is certain: as Sinn Fein continues to develop its understanding of the needs of this struggle, you are going to do it, sooner rather than later and your leadership is going to be back here year after year until it has convinced you of this necessity.

We all must share the daunting and massive task of interpreting and applying republicanism to changing and changed political conditions. Our failure to do this is one of the tragic failures of the past. The fundamental tenets of republicanism remain valid and are, of course, absolutely central to the resolution of our current national difficulties.

But no generation of republicans could or should ever merely absorb the teachings of previous generations. Those who were successful in the past in advancing the republican cause, even by one inch, updated and modernised the teaching and experiences of their predecessors. This is what Lalor did, what Pearse did, what Connolly did — and it is what we have to do also.

We have to develop a coherent social and political philosophy which provides a rationale for consistent political as well as armed action. Such a process is one of continual reinterpretation and refinement in response to constantly changing social and political reality.

Mar a deirtear i nGaeilge 'An té nach bhfuil láidir ní foláir a bheith glic'.

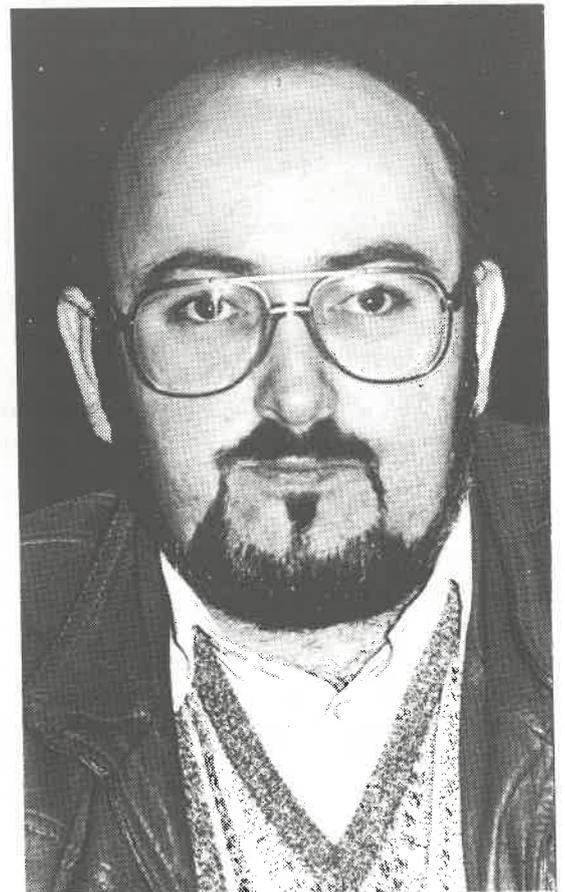
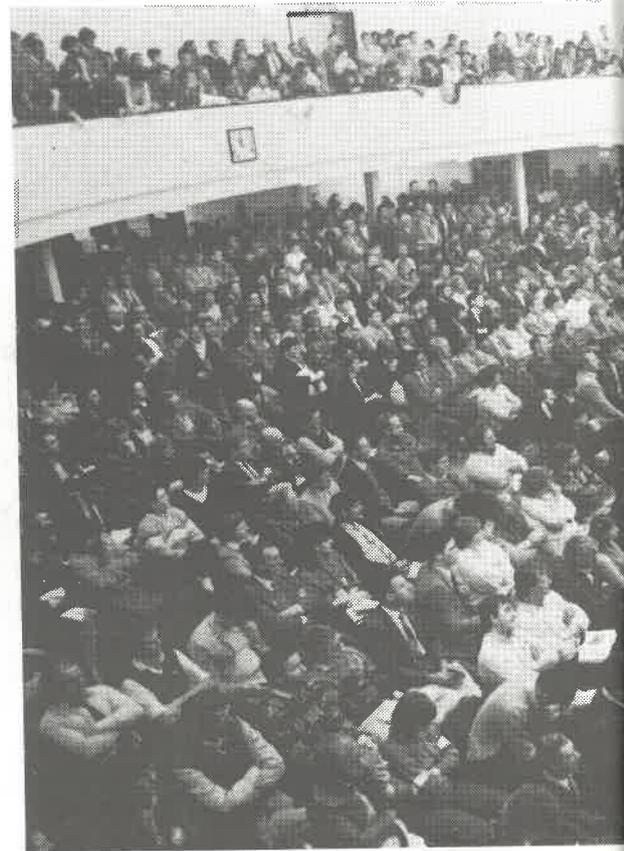
The failure to do this in the last 60 years has prevented Sinn Fein from assuming a position of leadership in this state from which people could be organised and their political and national consciousness raised. Many republicans wandered, many still do, in the political wilderness, isolated from the daily life and concerns of the people and unable to challenge or offer a viable alternative to the partitionist regimes in Ireland. This in turn has weakened the appeal and credibility of this struggle and limited our ability to think or act outside, and thus complementary to, the armed struggle, and it prevented us from mobilising the broad masses of our people, not least in regards to the armed struggle.

We have at all times been more committed to rebellion than to revolution. The cement which held us together was physical force and since 1918 until recent times, physical force was applied in isolation, unsupported by organised political sentiment in the country. I have spoken and written on this theme many times and I have preached the gospel of republican politics — the need for republican politics, that is the need for republican involvement with people — up and down this island.

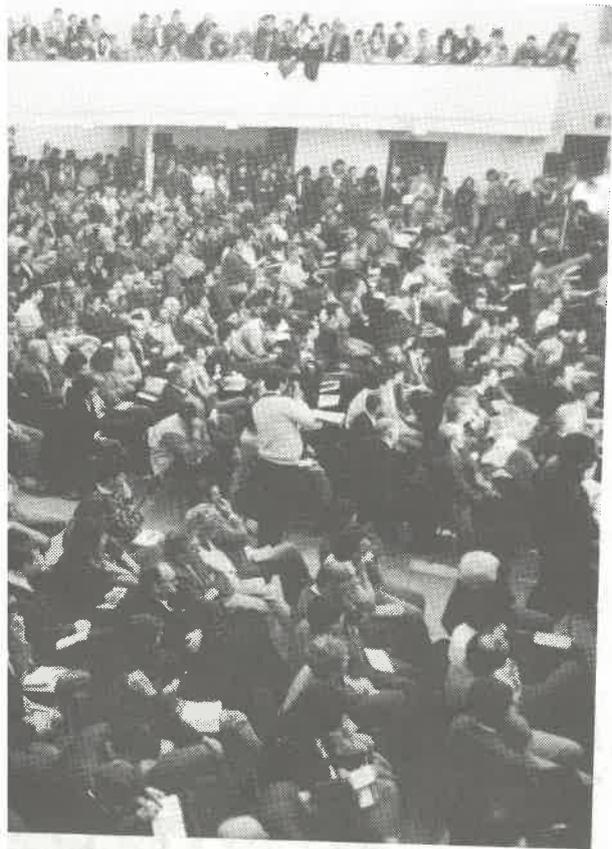
BREAKING OUT OF OUR ISOLATION

Over the last few years I have, like many of you, given serious consideration to the question of abstentionism and of what part it plays in our struggle. I have considered all the alternatives in great depth including a dual power situation which is neither feasible nor practical in this state at the present time. I have considered the strategy of taking seats only when we have a majority in Leinster House. This is advanced by some comrades and is, among other things, an admission by them that only mathematics and not principle is involved. But it is also as impractical as the dual power theory.

The only feasible way to break out of our isolation, to make political gains, to win support for our policies, to develop our organisation and our struggle is by approaching people at the level they understand. This is the sad and unfortunate reality of the dilemma



Caoimhghin O Caolain, Ard Chomhairle



Joe Cahill, Treasurer

facing us. It cannot be dodged by highly moral rhetoric. It is an issue which we must face up to. This means Sinn Fein getting among people in the basic ways which the people accept. This means new approaches and difficult – and perhaps risky – political positions have to be faced up to by us.

It will mean the difference between another glorious defeat or the development of strategies which can succeed.

The removal of abstentionism will not provide a 'magic wand' solution to all our problems. Indeed, in this state it merely clears the decks and it makes the burden of struggle heavier upon all of us.

We have to cease being spectators of a struggle in the 6 Counties and become pioneers of republicanism in the 26 Counties, putting our policies before the people, confident of the logic of the alternative which Irish republicanism offers.

I say this means risky political positions. This should not be underestimated.

The removal of abstentionism allied to implementation of the other necessities I have touched on here, and detailed in other addresses, will initiate an increase in our party membership and could change the political complexion of this party. It is important therefore that those who wish to change abstentionism now recommit themselves to this struggle and that those who are opposed to change stay with us also.

We need to keep our republican gut. While developing the struggle in the 26 Counties we must never lose sight of our national objectives. We must change our strategies but must never let this change our objectives or our aims. We are a republican party committed to the struggle for national self-determination, committed to the overthrow of British rule in Ireland and to the end of partition and committed to bringing about the political and economic changes necessary for the well-being and security of this nation.

In other words, we are committed to the reconquest of Ireland by the Irish people. This means the expulsion of imperialism in all its forms, political, economic, military, social and cultural. It means the establishment of a real Irish republic and the organisation of the economy so that all its resources are under Irish control and organised to bring maximum benefit to the people in a 32-County state in which Irish culture and national identity is strong and confident.

There has been much talk and speculation about how many seats Sinn Fein will win if we contest the Free State election on an attendance ticket. We should not seek to see such a contest merely in terms of winning seats.

If we do contest on an attendance ticket the election after the next one will be the first serious test of our ability to win major support. At this time, our entry in a serious way into electoral politics in this state should be seen in terms of broad political gains as opposed to immediate gains in terms of a seat or seats. Our underdevelopment, the denial to us of access to the media and our inconsistency in regard to elections in the past (between 1961 and 1982 we took no part in parliamentary elections here) are all factors which mitigate against us and which must be overcome by patient planning and involvement in the sometimes mundane work which will, in time, see gains for us in terms of seats.

What will make an organisation like ours revolutionary is not whether it is committed to any particular means of achieving revolution – such as street agitation, electoralism or physical force – but whether all the means it uses – political work, publicity, mass education, electoralism, and armed struggle (which should play no part in the struggle in this state) or projects of economic, social or cultural resistance – are

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conducive to achieving the revolutionary reconquest of Ireland.

The test of a real revolutionary is his or her consistent, determined and intelligent work for real national independence, whatever the area of struggle that might be in.

Revolutionary work is work which advances the national independence struggle, and it is the art of politics and political judgement which should determine what work should have priority at any moment in time.

No one form of revolutionary work is inherently superior to any other. The judgement of what form of work is required must be made on the basis of what form is most conducive and necessary for the national independence struggle in the particular circumstances currently existing.

Our candidates, even more so than in other electoral contests, need to be hard-working, articulate, politicised and supportive of – and supported by – our party structures.

Republican TDs will act, in consultation with the grassroots, on the direction of the Ard Chomhairle. They will vote in the interests of their constituents, our struggle and this party. I am totally opposed to this party becoming involved in any coalition, at any time, with any of the establishment parties in Leinster House. If we, at times, agree on specifics or if we vote along similar lines, that is fair enough and is acceptable.

Some of you may think that I have dwelt at too much length on this issue of abstentionism. Indeed, some delegates who support abstentionism may think that by doing so I have taken advantage of my position as president of Sinn Fein. That is not my intention.

Other republicans have rushed into print in the establishment media and on the television on this issue, sometimes in abusive personal terms. I have not. My intention is to place on the historical record now, in a clear and detailed way, the issues facing this party when we come to consider this contentious issue. We cannot enter into such a historical debate – the long-term outcome of which could change the face of politics on this island and will certainly change republican politics – without leaving a clear and unambiguous record of why we considered such a step.

In a sentence, what I am saying is that it's time for change, not just for republicans but for all the people of this state.

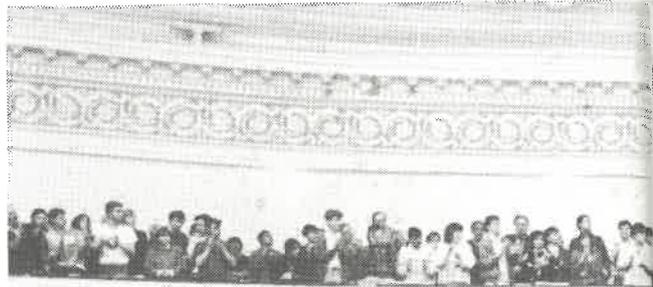
For too long the political pygmies of Leinster House have had things too easy. For too long they have been allowed a monopoly upon what passes for politics in this part of Ireland and for too long a very sizeable section of Irish citizens have been denied the opportunity to shape and build a relevant, radical and principled alternative to partitionist rule.

The failure to build a republican base in this state has meant that the anti-people policies of successive Dublin governments are implemented with almost no opposition and that the lowering of national spirit and the pretence that this state is a nation goes on unabated. Partition is virtually a fact of life here for many people who feel powerless to remove it. They need and deserve and are crying out for leadership. Can we provide it? (Of course, all of this presumes that when we win seats the 'great democrats' will allow us to take them and that 'Garrett the rude' doesn't strike us all dead with his silly sanctimonious repudiations.

UNEMPLOYMENT AND EMIGRATION

Garrett has little to be sanctimonious about.

In this, the 70th anniversary year of the 1916 Proclamation,



Lucilita Breathnach, Foreign Affairs



Kathleen Gleeson

over 23% of our people are unemployed in the 6 Counties. In the 26 Counties, the official figure is 232,448 people unemployed. Over 74,000 of these are under 25 years of age. The official figures nationally amount to almost 400,000 people suffering the misery and poverty of unemployment – a massive indictment of British rule in the 6 Counties and neo-colonial rule in the 26 Counties. And the actual situation is much worse than the official figures indicate. The official figures don't include people on government 'training' schemes, they don't include those people who don't bother to register, or young school leavers who are too young to qualify for assistance. They don't include those who are economically exiled through emigration. This year, for every four people born in the 26 Counties, three left the country for good. Since this state was established, half of its citizens have been forced to emigrate. Our young people are voting with their feet and our nation is being robbed of their talents and input.

Not only is the Dublin government exporting the human wealth of our greatest national resource – our youth – it is also exporting our material wealth. In the past 12 months, the wealthy ruling class, in an overwhelming vote of no confidence, has shifted more than £1.5 billion out of this state.

Michael Noonan recently boasted that Dublin has a pro-business government and a pro-business opposition and that not many other countries could say the same. Most other governments would be ashamed to make such a boast. Mr Noonan, like his cronies, is not renowned for his sense of national pride.

Indeed, Noonan's attitude was reiterated after RTE's interview with Colonel Gaddafi when it emerged that the pro-business interests which have the most influence on the formulation of the Coalition's foreign policy, according to Peter Barry, are the boards of US multinationals. Mr Barry was more outspoken about what he termed as Gaddafi's 'interference' in Irish affairs than he has ever been in opposing the British occupation of a part of Ireland.

He and his cronies are place seekers, shoneens and yes people who have neither the virtue, the sense, nor the ability to govern us. In every sphere they have failed to provide leadership to our people and they have the gall to boast about it. They tell us that we have no agricultural crisis while, all around the country, working farmers are being forced into bankruptcy and our horticultural potential is being undermined by imports.

They continue to foist the dictates of the EEC upon us while the agricultural sector, like other sectors of the economy, is belatedly beginning to view EEC membership as damaging. They sign the Single European Act – due to go before Leinster House before Christmas – and signal the greatest single retreat from sovereignty ever made by the 26-County state.

This Act effectively binds Dublin by legal agreement to supporting a NATO view of international affairs.

Of course, toadying to the NATO line is nothing new for this particular government. They recently voted against a proposal from the non-aligned countries in the United Nations for mandatory sanctions against South Africa. They also abstained in a vote calling for an end to United States' aggression against the democratically-elected government of Nicaragua and Peter Barry refused to condemn the US bombing raids on Libya. He reserves his hypocritical condemnations for the IRA.

It is also no surprise that the Coalition has been reluctant to call for the closure of Sellafield. It produces the plutonium for Trident missiles and the new EEC treaty commits Dublin to "maintain the technological and industrial conditions" necessary for the NATO war machine.

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Sinn Fein demands the closure of Sellafield and a complete end to the dumping of radioactive waste in the Irish sea. We indict the Dublin government for its refusal to halt this infringement upon the basic rights of this nation.

We also indict Garret FitzGerald for the mess he made of the divorce referendum. His performance in that campaign was vintage FitzGerald: bumbling, no sense of timing and absolutely amateurish. He proves that the only thing that is worse than a wishy-washy pseudo-liberal is an incompetent wishy-washy pseudo-liberal.

The most telling and historic example of Dublin subservience to outside interests lies, of course, in the Hillsborough Treaty. A year ago this month, the news was dominated by this event. Everything was to change: nationalists could hold their heads high, the nightmare was over, we had a framework through which nationalist alienation would end.

Instead of peace — even if we restrict the meaning of the word 'peace' to mean an absence of violence — this experiment has, so far at any rate, exploded in the face of its proponents, who range from the desperate political gurglers in the Dublin establishment to their Northern representatives in the SDLP leadership, to lukewarm British God-fathers whose support for and understanding of the Treaty is how far it will go in advancing their interests. The British confrontation with the loyalists, designed to split the loyalists and create a pragmatic leadership which would appreciate British counter-insurgency strategy and which would be bold enough to do an internal deal with the SDLP, has temporarily subsided for a number of reasons. John Hume told us earlier this year that a new and pragmatic loyalist leadership would emerge as soon as the Orange marching season was over. He failed to tell us which marching season he meant. In the meantime, the British government presses Dublin for more and more collaboration.

At our Ard-Fheis last year, before Hillsborough, I warned about a violent loyalist reaction and I pointed out that such a reaction was needed, and indeed that it would be deliberately provoked by Dublin and the SDLP, in order to exaggerate the substance of the Treaty as far as concessions were concerned and also to camouflage its pro-British bias. In retrospect, the British government gave even less than we in Sinn Fein anticipated. In typical imperial, chauvinistic and supercilious fashion, Britain gave Dublin the loan of two acres at Maryfield and took back a hundred acres this side of the South Armagh border.

The Hillsborough Treaty, a mediocre agreement by Dublin to assist Britain to govern part of Ireland as a British colony, is not designed to redress the historic injustices perpetrated against the Irish people. It has not been worth the loyalist reaction it has provoked. There is ample evidence to link the resumed loyalist sectarian assassination campaign with Hillsborough and there is a heavy responsibility on the likes of John Hume, who has said that a united Ireland is not worth the loss of one life, to explain to the nationalist people why they are dying, why they are being intimidated, and why they are being evicted from their homes for the Hillsborough Treaty. Is the political survival of the SDLP really worth it? Does that survival justify the renewed pogroms and assassinations?

I also warned last year that when the Hillsborough process had run its course, and if it failed to isolate us, that we would face a major joint offensive, North and South, which would probably include selective internment and the proscription of Sinn Fein. This scenario remains on the cards and is something we should continue to brace ourselves for.

Indeed FitzGerald, in an interview in Thursday's *Belfast Telegraph*, admitted what he have been saying all along when he said that it was the increased support for the IRA and Sinn Fein which led both govern-



Jim McAllister, Ard Chomhairle



ments to embark on the treaty. His government's 'only interest' in Northern affairs was the elimination of the IRA.

Peter Barry's accusations that republicans are terrified of this treaty, that Sinn Fein is panicking, that the IRA is attempting to bomb it out of existence are figments of his fevered imagination. The truth is that it is Mr Barry who is terrified and panicking. He is terrified of the open emergence of Sinn Fein as a crucial political force in the 26 Counties and he is panicking that his British masters may not have the same priorities as Dublin.

Mr Barry and Dr FitzGerald recently accused Charles Haughey of being afraid of Sinn Fein when Mr Haughey, in a Bodinstown oration, attacked the Hillsborough Treaty. What they failed to add was that it was the entire Irish establishment's fear of Sinn Fein which saw the conception of the still-born Dublin Forum. (Do you remember that costly venture? The greatest political initiative since 1920?) It is this fear which feeds their paranoia about us.

Mr Haughey says that he is going to renegotiate the Hillsborough Treaty. He needs reminding that no Irish person has the authority to negotiate or renegotiate any treaty about any issue with the British government while that government claims jurisdiction over any part of Irish national territory. While they continue to do this, Irish people, and particularly Irish political leaders, are duty-bound not to help Britain to maintain its partitionist status quo. This means that if Mr Haughey is serious he will stop spending millions of Irish taxpayers' money on maintaining Britain's border. In this regard we pay much more than the British themselves. It means that he would stop extraditing Irish citizens into the hands of the British. It means that he would send the British ambassador home and recall the Irish ambassador from London.

Níl údarás morálta nó eile ag aon ceannaire polaitiúil in Éirinn rud ar bith a phlé le Rialtas na Breataine ach amháin cén fad a ghlacfas sé astú imeacht as an tír seo.

The only thing any Irish political leader has the authority, moral or otherwise, to negotiate with the British government is exactly how long it will take the British to dismantle partition and withdraw its forces and administration from our country.

It is most unlikely that Mr Haughey will initiate or press home such negotiations.

Sinn Fein is the only party which has the commitment to do this. Sinn Fein is the only party in this country which is totally committed to securing a complete British withdrawal from Ireland. It is only a matter of time until we assist the British government in taking this inevitable course of action which will be hastened by the actions of Oglagh na hEireann, the spearhead of republican resistance in Ireland. It is only a matter of time until the British are forced to get out of our country. And when they do, then, and only then, will the basis for peace, unity, prosperity and democracy be established in our country.

God speed the day.

Beirigí bua agus beannacht.



Pat Doherty, Ard Chomhairle

Sinn Fein National Organiser, Pat Doherty opened

the historic debate on abstentionism by proposing

Ard Chomhairle motion 162 (reprinted below),

which advocated the dropping of the abstentionist

policy towards Leinster House. He said:

I AM speaking here as proposer of resolution 162. I am opening this debate on behalf of the Ard Chomhairle at a big disadvantage. Other Sinn Fein members have already started this debate in a co-ordinated publicity campaign in the establishment media in a highly immoral personalised effort to influence delegates. This campaign has largely been directed at our president Gerry Adams.

Let me remind you that this decision was arrived at collectively by our leadership. The Ard Chomhairle, despite abusive attacks on some of its members, refused to make any contribution, or play any part in this campaign. We believe it should have been kept within republican ranks. Others obviously didn't and for this reason, as I have said, I start with a disadvantage.

You will be told here today, during the course of this debate, that other sound people advocated this position in previous years and that, in due course, they became absorbed into the system. Even our opponents see the difference. Johnny Murphy would have spoken for all of them when he wrote in the *Irish Independent* in an analysis of this debate: "There is a fundamental and striking difference. They will be the first attending republican group who are avowedly and unequivocally supporters of armed struggle".

I am going to approach this debate under four headings. Firstly of Sinn Fein's right to choose. The last sentence of our constitution reads, and I quote: "Any alterations or amendments to the foregoing constitution shall require a supporting vote of not less than two-thirds of the duly elected delegates present at the Ard-Fheis."

This sentence was in the constitution before any of us joined Sinn Fein and since our constitution was originally drawn up by Sinn Fein members, and not by God, it clearly indicates that other Sinn Fein members who are the duly elected delegates have the authority to change the constitution at an Ard-Fheis.

I am pointing this out to you because some of those who are opposed to the leadership have been implying and saying, with the attitude of theologians, that we have no right or authority to even propose change. It ill-becomes this grouping to take on this self-righteous attitude and try to play the role of God. This is as principled a leadership as any previous leadership.

Secondly, our leadership, your leadership, who are these people who are spearheading change; where did they come from? Well let me tell you. They were the people who, along with others, were doing all the things that were required to be done on the ground at local level during



RESOLUTION 162

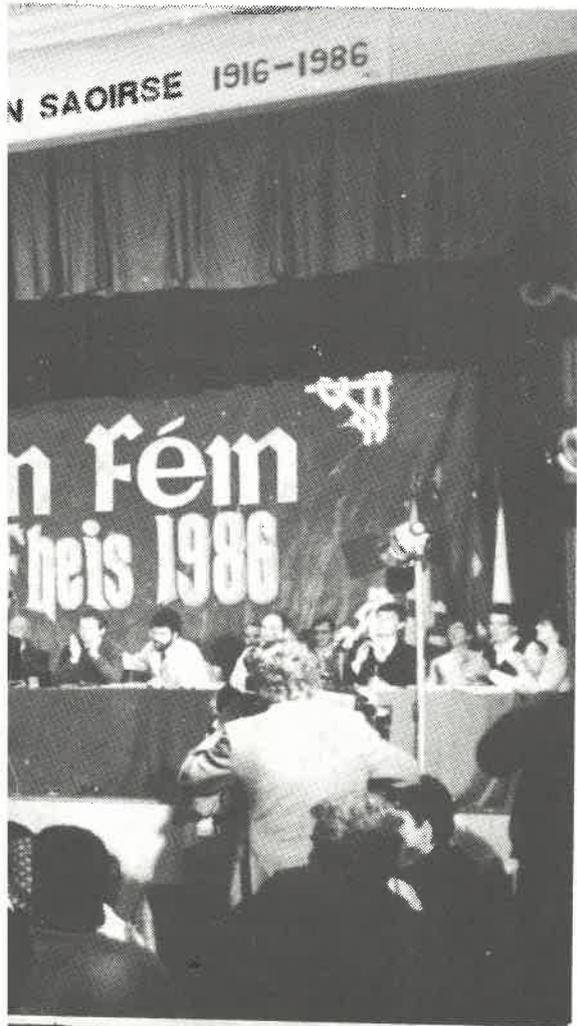
THAT this Ard-Fheis drops its abstentionist attitude to Leinster House. Successful Sinn Fein parliamentary candidates in 26-County elections:

- a. Shall attend Leinster House as directed by the Ard Chomhairle.
- b. Shall not draw their salaries for personal use. (Parliamentary representatives shall be paid a Sinn Fein organiser's subsidy, and the Leinster House salary shall be divided at the direction of the Ard Chomhairle to defray national and constituency expenses.)

To accommodate this change, the *Constitution and Rules* be amended as follows:

That Section 1b of the Constitution be amended to read:

"b. No person who is a member of any political party organisation or who approves of or supports the candidature of persons who, if elected, intend taking part in the proceedings of the Westminster or partitionist 6-County parliaments or who approves of or supports the candidature of persons who sign any form or give any kind of written or verbal undertaking of



intention to take their seats in these institutions, shall be admitted to membership or allowed to retain membership."

That Section 1f of the Constitution be amended to read:

"f. No member of the British armed forces shall be eligible for membership.

"No person who has taken an oath of allegiance to the Westminster or partitionist 6-County parliaments shall be eligible for membership so long as he/she retains the office or position involving such oaths or until he/she repudiates the oath of declaration in writing to a cumann."

That Section 5 of the Constitution be amended to read:

"5. Sinn Fein candidates in Westminster or partitionist 6-County parliamentary elections shall, on selection and before nomination, publicly and solemnly pledge themselves, as follows:-

"I.....freely and solemnly declare:

"a. That, if elected, I will not sit in, nor take part in, the proceedings of the Westminster or

Continued on next page

the years 1969 to 1975. They were the people who after the disastrous 1975 truce moved into middle leadership and national leadership and started to pick up the pieces and push the Movement forward once again. They are the people who moved into the Sinn Fein leadership from 1980 to the present, and have led Sinn Fein to various electoral propaganda successes.

What I am saying is that the present leadership did not drop out of the sky in the last few months, they have always been in our organisation. There are no long rifles or armchair generals amongst them. They have always led from the front. Some of them come from the war zone, others come from, and work day and night throughout, the 26 Counties.

This leadership is totally committed to this Movement and what is perhaps more important, they are absolutely and totally committed to achieving victory.

As to the question of abstentionism itself. The Ard Chomhairle position has been clearly stated in the presidential address last night; of the need for Sinn Fein to develop republican politics. But picking up on one or two points, it is our analysis that partition is as bad a blight on the 26 Counties as it is on the 6 Counties. It is also our belief that the Free State establishment and the Dublin government are as intent as the British government on stopping the Irish people from becoming a sovereign people.

This being the case then, how best can we confront this attack from the Free State?

From as far back as the '50s, military action in the 26 Counties has been ruled out. Is there anyone in this hall today seriously saying that we should confront the Free State on a military front? Of course there is not. Therefore the only way we can confront the Free State is by political means, as part of an overall national struggle.

In other words, armed struggle in the 6 Counties in pursuance of British withdrawal and political struggle throughout the whole 32 Counties in pursuance of the Republic. By political struggle we mean to confront the establishment on social, economic and cultural issues. We also, as an organisation, intend to confront them on the electoral field. On this and other issues we have come to learn that we have got to start to work at the level of the understanding of the people.

The people just do not understand abstentionism. Ninety-five percent of them accept Leinster House as being their government. Of course Leinster House is a partitionist institution pretending to be a national parliament. We need to explain this reality to people, but we also need to accept the reality of their view of this institution.

And finally, the people who are opposed to us taking seats in Leinster House are basically in two groupings. Those who are opposed to this move, but are quite prepared to accept the democratic wishes of this Ard-Fheis, and those who have suggested that they will not accept the outcome unless it is in their favour. Indeed some of them have been facilitated by the British media in giving credibility to media speculation about a split. It is indeed our enemies' wishes that we do split.

If those who are opposed to this change, those who have been canvassing around the country and have been engaging in public abuse and personalised attacks on the leadership, had used even 10% of their energy building the republican base this last few years in the Free State, then we might not even be having this debate today. They have allowed themselves to be used by our enemies, but they are still our comrades and we will not desert them. It is not too late, they should catch themselves on and stop allowing themselves to be exploited by the Free State and British establishments.

Veteran Leitrim republican and vice-president

of Sinn Fein John Joe McGirl recieved

tumultuous applause after seconding the

Ard Chomhairle motion advocating the

removal of Sinn Fein's abstentionist

policy towards Leinster House.

He said:

WISH to second resolution 162. First, in seconding that resolution, I would like at the outset to qualify my own position.

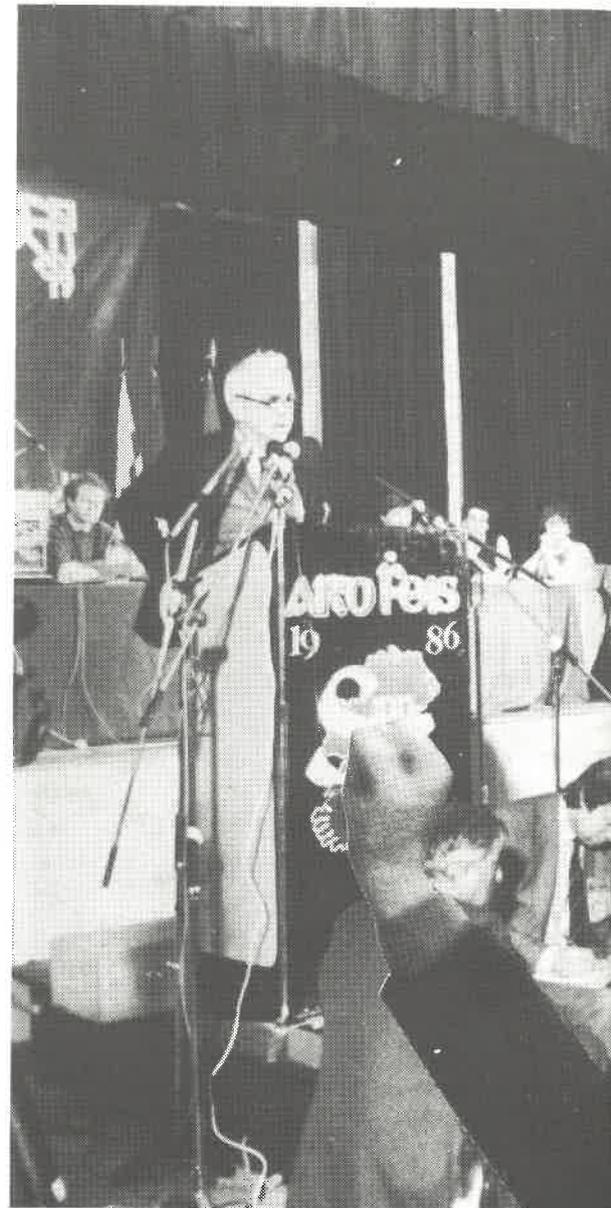
I have been an opponent to entering Leinster House all my life and people who are opposed to this have asked the question and rightly so: why do you change your mind at this junction? As I go along putting forward the points I will in detail explain why I feel it is necessary that we examine our strategy as we go forward.

People say the situation now is the same as it was in 1969. That I deny. I, 12 months before '69, went to one of the leading people who are opposed to this resolution with the view of doing something about the Irish Republican Army, because I could see clearly that they had abandoned Irish freedom and the Irish struggle. Today that situation is in reverse. We have an army fighting 16 years which will continue to fight until British rule is defeated.

When this policy was mentioned to me I didn't hastily make up my mind. I went to people like J.B. O'Hagan, Joe Cahill, Seamus Twomey and others who were close to me at that period in 1969 and we agreed that it was necessary to make change if we were not going to hand down this struggle to another generation.

To come to the people here today who will be opposing this resolution, I have the height of respect for them, and I don't question in any shape or form their independent views on it: they are entitled to them. I don't question their sincerity because I know that Leinster House has been a millstone and it has been imposed by British forces on the Irish people as an alternative to an Irish republic. It is sealed with the blood of Irish republicans down the years.

I, in my time, in this city, saw some of the men who walked round the prison yard with me taken out and executed. Am I abandoning these men today?



Continued from previous page
partitionist 6-County parliaments.

"b. That, pending the establishment of the parliament of the Irish Republic, in all matters pertaining to the duties and functions of a parliamentary representative I will be guided by and hold myself amenable to all directions and instructions issued to me by the Ard Chomhairle of Sinn Fein.

"c. That, pending the establishment of the parliament of the Irish Republic, I will, at any time, if called upon to do so by a majority of the members of the Ard Chomhairle of Sinn Fein, resign my seat as a parliamentary representative of the constituency of....."

"d. That I take this pledge voluntarily, of my own free will.

"That Sinn Fein candidates in Leinster House elections take pledges 5b, 5c and 5d."

I tell you in all faith and in all sincerity, in no way am I.

My aim today is the same as it always was, to bring about an all-Ireland parliament and I have worked hard all my life to promote the abstentionist policy, but now we must look at where the abstentionist policy has been bringing us.

If you take a county council, we go and we mobilise support and with limited success. The next parliamentary election comes and we don't contest it, the people we have built up are gone into Fianna Fail and Fine Gael. We talk to the young people today, we tell them of our effort for freedom, we tell them that we are interested in their livelihood. And we are interested in people because that's what this struggle is about. And when young people come in looking for work, I'll say that it's the politicians in Leinster House who are to blame for their plight and the British occupation of their country. And the answer I get, no matter how I convince them, is, why will you not represent us there? That is not alone applying in Leitrim, it is applying all over Ireland.

I have had correspondence from Gerry McDonnell. I have met him. I have known him for 12 years. I have known some of his comrades who are in England and before Gerry ever went to England he put some of these proposals to us. He talked of elections, of us winning two elections with our hands tied, with us handicapped because of our abstentionism policy and he rightly questioned, did we expect to win on this basis? Now I think that we should throw off this handicap; that we have enough faith in our candidates; that we will succeed where the others failed. That is the important thing.

There are other men and women lying in British jails and they are watching you here today for a lead, and as our president said here yesterday, you people on the floor are the leadership and you take the decision and we will abide by that decision. If you reject this motion we will go back to the blackboard and we will continue on the same road that we have continued on for a long time. But I don't think that we're going to convince the youth of Ireland that it is the right road. We have enough confidence in ourselves and they see what is in Leinster House today. They know that they're rotten to the core.

The Irish people want leadership and the important thing for us today is to win, not to hand it back to another generation. I feel that if this resolution is not passed we will be passing on the fight to our children and the children of a future generation.

Some people will say, well we are entitled to pass on this clean, we got it clean. But we believe that the important thing is to bring about an all-Ireland republic. There are young people leaving this country every day and we care about people no matter what the politicians say. Connolly cared about people, Pearse cared about people, and I believe that we can be successful in bringing about both political and economic freedom, and I will ask you when you come here as men and women, no matter which way you speak, I ask you to speak with dignity and honour and sincerity and to give each one the same hearing. Calling names shouldn't be in our field. That belongs to children going to school. Leave it to them, it is their pastime. We should be above all that.

I have faith in the leadership of this Movement. I have faith in the army of our country, the Irish Republican Army. I was informed by a number of people who are not delegates here, that they were asked to come here today to walk out. I ask them to have second thoughts on that. The position in 1969 and 1986 are completely different. We are going to succeed. We ask you to stand with us.

Go raibh míle maith agat.



Veteran Belfast republican and Treasurer of Sinn Fein

Joe Cahill spoke in favour of the motion. He said:

JOHN Joe McGill spoke for me and he spoke for a lot of people in here today. Like John Joe, in many ways I haven't changed. The dedication and commitment which brought me to the foot of the scaffold in 1942 is the same in my heart today as it was then, and will be until the day I draw my last breath. The only thing that has changed as far as I'm concerned is that age is against me and I can't be in the field with the freedom fighters today because of that. I thought I had to make those remarks.

What I wanted to say today, especially to the young people – and it's great to see so many young people here at this Ard-Fheis – is this. A lot of comparisons have been made between today and the Ard-Fheis of 1970, and I would just like to record a few facts.

In the early '60s and the mid-60s a number of people were forced out of, or had to resign from, the Republican Movement, because they opposed what was then a corrupt leadership: people who had sold out the military spirit that existed within the Republican Movement. In 1965, I resigned. I resigned because I opposed them, and I'll refer to that just before I finish.

RUNNING DOWN THE MOVEMENT

In 1969, July 1969, Jimmy Steel in his famous speech at the grave of Barnes & McCormick in Mullingar, pointed out where the leadership was going wrong in running down the military side of the Movement with their corrupt politicians and foreign influence.

When the holocaust of August '69 came, there was nothing there to defend the people. And I make it public now, that on the 17th of August when, along with other people, a few of us had to leave Belfast and come down here in search of arms, John Joe McGill was the man who gave me arms in Leitrim.

In 1969 the Belfast Brigade of the IRA broke with the then Dublin leadership. In December 1969, an IRA Convention was held and there was a split there. In January 1970 there was a Sinn Fein Ard-Fheis in which the resolution on abstentionism was beaten fairly and squarely. But later on in the day, when a number of delegates had to go away – and please make sure it doesn't happen here today – a resolution was proposed from the floor, a resolution of support for the then Sticky Army Council of the IRA – remember the Provisional Army Council of the IRA was in existence then. And that's exactly what the split came from in 1970.

I would ask people to seriously consider what has been said here.

You've often heard the expression, we can win the war but lose the peace. Gerry Adams in his speech yesterday said it's not the next election we're interested in, but the one after that. I'm confident by that time, the freedom fighters of the IRA will have forced the Brits to the conference table. Let us by our example and determination here today in voting for this resolution, ensure that those who have fought so valiantly with such bravery, will also win the peace. I think that is the most important thing.

Earlier I said that in 1965 I resigned from the Republican Movement. That was a mistake, I should have stayed on and fought. If there are people who are opposed to this resolution I would ask them not to leave: stay in and fight your corner and let us go forward united!





BELOW we reprint an article from *An Phoblacht/Republican News* which vividly captures the atmosphere in the Mansion House on Sunday November 1st and includes extracts from many of the contributions to the abstentionist debate.

AFTER vice-president John Joe McGirl had seconded the motion, Caoimhin MacCathmhaoil (Galway) the first of a long line of speakers that stretched towards the back of the hall, addressed the gathering. He argued, *"the positive political aim"* of Irish republicans is *"to get Dail Eireann functioning again"*. Going into Leinster House would, he said, *"actively impede the coming together of a 32-County Dail."*

The only way for delegates to ensure that they remained republicans was to *"stay out of Leinster House"*, he said. There are no *"short cuts"* to Irish freedom — *"It might be 80 years and it might be another 800 years,"* was his assessment.

Ballyshannon delegate Brendan Magill (who stated that he had lobbied against Motion 162 but had not gone to the media) claimed that going into Leinster House was *"betraying the Republic"*. The place was a *"sewer of filth created by the British"*, said a Cork delegate. *"When you lie down with the dog you get up with the fleas,"* opined a Roscommon speaker. Other delegates described abstentionism as a *"safeguard"* and a *"fundamental cornerstone"* of republicanism.

A youthful Rathfarnham opponent of Motion 162 seemed to think that it was all a waste of time anyway, arguing that the Dublin government would use boycotts, an anti-IRA oath, etc, against Sinn Fein TDs *"to ensure that the Republican Movement has no role in Free State politics"*.

Ballymun delegate Niall Donnelly declared, *"We are on the offensive now!"* Speaking in favour of the motion he said, *"We are forcing them to react to us, and when they react to us they expose themselves."*

Donnelly also opposed the view of some speakers that entry into Leinster House meant support for Free State repression. The establishment parties, he said, are *"very much afraid"* of Sinn Fein passing Motion 162 because Sinn

Fein TDs would challenge the establishment parties on their collaboration with Britain, on conditions in Portlaoise, and on the *"anti-people nature of their social and economic policies"*. Sinn Fein deputies would also expose the myth of Fianna Fail republicanism.

HARDSHIP

South Armagh Councillor Jim McAllister (Ard Chomhairle) was one of those unwilling to put victory on the long finger: *"I want to live in the Republic; I don't want the Republic to be just a plaque on the wall."*

Angrily rebutting one young delegate's suggestion that those advocating entry into Leinster House were in it for *"gain"*, McAllister pointed out that being an elected representative *"has brought me bloody hardship, seven days' and seven nights' work a week, and total disruption to my family life"*.

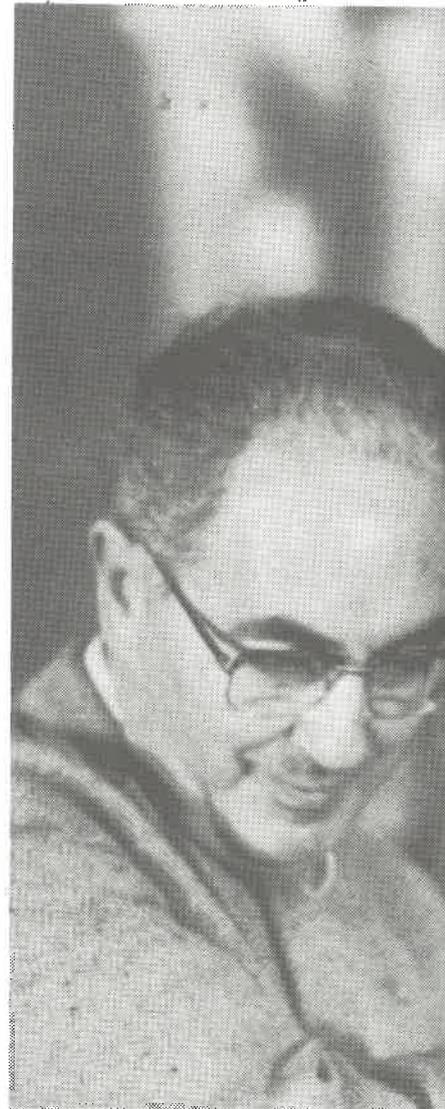
Liam Cotter (Tralee) feared that by entering Leinster House *"we'd forget everything the men of 1922 died for"*.

However, on behalf of the Mid-Kerry Comhairle Ceantair, Mossie Prendergast announced that Motion 162 had the support of the *"majority of republicans in Kerry"* who believed that *"the Republican Movement should use every means at its disposal at this stage of the struggle"*. And they are not *"mad young radicals"*, he pointed out.

The final speaker at the morning session was Cavan delegate Peter McGovern, another older republican, who said that, after much thought, he had decided to support the change. *"It is no good the IRA achieving a military victory if we don't have a political victory in the 26 Counties."*

During the afternoon, the flow of speakers continued unabated. The attendance was, if possible, greater, the heat more intense, and, at one point, some 93 delegates were queuing up to speak.

Pat O'Donnell (Cashel) appealed to





● Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams shakes the hand of Ruairi O Bradaigh. Later Adams, in his appeal for unity, remarked:

"I didn't shake hands with Ruairi for the benefit of the media. I did it to set an example to you all."

abstentionists to *"give the thing a chance"*, pointing out that within the Movement there was no *"generation gap"* or *"North-South gap"* on the issue.

Abstentionism *"marginalises us"*, said Padraig O Maolcraoibhe (Lagan Valley Comhairle Ceantair). He appealed to delegates to *"open this new front to shorten the war"*. For Ardoyne delegate Dessie Breslin, abstentionism meant *"standing by while the state is kicking people in the teeth"*.

Several delegates who voted against the change spoke equally forcefully against any walk-out, including, John Carroll (Offaly), Joe Callaghan (Cork), and Councillor Lughaidh Mac Ghiolla Bhrighde (South Derry), who pointed out, amid general applause:

"No-one is any more or less a republican according to their position on Leinster House."

TRADITIONAL

In the closing stages of the debate, former Sinn Féin President Ruairi O Bradaigh rose to speak, to a standing ovation from delegates.

Like other speakers opposed to Motion 162, he rested his case on the traditional republican aim of convening a Third Dail, *"when strong enough"*, and he advocated Roscommon's Motion 184 to this effect.

Entering Leinster House contradicted the *"two fundamental principles"* of Sinn Féin's Constitution, said O Bradaigh, *"allegiance to the sovereign Irish Republic"* and the principle that the sovereignty and unity of the Republic are *"inalienable and non-judicable,"* he said.

"How can serious social change or fundamental change in property relations come out of Leinster House? No way can it."

Entry into Leinster House meant *de facto* acceptance of the Free State army, and would *"enmesh"* Sinn Féin in constitutionalism.

All previous moves by republicans into Leinster House had only strengthened the state and weakened the Movement, he concluded.

The next delegate, Richard Behal (Killarney), also speaking against Motion 162, detected *"an element of partitionism"* in Motion 162. Leinster House was *"as loathsome to me as Stormont is to people living in the Six Counties"*. Behal claimed that the arguments for dropping abstentionism with respect to Leinster House applied equally to Stormont or Westminster.

Derry republican and Ard Chomhairle member

Martin McGuinness backed the motion in a very

stirring speech in which he said:

FIRST of all, I would like to give a commitment on behalf of the leadership that we have absolutely no intention of going into Westminster or Stormont.

In developing my contribution in the run-up to today's debate, I have steadfastly refused to become embroiled in a public slanging match with those who oppose this motion. But issues have been raised by some of the defenders of abstentionism which need to be confronted and challenged.

They argue that Sinn Fein TDs entering Leinster House will make it impossible to conduct armed struggle against British rule in the 6 Counties. They tell us that it is inevitable that the war against British rule will be run down.

These suggestions deliberately infer that the present leadership of Sinn Fein and the leadership of the IRA are intent on edging the Republican Movement onto a constitutional path.

To bolster their arguments they draw comparisons between a pre-1970 leadership of the Republican Movement, which republican history proves had surrendered before the war began, and the present leadership of this Movement.

Shame. Shame. Shame.

The reaction of the British government to the IRA's military campaign and Sinn Fein's successful electoral strategy in the 6 Counties is testimony enough of that government's inability to overcome the resistance of a new generation of IRA freedom fighters, supported on equal terms by articulate and committed Sinn Fein freedom fighters. It would be a sad day for this Movement if the record of the present generation of republican soldiers and Sinn Fein activists needed to be defended on this platform. Sadly, the inference that the removal of abstentionism will lead to the demise of military opposition to British rule has indeed called into question the commitment of the IRA to pursue this struggle to a successful conclusion.

I reject any such suggestion and I reject the notion that entering Leinster House would mean an end to Sinn Fein's unapologetic support for the right of Irish people to oppose in arms the British forces of occupation.

That, my friends, is a principle which a minority in this hall might doubt, but which I believe all our opponents clearly understand.

Our position is clear and will never change. The war against British rule must continue until freedom is achieved. But we are not at war with the government of the 26 Counties.

The reality of this fact must be recognised by us all and, in accepting





this reality, we must also accept that after 65 years of republican struggle, republican agitation, republican sacrifice and republican rhetoric. We have failed to convince a majority of people in the 26 Counties that the Republican Movement has any relevance to them.

By ignoring reality we remain alone and isolated on the high altar of abstentionism, divorced from the people of the 26 Counties and easily dealt with by those who wish to defeat us. Such a situation cannot be allowed to continue and this leadership is charged with a responsibility to make our struggle more and more relevant to the Irish people.

In a *Sunday Tribune* article last week, we were told that we endanger the purity of republicanism because we will attract quantity, rather than quality. This is a calculated insult to the Irish people which ignores a very important fact. The struggle against British rule could not have been carried out without an adequate supply of both quantity and quality.

It is a fact that IRA Volunteers, some very young, and some with only a limited knowledge of republicanism, have given their lives and liberty in the struggle. They were committed to Irish Freedom and they fought and died in this cause.

Are they to be regarded as inferior and less important than those who regard themselves as republican elitists?

In the establishment media we are told, amongst other things, that we are counter-revolutionaries and that, if we lose the vote, we will be discredited.

It's sad and surprising that this could be said by a republican.

The British government have a different opinion of us however. They fear this Movement. They fear this leadership. They have every right to, because in or out of Leinster House, we lead the most dangerous and committed revolutionary force in Ireland for 65 years.

This Ard-Fheis, and you the delegates, deserve to know the full story.

In fact what you are witnessing here is not a debate over one issue, but two: abstentionism and the leadership of the republican struggle. The two issues should not be confused and those who are considering leaving along with members of the former leadership should consider carefully what I am about to say.

The reality is that the former leadership of this Movement has never been able to come to terms with this leadership's criticism of the disgraceful attitude adopted by them during the disastrous 18-month ceasefire in the mid-1970s.

Instead of accepting the validity of our case, as others who have remained have done, they chose to withhold their whole-hearted support from the leadership which replaced them. Some of this former leadership have already gone. They were not squeezed out. **They left us.** Some stayed and will stay after this debate. If those who remain leave this Movement today, it will not be just because of the abstentionist vote.

Finally, those opposed to us on this issue know there is not going to be any split in Sinn Fein. They also know that the ranks of the IRA contain a minority of Volunteers who, while opposed to the removal of abstentionism from Leinster House, have committed themselves to stand shoulder-to-shoulder in unity with their comrades.

They will not split.

They will not walk away from the armed struggle. They are real revolutionaries. If you allow yourselves to be led out of this hall today, the only place you will be going is home.

You will be walking away from the struggle. Don't go my friends. We will lead you to the Republic.

Before the result of the vote on abstentionism was announced Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams requested to address the gathering. He said:

YESTERDAY at lunch-time myself, Martin McGuinness, Pat Doherty, John Joe McGirl and other members of this leadership met with some of the leading supporters of abstentionism.

The meeting was at our request and was in some cases the second meeting which we as individuals, again at our request, with some of these comrades. I won't name the people involved in order not to embarrass them. They know who they are. I wish to address them again and all other delegates who we haven't got talking to on a person to person basis. Yesterday's meeting, like the previous one, was to appeal to them not to leave Sinn Fein and not to walk out if the vote went against them. The vote has been counted now and what I have to say can have no bearing upon it.

I hope that what I say does have a bearing on the attitude of anyone thinking of walking out.

I have asked Sean not to announce the vote for a few minutes until you all have the chance to reconsider your position. I don't know what way the vote has gone, but if it has gone in favour of the Ard Chomhairle I appeal to you all not to do anything you, or we, would regret. We have never tried to change anyone's personal principles. We all hold our own principles dearly. We only ask that you give us a chance. If the Ard Chomhairle loses the vote we will accept it in a comradely fashion and will return to another Ard-Fheis with our proposal. We have had a good debate and we accept your verdict. I want to thank you all for your contributions. One delegate says he knows how the vote is going to go. He should take up fortune-telling. No-one can say it was a rigged vote or a rigged debate. It was an intelligent, educational and a comradely debate.

At yesterday's meeting the comrades we spoke to refused our requests not to leave. They told us that if they lose the vote that they would publicly walk out of this Ard-Fheis. Again I appeal to them not to do so. To my knowledge no cumann has mandated any delegates to walk out. No delegate here is here on his or her own initiative. All delegates represent not themselves but their cumann or comhairle ceantair. Unless they authorised us to walk out we have no authority to do so. This is a personal decision and must be seen as such. To suggest otherwise would be dishonest.

I am now reconciled to the fact that if you lose the vote some of you will leave us. I regret this but it is your choice not mine. You should not take such a decision in the heat of the minute. Such a decision should be given long consideration. Don't put yourselves on hooks or feel you are on a hook by what you have said here or in the past. Think about it, on your own and at length. If you then decide, or if you ignore this request and are going to leave this struggle, please do it in a republican and comradely fashion. To walk out publicly gives the establishment media the opportunity of running the headlines which they may already have set – Sinn Fein Walk-Out... Sinn Fein Splits.

Some comrades may leave us but we all know there is not going to be a split. Everyone here knows the army is united. Everyone here knows the vast majority of this party is united. We have more to unite us than to divide us. Those who walk out leave this struggle. There is going to be no bloodshed, despite what sections of the media are saying or promoting over this issue. We have been down that road before.

We are not going down it again.



If we part, we part as friends in sadness and not in anger. The establishment is trying to create the imagery of a split in order to divide our base and to cause confusion.

Many of us already run the daily risk of loyalist assassinations. We can live, or die, with that. If however a British undercover squad moved in, because of our public lifestyles, there is little we can do. And if some prominent republican, God forbid, was shot dead by such a squad in the wake of a walkout, could we blame the general public if they saw this as part of yet another republican feud?

A walk-out helps nobody but our enemies. It creates the climate for British dirty tricks. If comrades feel the need to leave us, and if they feel the need to do this publicly, then tomorrow is the time to do it. Think hard on what I have said.

There are many visitors here. Some of you are ex-members of Sinn Fein. Some may have come here with a misguided view to bolstering the 'walk-out' numbers. No one with accreditation was denied entry to this Ard-Fheis. If some people couldn't get in, it was because there was no space, a good problem for Sinn Fein. Those lucky enough to get in were made welcome. You enjoyed our hospitality. Please don't insult us now.

Having said all that, if people wish to reject what I have said, so be it. I didn't shake hands with Ruairi for the benefit of the media. I did it to set an example to you all. I can do no more. If I bend backwards any further I'll go up my own arse. I have no intention of doing that. They should not be impeded, hassled or heckled on their way out. I appeal to those who are not leaving, to sit in silence and to facilitate comrades wishing to leave.

Then we can get on with the work of this Ard-Fheis. So for a minute or two let us all contemplate what I have said. Then, as the tension increases, Sean will announce the vote. Remember what I have said. Don't lead a walk-out or be lead into a walk-out. Don't in the emotion of the minute assist the British government dirty tricks department. Regardless of what opponents of the Ard Chomhairle motion think about me, I consider them to be comrades and good republicans. Ruairi O Bradaigh knows me long and well enough to know that. If people wish to resign from Sinn Fein, let them do so in a manner which will ensure that we have merely agreed to disagree, that we can still talk to one another when we meet again in the future. Take an example from Danny Gleeson. "I'm voting against the Ard Chomairle", he told me. *"But I'm not walking out"*.

Take a minute or two to think about all that and then in the days ahead take your final decision. I spoke at a protest demonstration in West Belfast after the murder of John Downes in West Belfast. Thousands and thousands and thousands of men and women marched in an awful silence. I explained to those people what a clenched fist salute means and we have seen many clenched fist salutes today. I explained that an open palm is divided into 4 fingers and a thumb. United it becomes a fist, and with or without a freedom-fighter's weapon, it is more powerful than an open palm because it is united. When I had finished those thousands of old men, old women, young boys, girls, IRA Volunteers and Sinn Fein members stood shoulder to shoulder with their clenched fists raised to the sky. They set an example for us. They, and others throughout the country are the people we represent. Let us not let them down. Think about what I have said. Do nothing in haste.

Bígí le chéile. Bígí aontaithe. Whatever way the vote goes let there be no triumphalism. Take a minute to think of all this. If the Ard Chomhairle loses the vote there should be no triumphalism. If it wins the vote there should be no triumphalism.





THE LEADERSHIP of the Irish Republican Army issued a statement on Wednesday, November 5th, outlining in some detail its attitude to the weekend decision at Sinn Fein's Ard-Fheis to drop abstentionism in the 26 Counties.

The leadership of the Irish Republican Army welcomes the decision taken by Sinn Fein at its Ard-Fheis to drop its abstentionist policy in the 26 Counties.

"We also welcome the pledges of continued support for the strug-

gle in Ireland from Irish republicans in the USA and Australia.

'We are confident that Sinn Fein will emerge as a significant political force in the Free State and will build a sound republican base.



"We are also confident that our successful prosecution of the armed struggle will bring heavy pressure to bear on the British government and will be the force which makes them quit Ireland."

The Irish Republican Army has also commented on some of the remarks made by republicans over the abstentionist debate.

"Given our determination,

given the sacrifices we have made in the past, are making at present, and will be making in the future; given the fact that despondency and war weariness do not enter into our vocabulary, we are considerably annoyed and disappointed that some comrades in Sinn Fein should have publicly brought themselves into disrepute by slandering the men and women Volunteers of the Irish Republican Army.

"To say, as some have done, that the men and women who are prepared to die, who are prepared to go to jail, have no right to advocate certain political strategies and tactics, makes a mockery of the very thing we are fighting and dying for: freedom; the freedom of choice; the freedom to choose strategies which we believe will help consolidate our base of support and which will contribute to victory.

"To suggest that the IRA is not legitimate because of the decision it has taken on abstentionism is ridiculous. The IRA predates the Second Dail and the First Dail, its constitution is a military constitution, and our legitimacy stems from organised popular resistance to British rule in Ireland, a tradition which was reinforced in 1916, by the Fenians, by the Young Irishmen, by the United Irishmen.

"Its legitimacy stems from a tradition of resistance which has been a fact of history since Britain first encroached Irish sovereignty 800 years ago."

OPINION

Reprinted here is the editorial from

An Phoblacht/Republican News

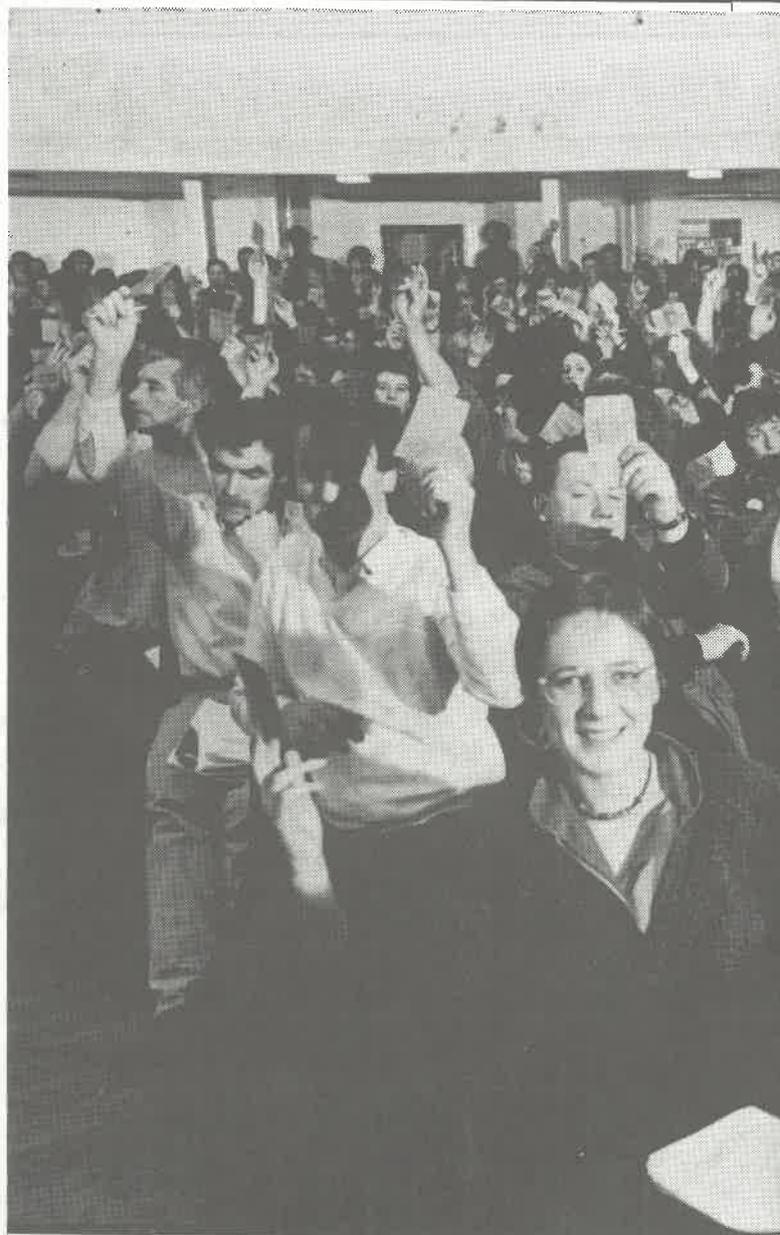
of November 6th 1986.

LAST SUNDAY'S ARD-FHEIS decision to end Leinster House abstentionism was clinched not on the say-so of an IRA General Army Convention, and not because of any blind faith by delegates in the wisdom of an Ard Chomhairle resolution, but because the bulk of the Sinn Fein membership, after considering every other option (and there were *no* options being proposed by those against the change), had concluded that this step was essential if Sinn Fein was to expand its base of support in the 26 Counties.

The stakes were, and are, as fundamental as the success of the republican struggle: breaking out of isolation and becoming politically relevant, the need to blend the national struggle with contemporary reality as perceived by the majority of people in the 26 Counties.

Those republicans who booked a hotel even before the vote was taken, those of them who, in a hypocritical exercise, participated in voting before leading the walk-out, and who then assembled as prearranged with their prepared, printed material to announce the formation of 'Republican Sinn Fein', have walked a small number of people, including themselves, into a cul-de-sac.

No-one would attempt to detract from the sacrifices made in the past by the organisers of the West County Hotel meeting. However, on the issue of abstentionism, the ending of which they have predicted will lead to the Republican Movement being gobbled up, they



are wrong. There was more chance of the Irish Republican revolution being thwarted by the disastrous and confusing 1975 ceasefire which led to a degeneration in the armed struggle, or by the federal policy had it been maintained as a serious basis for a settlement. Their walk-out has harmed the Republican Movement. It arose because they failed to convince Sinn Fein *and* the IRA about the merits of maintaining the abstentionist policy. So the walk-out was a mixture of pride (and has been seen as such) and principle, which no-one could or would attempt to change.

Worse still, the organisers have, unjustifiably, publicly cast doubt on the sincerity and dedication of the memberships of Sinn Fein and the IRA to maintain and sustain a stand against the British and the Free Staters. So confused are they that, on the one hand, they have



declared the IRA 'illegal' (because of the abstentionist decision) but, on the other hand, they say they support the IRA.

It is sad that people have broken from the Movement.

Let us hope they return.

They will have cause to return.

They will have cause to return because the struggle and the heavy task of freedom will not only continue but, now that Sinn Fein has removed the shackles from itself, the Republican Movement is entering an exciting and challenging period.

Against the background of an heroic armed struggle in the North, which the IRA is pledged to continue and intensify, Sinn Fein is under no illusions about the nature of the challenge: to overturn a dark, uncomplimentary and unsympathetic view of republicanism carefully

nurtured by successive Dublin governments and a hostile media; to build and nurture new support; to develop and defend practical policies on social and economic issues — these are the challenges facing Sinn Fein.

And then there is Leinster House.

Leinster House *does* corrupt. It corrupts corruptible people, just as any parliament, even a 32-County parliament, would corrupt the weak and vain, the insincere and the gombeen. It cannot corrupt a revolutionary.

We need experienced, articulate and confident republican representatives. Initially, our solidarity with the armed struggle may cost us support among some sections of the non-republican populace. However, rather than compromise or be evasive, republicans must explain the origins of the war and the justifications and correctness of physical force. We can then learn to live without the support of those to whom armed struggle is an insuperable difficulty. It is something we have assessed. But we will also educate many into republicanism, into our analysis of the crisis in Ireland, into supporting republicanism and the republican struggle.

The IRA is right, and we say that.

Our position on Leinster House is that it is not at the head of a sovereign nation as envisaged in the 1916 Proclamation. It is a partitionist institution, and we say that. The Garda and Free State army are the constituted force of this institution and we wish them no harm. If there is, by some unforeseen chance, a clash between them and the IRA, our public position in Leinster House on such a clash would be the same public position had we never crossed the door.

These convictions about sovereignty and resistance have sustained republicans through thick and thin, through brutal interrogations, through the pomp of 'courts and justice', in desolate prison cells, against the might of the British authorities. They have sustained republicans not just in the last 65 years, but well before the Leinster House parliament was even dreamed up. They are not going to be deserted because there's a bit of carpet on the floor and the enemy are in pin-stripes, seated on leather benches. Indeed, our convictions, arguments and views would be even more tenable because our republican TDs would be on an electoral par with the FitzGeralds and Haugheys.

It is their position which is untenable.

They have never seen the likes of us before, and they know it.

They have never seen the likes of us before, and we know it!



(Above and below) Some of those who attended the meeting convened in the West County Hotel, County Dublin, shortly after the walk-out by less than thirty delegates who ignored the pleas for unity from the leadership.





Sean McManus, Sinn Fein Chairperson

On the following pages we reprint a selection of reports dealing with the many other important debates and discussions which took place at the 1986 Sinn Fein Ard-Fheis.

As an introduction to these we reprint in full the text of the address by party spokesperson, Sean McManus.

SINCE we last met here, twelve months ago, there have been many major developments in the political, social and economic life of this island. These changes have had a direct relevance to our struggle for freedom and justice and this Ard-Fheis gives us an opportunity to take stock of our position now and to formulate our course for the years ahead.

Amongst the political milestones of the past year the dominant issue has undoubtedly been the Hillsborough Agreement, but there have been others such as the demise of the Stormont Assembly and, in the 26 Counties, the spectacle of an increasingly desperate Coalition government clinging to power.

The determination of the Westminster and Dublin governments to formulate and implement common political objectives has been equaled only by their common indifference to the economic and social misery which their policies have caused the people of this island.

As both administrations concentrate their attention on bolstering a border which is the primary source of division on this island and while vast resources are diverted to copper-fasten this division, the dole queues lengthen, health services are cut back and our youth are forced, in increasing numbers, to emigrate in search of a better life.

This story of political, economic and social misrule could have been written at any point since the partition of this island more than 60 years ago and to that extent, while some things do inevitably change, the underlying framework of repression remains unaltered.

The Republican Movement stands today, as it has always stood, on the side of justice against oppression, on the side of the poor against poverty, on the side of all freedom loving people against unjust foreign rule. It is no surprise, therefore, that today, as always, we are identified as a threat by those who perpetuate injustice. Nor is it any surprise that our enemies have, through the Hillsborough Agreement, attempted to crush Irish republicanism.

In two weeks the Dublin government and the Northern wing of Fine Gael, the SDLP, will be celebrating the first anniversary of the signing of the Hillsborough Agreement. A lot has been said about the Agreement, and there has been from the outset widespread reaction to it, including a violent loyalist reaction which has by no means petered out.

Our initial reaction to the Agreement and our objections to it, remain. We stated that it would provoke a loyalist backlash. We stated that it was aimed at undermining the Republican Movement by deliver-

ing a number of limited and minor reforms through the Dublin government and the SDLP. We pointed out that whilst it was the British government's intention to confront the loyalists and divide the loyalists and produce a new loyalist leadership which would do an internal deal with the SDLP, this confrontation was never the issue of Irish rights to **self-determination**, but was one of **reform** and that even though the Hillsborough Agreement 'copper-fastened partition' – as Tom King so correctly puts it – the loyalists would still not accept it.

The SDLP and the Dublin government needed the monster of loyalism to help sell the Agreement. They needed Paisley and they needed the UDA. John Hume even provocatively boasted about "*lancing the Orange boil*". They pointed to the 'Ulster says no' rallies as proof that loyalists were confirming that something major was about to be given to Northern nationalists. On a wave of hope and risen expectations they got Seamus Mallon elected to Westminster. The 'Northern nightmare', boasted Peter Barry, was beginning to end.

The Northern nightmare began to get worse, however.

The Hillsborough Agreement was initially sold as a big breakthrough for nationalists. There were going to be changes in employment with equality of opportunity; the judiciary and the RUC would be reformed; show-trials would end; harassment would cease; our cultural identity would be recognised.

Sinn Fein said then, and repeats now, that the Agreement is about stabilising British rule in the 6 Counties and the quid pro quo which Britain demands is increased cross-border collaboration. People in the 26 Counties, insulted by the existence of the border, are now paying for its upkeep as never before.

So what benefits has Hillsborough brought?

It has sparked off a loyalist backlash which in the town of Lisburn alone has forced 150 Catholic families to flee their homes. Twelve Catholics and a Protestant woman married to a Catholic have been assassinated.

In Strabane, as has already been stated by Bishop Edward Daly among others, the RUC and British army have gone on a sectarian spree. Also in Strabane a nationalist band which filed the RUC for permission to march through the 95% nationalist town centre, a few weeks after outside loyalists had triumphantly marched along the same route, were banned because they intended carrying the Irish Tricolour and because they had given 118-hours' notice, instead of the statutory 120 hours!

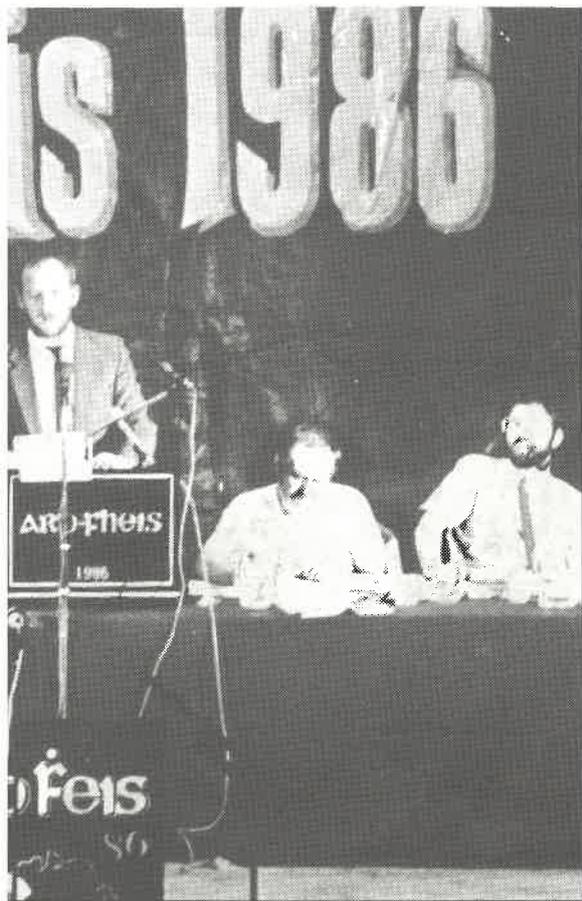
Irish language speakers, just six weeks ago, were arrested at the border and taken to Gough Interrogation Centre for giving their names in their native tongue.

The strip-searching of women prisoners is carried out daily at Magherry.

UDR soldiers, who without warning or cause shot and wounded two Catholic civilians outside Cookstown last January, were not prosecuted and are back on duty boasting to nationalists at checkpoints what they can get away with. Three Diplock judges instead of one, are advocated by the Dublin government as being the panacea for restoring nationalist confidence in the courts. Jim Gibney, a former national organiser of Sinn Fein, was sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment on the word of a perjurer in one of the notorious show-trials. His appeal was heard by three judges. One judge, a Catholic, said he should be released. The other two judges with unionist backgrounds, 'the majority', refused his appeal. Today Jim Gibney is still in the H-Blocks serving 12 years.

And now we have the unbelievable sight of Seamus Mallon, who





swapped his long-standing friendship with Fianna Fail, and the support that party had pledged to him for many years, for the backbenches of Westminster and the seat he won in what must rank as the confidence trick of the century.

"Vote for me and I'll set you free"! he said. According to Seamus Mallon and his SDLP colleagues, the Hillsborough Agreement was an historic breakthrough, the road to a united Ireland. Just three weeks ago on the radio, when a reporter confronted him with the reality of all the broken promises, the wrecked homes, the assassination victims, Mr Mallon blurted out: "But the Agreement is the only little thing we have got in 65 years."

Such a wording was certainly not contained in his election manifesto. Does anybody believe that he would be the MP for Armagh if he had been as honest with the electorate last January?

The sight of Mallon on the one hand defending the building of RUC and British army barracks in Derry or Carrickmore and, on the other hand, condemning the building of British army Hillsborough spy-posts along the South Armagh border, ranks as the highest example of hypocrisy. In case he needs a reminder let me say that the spy-posts he complains of are there thanks to Articles 2, 8 and 9 of the Hillsborough Agreement, which Mr Mallon and his party support.

For the past year, in order to sustain the hype, the Dublin government and the SDLP have been claiming the IRA and Sinn Fein have been doing their utmost to bring down the Agreement. The IRA has more important things to do and the most we have done is issue statements pointing out why the Agreement is not a step forward. An examination of this Ard-Fheis Clar, for example, and the small number of resolutions on this matter, is the answer to Peter Barry and the SDLP wishful thinkers who have claimed that we are terrified of the Agreement.

At this late stage we call upon the SDLP to repudiate the Hillsborough Agreement. If a united Ireland, to quote John Hume, is not worth the loss of one single life, then how can they support a document which has sparked off a loyalist backlash (which has led to many innocent Catholics being killed), and is a bulwark against a united Ireland? They should pull out of the Agreement and make an international declaration about British insincerity and they should be demanding a British withdrawal from Ireland as the only progressive step Britain can take towards helping bring peace to Ireland.

Likewise Fianna Fail, whose leader Charles Haughey recently acknowledged that the deal "*had worsened the situation for the nationalist community*". They must stop their nonsensical talk of re-negotiation if and when they are elected to power. Such re-negotiation, even if it was possible, would not end the nationalist nightmare, nor would it alter a fundamental injustice upon which the Hillsborough Agreement is built — the recognition of unionists' 'right' to veto constitutional change on this island.

And what of the current Coalition administration in the 26 Counties? Their determination to cling to office as witnessed by their wheeling and dealing before the recent no-confidence vote has very little to do with wanting to correct the social and economic mess they have created. The implementation of the Hillsborough Agreement, at whatever cost in terms of human suffering, and the further strengthening of the link with the EEC and through it the NATO alliance — these are the primary objectives of the Coalition and particularly the Fine Gael partner within it.

Sinn Fein stands in opposition to the erosion of the limited sover-

eignty for all of Ireland, we are loathed and feared by the Coalition government and the interests they represent. They loathe the republican point of view which we profess and they fear that the victims of their political, social and economic misrule will increasingly turn to that point of view.

We have had evidence of the extent of this fear in recent weeks. The very mention of an increased role by Sinn Fein in electoral politics in the 26 Counties threw leading members of Fine Gael into a tantrum at their recent Ard-Fheis and already there is talk of proscription and other dire threats. So much for their faith in an alleged respect for democracy!

They use scare tactics, deliberately choosing to ignore the IRA's consistent and recently re-affirmed rule prohibiting armed action against the institutions of this state.

Let the message go out clearly from this gathering: Sinn Fein is a political force and will continue to build on its base of popular support through its progressive and increasingly relevant policies. We will achieve this through a politicised, committed and disciplined membership, who will be satisfied with nothing less than the attainment of one ultimate objective – a free and united Ireland.

Finally on the same day that Tom King and Alan Dukes have colluded together in London in another of their vain attempts to harm the Republican Movement – let us look ahead briefly to one of the major issues of this Ard-Fheis. Much has been said regarding the issue of abstentionism. All I would ask is that we have a calm, reasoned debate, without recourse to prisoners or our patriotic dead, and that when this Ard-Fheis has reached its decision, whatever that decision may be, all members of this Movement should unite together to continue the work which we have set ourselves.

Let us not be swayed by the attempts of a hostile media to sow dissension in our ranks, but let us leave this Ard-Fheis as we have entered it – united and strong.



FOR THE FIRST TIME, the Sinn Fein Ard-Fheis began on Friday evening this year, with debates which, while relatively low-key and less controversial than much of the rest of the weekend, nevertheless demonstrated the growing relevance and increased work of the organisation on a wide range of issues.

In opening the Ard-Fheis, the chairperson for the first session, Rita O'Hare, called for calm and comradely debate and welcomed the hundreds of delegates and visitors who had already crowded the hall. Their numbers showed, she said, that Sinn Fein was steadily increasing support.

The first item on the Clar was the section on *Prisoners*.

Seanna Breatnach (Sinn Fein POW Department) gave a report

on the state of the struggle for republican prisoners incarcerated in Irish and British jails. He said that the emphasis was less now on harsh and inhuman prison conditions and had shifted to a longer-term struggle in which the plight of those serving life sentences is to the fore.

"The primary aim of the British and Irish jailers of republicans remains to demoralise and psychologically defeat the POWs,"



he said.

Motions were passed to establish Sinn Fein cumainn in all jails which would have speaking rights at future Sinn Fein Ard-Fheiseanna and an anti-repression co-ordinating committee to incorporate all campaigns.

Ongoing campaigns include those against strip-searches, show-trials and extradition, and demanding repatriation for republican prisoners in England and release dates for Portlaoise lifers. An important motion was also passed calling for a realistic system of support for released prisoners in their efforts to readjust to life outside.

YOUTH

Alan O Cuirrin outlined the work of the Sinn Fein Youth Department over the last year. In the debate which followed, several speakers highlighted the exploitation of young people through government 'training' schemes which continue to be used as a source of cheap labour with no prospect of lasting work for those involved.

The Ard-Fheis adopted a comprehensive resolution from a Dublin cumann calling for a fundamental re-evaluation of the entire education system in Ireland which, it said, was "undemocratic, sexist and based on the perpetuation of power amongst the middle and upper classes".

The plight of hundreds of thousands of people affected by cuts in health and social welfare occupied the attention of delegates for the rest of Friday evening. An Ard Chomhairle motion urged all Sinn Fein members to actively campaign against the cuts in both the Six Counties and 26 Counties.

There followed an extensive debate on housing which reflected the work done, especially by Sinn Fein community activists in Dublin.

NUCLEAR POWER

On environment, the party reiterated its total opposition to nuclear power and the dumping of nuclear waste in the Irish Sea. Support was pledged to the people of East Tyrone who are

resisting plans to destroy their environment through open-cast

In the section on *Justice and the Community* two important motions were passed expressing Sinn Fein opposition to the Neighbourhood Watch scheme in the 26 Counties and calling for the decriminalisation of homosexual acts between men and equal rights for all gay men and lesbian women.

The debate on social and economic issues resumed on Saturday afternoon.

The massive upturn in emigration was described in an Ard Chomhairle motion as "a true symbol of failure and shows, more clearly than anything else, that successive Dublin governments have abjectly failed to provide employment or prosperity for the Irish people".

Sinn Fein Councillor Caoimhghin O Caolain spoke of the devastating effects of emigration on his county of Monaghan.

He said that emigration was being used by the Dublin government as a means of "exporting revolutionaries" from Ireland, the majority leaving being young supporters or potential supporters of Sinn Fein.

Despite restrictions on time, there were lively contributions on agriculture. Joe Ennis reported on the work of the national agriculture committee in the past year, once again stressing the need for more co-operation from the membership in the development of policies in this area.

Frank Guckian (Leitrim) said that the depopulation of the West is as a result of afforestation. He said that working farmers were being sold out by the Dublin government to private forestry interests.

Guckian's cumann successfully proposed a resolution calling for the establishment of a state forestry agency to develop the timber industry, complementing the interests of local small farmers and for the benefit of the Irish people as a whole.

The Ard-Fheis expressed solidarity with striking workers in



Cork Corporation and in the Shelbourne Hotel, Dublin. After the debate a collection was taken up for the Shelbourne strike fund.

The Dublin government's proposed *Legislation on Industrial Relations* was rejected by delegates, who agreed that it restricted the rights of trade unionists. It called on the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and all individual unions to draw up their own proposals on industrial relations reforms, including the right to strike without restrictive condi-

tions.

Despite the broad scope of the section on *Political Policy*, there were only six resolutions and a short debate on this area.

Attention centred on a motion from the Markievicz Cumann in Dublin asking the Ard Chomhairle to look into the possibilities of organising or taking part in a broad-based campaign on national freedom, sovereignty and neutrality. The motion was adopted but time did not allow anything like the level of debate required by such an important issue.



THE ARD-FHEIS got off to a rather slow start on Saturday morning, beginning with the section on *Constitution & Rules*. An Ard Chomhairle motion called for Sections 1g(1) and 1g(11) of the Constitution to be deleted and replaced so that Sinn Féin may only make use of courts at the discretion of the Ard Chomhairle.

In support of Motion 42, Ard Runai Tom Hartley pointed out that over the past few years it had become clear that where Sinn Féin members have been brought up on trumped-up charges they have fought these cases. It was now therefore a matter of practicality. The motion, which needed a two-thirds majority to change the Constitution, was passed overwhelmingly by delegates.

Another Ard Chomhairle motion, which again needed a two-thirds majority, called for Section 1h, which specifies that new members serve a six-week probationary period, to be extended to three months. Party Chairperson Sean MacManus explained that the increased time period would allow new members to become more familiar with Sinn Féin policies. This motion was carried.

In the *Rules* section, an Ard Chomhairle motion calling for a change in Rule 21 (which stipulates that the Coiste Seasta meets "every week") should now read "regularly". With the

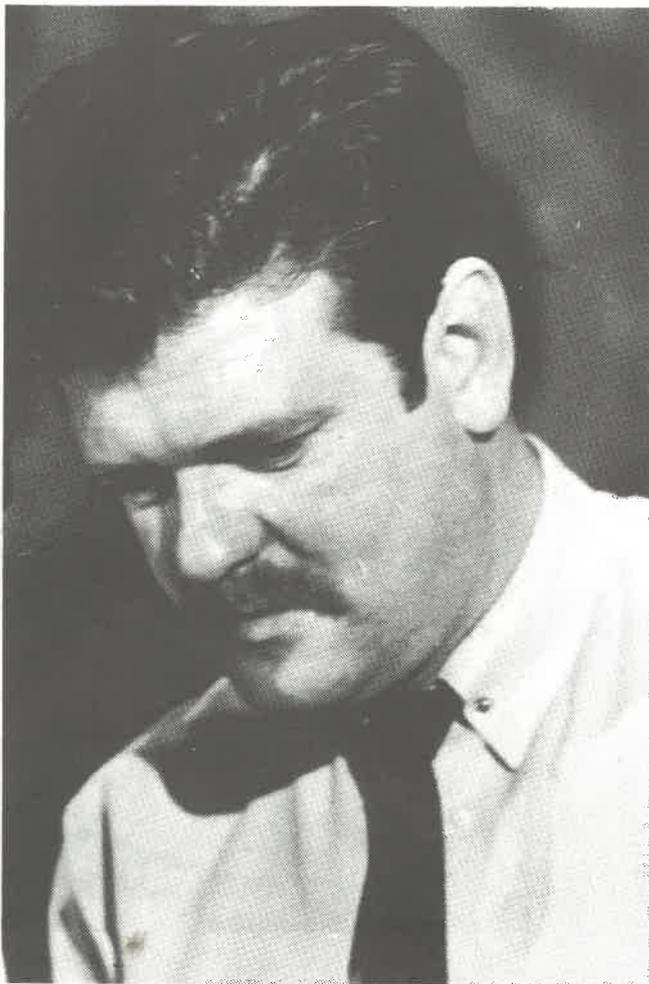
development of Sinn Féin departments, the role of the Coiste Seasta had been reduced and therefore, as Tom Hartley explained, needed only to meet regularly. This too was passed.

Rule 34, regarding internal discipline, was amended by the South Dublin Comhairle Ceantair and passed by the Ard-Fheis so that comhairli ceantair now have the authority to dismiss members whose behaviour brings the name of the Movement into disrepute, or for other adequate causes, with a right of appeal to higher bodies. Delegates also passed a motion charging the incoming Ard Chomhairle to redraft and update the *Constitution & Rules* so that it was more comprehensive.

AP/RN & PUBLICITY

In his first year as Director of Publicity, Brian MacDonald opened the section on *AP/RN & Publicity* and gave a comprehensive report on the functions and role of the Publicity Department whose main task, he said, was to "win the hearts and minds of the





people" to fuller understanding of the struggle. With Section 31 and overall media self-censorship operating, MacDonald congratulated those who had tried to counter media misrepresentation, whether by writing letters or producing news-sheets to bypass censorship. There are great demands on the production staff of *AP/RN* who, apart from producing and independently distributing a weekly paper, issued a wide range of material throughout the year.

The Republican Press Centre in Belfast and Republican Information Centre in Derry had handled thousands of statements and interviews and the main priority of the department was

to establish a similar facility in Dublin.

During the *AP/RN & Publicity* section, the Ard-Fheis passed a motion charging the incoming Ard Chomhairle to formulate a report on the feasibility of establishing a daily newspaper. A motion calling on only Sinn Fein public representatives to refuse to pay the RTE television licence in protest against Section 31 was amended to include *all* Sinn Fein members. The motion was accepted.

As the Ard-Fheis was running behind schedule, most of the motions in the section on *Internal Education* were referred to the Ard Chomhairle, apart from Motions 69 and 74, which were withdrawn.



SILE FANNING, chairperson of Sinn Fein's National Women's Committee, opened the section on *Women* in the Clar and reported that there had been three committee meetings and two national seminars since her appointment last November. Unfortunately, many women outside Dublin, Belfast and Derry had fallen away throughout the year and if growth and strengthening of the department and the Movement was to develop, this depended on the participation of women in the department, at meetings and on the committee.

She urged support for Motions 75 and 76 on the Clar, relating to the need for child-care facilities to be taken seriously by the Ard-Fheis and not simply paid lip-service. In Dublin, the Women's Department had put together an exhibition which was made available to cumainn throughout the country. In Belfast, members were agitating on the various cuts in the Health Service, and establishing links with women republican prisoners. In Derry, department activists and local women were in the process of organising a Rape Crisis Centre and had set up a working committee to discuss abortion, the hope being that different views would be

represented in a series of educational discussions which would leave aside people's moral views on this emotive issue. Fanning expressed the hope that Saturday's debate on abortion would be carried out in a similar vein, keeping in mind that "*Sinn Fein is the progressive party in this country and our policies should reflect this no matter how unpopular an issue.*"

Eight delegates spoke in support of the two motions on child-care and each expressed dissatisfaction that creche and baby-sitting facilities for women who wish to participate in a full or part-time basis in Sinn Fein were rarely provided and were usually badly organised even when they

were available.

ABORTION

The debate on abortion this year was a continuation of last year's thought-provoking debate and judging from the volume of 'pro' and 'anti' motions on the Clar — ranging from total opposition to abortion, whatever the circumstances, to those in favour in special medical circumstances, and to others in support of a woman's right to choose — it is evidently an issue which Sinn Fein will be debating for some time ahead.

Motions 78-79 on abortion were taken *en bloc* and 30 delegates made contributions, but mainly in support of Motions 83 and 88. Ard Chomhairle Motion 83 called on the Ard-Fheis to delete last year's addendum from policy while Motion 88 from the Northland Cumann, Derry, and Derry Comhairle Ceantair basically asked the Ard-Fheis to accept the individual's right to make a conscientious decision for or against abortion without coercion from any other individual or group.

Rita O'Hare (Ard Chomhairle), supporting Motion 83, said that in deleting the addendum Sinn Fein's policy would be clearer and would affirm the right to life of the mother as paramount. It would reject the criminalisation of women forced to seek abortions and recognise the reality of what life is like for women in Ireland.

A delegate from Skibbereen contended that a lot of people were clouding the issue of when life begins and that this led to "the slippery slope of abortion". To him the 'taking of life' was only permissible in cases of self-defence or in an armed struggle.

Marie Gavighan (Bray) called for further discussion on the issue and appealed for delegates to keep personal feelings out of the debate as women needed help and understanding "not more criticism".

Martin O Muilleoir (Belfast) said that last year's addendum did not make sense, was ambiguous and created confusion which in turn had led to it being

used as a "propaganda present for our political enemies" in the SDLP and the Church. Also supporting 83, Pat Rice (Lagan Valley) said the inclusion of the addendum was "a most unfortunate and incorrect inclusion in our policy". He was in favour of maximum freedom of the individual provided "that does not interfere in the freedom of others".

Dublin delegate Liam O'Donoghue, speaking to 88 and against Motions 77-87, said that his cumann supported self-determination for the Irish people. In that support "we are not sexist; we include unequivocal support for self-determination for women also".

Francie Molloy (Ard Chomhairle) called for support for Motion 83, saying that the phrase 'a woman's right to choose' was passed, he believed, "to appease a minority". In the by-election in Fermanagh/South Tyrone in January, he and Sinn Fein canvassers were physically attacked at doors because of it. In voting for 83, he asked delegates to "recognise the wishes of the majority of the Irish people".

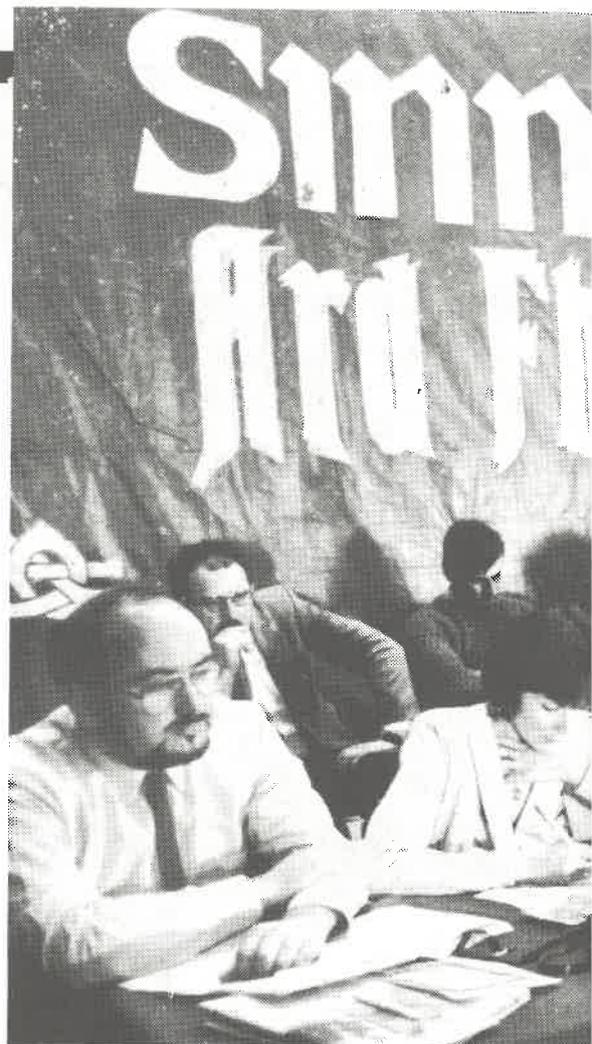
FACING UP TO REALITY

In proposing Motion 88, a Derry Comhairle Ceantair delegate, Councillor Dodie McGuinness, said that she was neither for nor against abortion but "for facing up to the reality that young women and girls were going across to England and elsewhere to have abortions".

She added:

"Our aim is to establish a secular state in which the state, its laws, its constitution and its criminal code would not embody the code of any particular religion, theology or morality [yet] we refuse to allow the decision of an individual, in accordance with one's own conscience, to have an abortion."

Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams urged delegates to reject all other motions except 83. The Ard Chomhairle last year had been opposed to the addendum "not because we are anti-feminist, not because we think women should not have control over





their own fertility or bodies or their own sexuality, but because the phrase is synonymous with the abortion on demand campaign. It makes a nonsense of what precedes it and reduces policy on abortion to a fudge."

Following many other speakers, including several who wished to revert back to the 1980 policy which was "totally opposed to abortion", the vote was taken with the Ard Chomhairle motion

being carried.

Sinn Féin policy on abortion now reads:

"We are opposed to the attitudes and forces in society which compel women to have an abortion. We are opposed to abortion as a means of birth control but we accept the need for abortion where the woman's life is at risk or in grave danger, for example ectopic pregnancy and all forms of cancer."



TÁ POLASAÍ nua cultúrtha ag Sinn Féin tar éis Ard-Fheis stairiúil '86. Glacadh d'aon ghuth le doicméad nua a phléann gach gné den streachailt cultúrtha in Éirinn faoi láthair.

I measc na n-ábhar atá pléite tá na mór mheáin, an timpeallacht, rialtas áitiúil, príosúin agus ar ndoigh, an Ghaeltacht. Deir an doicméad go bhfuil sé mar aidhm fad-théarmach ag an eagrais seirbhíis náisiúnta raidio agus teilifíse i nGaeilge amháin a bhunú. Éileann sé méadú ar na gcláracha teilifíse Gaeilge ar RTÉ agus sna sé chontae go dtí go mbeidh staisiún lán-Ghaeilge bunaithe.

Deir an alt faoi rialtas áitiúil go leanfaidh Sinn Féin ar aghaidh ag úsáid na comhairlí chun an teanga agus an cultúr a chur chun cinn. Tá liosta fada d'éilimh sa roinn seo a bheidh mar clár oibre do chomhairleoirí agus baill Shinn Féin sna sé chontae agus sna sé chontae is fiche.

Cáineann an polasaí an cosc ar chultúr Gaelach i bpríosúin na Sé chontae. Tá éilimh na bpríosúnach sna Blocanna-H leagtha amach sa pholasaí.

Ghlac an Ard-Fheis rún ag iarraidh ar gach cumann de chuid Sinn Féin sintiús bliantúil de *Shaoirse* agus *Nuacht Feirste* a thógáil amach. Moladh Roinn an Chultúir as ucht na bhfoilseachán seo go háirithe.

Mar a dúirt ceannaire na Roinne, Máirtín Ó Muilleoir an chéim is mó ar aghaidh i rith na bliana ab ea Slógadh Shinn Féin, a léirigh go bhfuil an eagrais anois i suíomh lánach ceannasaíochta sa streachailt cultúrtha.

Ba stairiúil agus ba corraith-each an Ard-Fheis i mbliana cúis amháin b'fhéidir nar thug daoine faoi deara gur labhraíodh níos mó Gaeilge ann ná riamh. Bhí Gaeilge le cloisteáil i ngach díospóireacht agus is mór an cúis dóchais é sin.

Ach mar a dúirt Máirtín Ó Muilleoir sa deireadh:

"Is gá go mbeadh coinsias na Gaeilge i bhfad níos airde sa ghluaiseacht seo. Caithfidh a bheith ag féachaint chuige amach anseo go bhfuil gach ball den phairtí seo ina Ghaeilgeoir nó ag foghlaim na Gaeilge."

"Ag Ard Fheis 1987 beidh, le cuidiú Dé, ábhar polasaí romhaibh ar Ghaelú Shinn Féin. Ar ndoighe ní feidir an Ghaeilge a bhrú ar dhaoine. Caithfidh gach ball a bheith ag iarraidh an Ghaeilge a foghlaim. Caithfidh gach ball a bheith ábalta an cheist 'Cad chuige an Ghaeilge?' a fhreagairt dó féin nó di féin."



THE Director of the Sinn Fein Foreign Affairs Bureau, Ted Howell, introduced the *Foreign Affairs* section of the Ard-Fheis on Saturday morning. Howell began by formally welcoming the foreign delegates who had arrived from Italy, Denmark, Holland, France, Brittany and Euskadi (the Basque Country).

He then went on to give a breakdown of the Foreign Affairs Bureau's activities during the past year, which included attendance at various conferences including those of the Democrazia Proletaria (Italy), Ventresocialisterne (Denmark), and the Greek Communist Party of the Interior. There had also been visits to Canada and cultural tours of Catalonia. Another very important aspect of the FAB's work has been the anti-extradition campaign in Holland, where Brendan McFarlane and Gerry Kelly are currently held and are fighting British demands for their custodial return. The director of the FAB congratulated all those working for McFarlane's and Kelly's release.

Winding up his report, Howell returned to the same problems that have affected the Bureau for years — the lack of resources and personnel. He said he was "far from satisfied" with the input and impact of the FAB, which had still not established a credible information service.

MOTIONS

Howell then introduced the eight motions on Foreign Affairs contained in the Clar.

Motions 51 and 52 from the Ard Chomhairle dealt with US imperialism in Central America, support for the ANC, the Palestinian liberation movement, the attempted extradition of Brendan McFarlane and Gerry Kelly, neutrality and non-alignment, the

EEC and NATO, and legitimate struggles for national liberation and self-determination throughout the world. (Motion 51 also took "this opportunity to once again dissociate [Sinn Fein] from such groups as the Red Army Fraction, Direct Action and the Red Brigades.") Both motions were passed but it was a pity that none of the delegates from the floor felt the need to speak to or debate these important motions.

There was, however, some debate on Motions 56, 57 and 59.

Motion 59, on South Africa and the ANC, was debated basically on the interpretation of the wording of the motion. A number of amendments were submitted and passed.

NEUTRALITY

Motions 56 and 57, on neutrality and non-alignment, drew the most speakers, with Richard Behal (Kerry) voicing fears that Sinn Fein is moving away from its traditional policy.

Motion 57, calling for the creation of a broad-based national committee to fight the erosion of the neutrality of the 26 Counties, was passed after a general understanding was reached that Sinn Fein would approach this when the time was ripe.

Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams declared that wheels were already in motion on this subject but that the timing and content of such a campaign is crucial.



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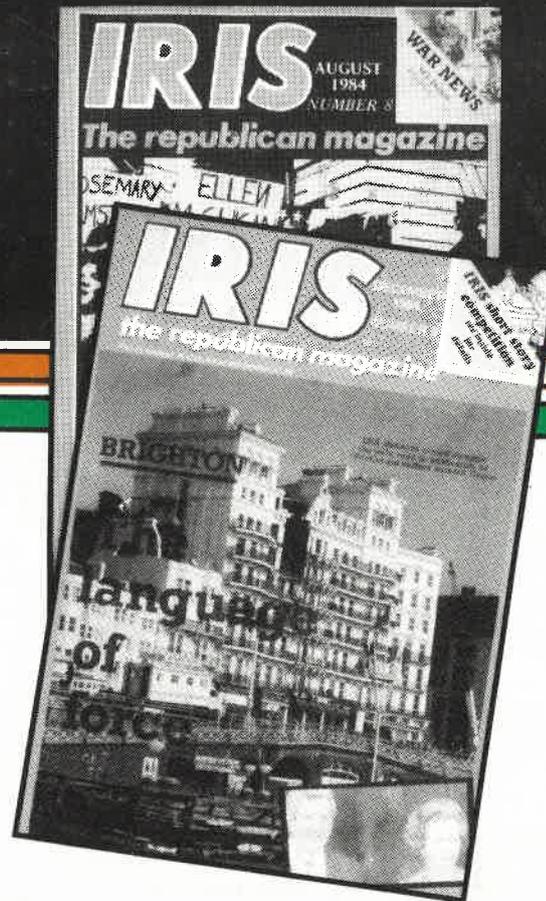
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IRIS



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SAOIRSE

SAOIRSE is the only all-Irish political magazine and is published by Sinn Fein's Cultural Department.

As well as articles on current and foreign affairs, the magazine includes a section on literature and history as well as cartoons and opinions.

Copies of *Saoirse*, price 80p (70p sterling), are available from Republican Publications, 51/53 Falls Road, Belfast and also 44 Parnell Square, Dublin 1.

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