

## WHERE SINN FÉIN STANDS

*The following statement was issued subsequent to a meeting of the Caretaker Executive of Sinn Féin on January 17, 1970.*

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

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

### RECOGNITION OF PARLIAMENTS

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

Sinn Féin’s alternative to these British institutions of government was the All-Ireland Republican Dáil which it assembled in January 1919. It remains the task of Sinn Féin today to lead the Irish people away from British, 6-County and 26-County parliaments and towards the re-assembly of the 32-County Dáil which will then legislate for and rule all Ireland.

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

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

Having failed to secure the necessary two-thirds majority to effect these changes they then pressed on the Ard-Fheis a resolution requiring a simple majority only viz; “expressing

allegiance to the IRA leadership” which had prior to the Ard-Fheis adopted recognition of Westminster, Stormont and Leinster House as policy.

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

## **THE BACKGROUND**

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

Most of the ten points which emerged were turned down at an Extraordinary Ard-Fheis in June 1965, notably one which sought to have Sinn Féin recognise Westminster, Stormont and Leinster House. Another — which was also turned down but was later accepted by a further Ard-Fheis — looked for “co-operation with other radical groups” in pursuit of limited objectives. These groups included the Communist Party of Northern Ireland on one side of the border, the Irish Workers’ party and Connolly Youth Movement on the other, and the Connolly Association in England.

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

In spite of the developments North of the Border since October 5th 1968, in Derry and the escalation of events throughout the 6 Counties all through the first half of 1969, the Commission remained blind to what was obvious to even outside observers. The terror of August 1969 in Belfast, Derry, Armagh, Dungannon and other places was not foreseen when the Commission reported finally in July, nor was anything of the kind considered or provided against.

## **A FORMAL ALLIANCE**

The recommendations which were made were two in number:

**(a)** That the relationship with “other radical groups” involving co-operation for the achievement of limited objectives be now brought a stage further; that it be formalised into an alliance to be known for the sake of convenience as the ‘National Liberation Front’.

**(b)** That subject to certain conditions, etc, Republican elected representatives should participate in Westminster, Leinster House and Stormont.

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

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

## **EXTREME SOCIALISM**

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

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

Furthermore, in the opinion of the ‘master-minds’ there was no need for establishing a Republican youth organisation when the Connolly Youth Movement existed, nor was there

any need for the Republican 'Clann na hEireann' in Britain since the Connolly Association was there.

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

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

### **INTERNAL METHODS**

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

In 1966 the entire North Kerry Comhairle Ceantair of Sinn Féin, embracing 13 Cumainn and 250 members and including three local councillors and leading figures such as Miss May Daly (sister of Charlie Daly, executed at Drumboe, Donegal, in 1923), John Joe Rice, Sinn Féin TD, 1957-61 and John Joe Sheehy, veteran Republican and Kerry footballer, were ousted from the organisation. The underlying issue was the uncompromising stand of Kerry in refusing recognition to Westminster, Leinster House and Stormont.

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

Seán Keenan of Derry City, another veteran Republican who was Chairman of the Derry Defence Association last August and has been very active on behalf of Civil Rights in the

North, was expelled in December last while on a tour of America. His first notification of this action came when a friend showed him a four days' old copy of the Irish Times which contained a news report of his expulsion from the Republican Movement. These are but the most notable cases.

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

The basic method of procedure was stated to be that the ultimate objective was the only principle. Everything else was merely a tactic — truth and justice and many other things were to go by the board apparently. At the Ard-Fheis itself elaborate precautions were taken regarding the admission of delegates known to be opposed to 'recognition'. Where an organiser would report a Cumann to be in favour or indecisive, receipts for affiliation fees and delegates cards were forwarded even up to the eve of the Ard-Fheis. The affiliation fees of long-standing Cumann, well-known to be 'against' were returned with the excuse that they were too late. In Belfast, three Republican Clubs were denied representation on the grounds that they had been 'inactive' since August last. We leave it to the public to assess the validity of this last subterfuge, bearing in mind the circumstance of Belfast for the past six months. It seems hardly likely that any Republicans would be inactive. In all this harassment of the delegates opposed to 'recognition', many of the full-time paid officials of the organisation were unduly active.

### **LET DOWN OF NORTH**

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

## **ABOLITION OF STORMONT**

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

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

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

## **OUR SOCIALISM**

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

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

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

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

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

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

We have played, and will continue to play, our part in the struggle for Civil Rights in the 6 Counties.

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

### **WRONG ASSUMPTIONS**

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

**(a)** That we are militarists who will promote ‘border raids’ is untrue. We will, nonetheless, support all efforts to defend our people in the 6 Counties.

**(b)** It is said that we are ‘wild men’, whose policies are crude and old-fashioned, while those now in opposition to us are reasonable people. To this we reply that while we adhere to basic principles we believe in forward-looking policies as has been outlined in this statement.

**(c)** The generalisation that those who intend recognising Westminster, Stormont and Leinster House are ‘progressives’, while we are ‘traditionalists’ is also false. They will at best end up in parliamentary blind alleys as have other splinters from the Republican Movement — Cumann na nGaedheal (now Fine Gael), Fianna Fáil and Clann na Poblachta, not to mention the Northern Nationalist Party. This was the British intention in imposing the ‘settlement’ of 1921 and after 50 years the constitutional framework has failed and frustrated the Irish people. While we take our inspiration and experience from the past we are realistic as to what will strengthen the people’s will to resist British imperialism and what will weaken that will. Participation in the institutions designed to frustrate our people’s progress to full freedom is certain to weaken that will to resist.

We are unanimous in that there can be no question of rapprochement or of meetings with those who are opposed to us. For their part, their attitude before and during the Ard-Fheis was as could be expected.

On Saturday morning, January 10th, the opening day of the Ard-Fheis, a Dublin morning paper carried an alleged 'Northern Command' statement which said, in reference to those against recognition, "the divisive tactics of these few malcontents" and "it is being openly suggested that Fianna Fáil has already succeeded in planting one of its agents in this group". The smear tactic was early in use. On Saturday night, before the Commission recommendations could be considered by the Ard-Fheis delegates, a statement was read from the already compromised 'Army Council' which urged the delegates to accept the proposals. It spoke in typically hard-line terms of the Provisional Army Council and its supporters, saying that "If they persisted in error, then all sentiment must be put aside in dealing with them" This dogmatist attitude is surely worthy of the Inquisition of many years ago in its dealings with 'heretics'.

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

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

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

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

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

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

We are content to leave it at that.