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'The People's Own MP'

How the 1981 Hunger Strike Changed the Republican Movement in Ireland

By

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HIS 490 History Honors Thesis

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Fall 2013

*“Forever we'll remember him that man who died in pain
That his country North and South might be united once again
To mourn him is to organise and built a movement strong
With ballot box and armalite, with music and with song*

*He was a poet and a soldier, he died courageously
And we gave him 30,000 votes while in captivity.”*

-Bruce Scott “The People’s Own MP”

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INTRODUCTION

IRISH REBEL TRADITION

The early 20th century writer G.K. Chesterton wrote in *The Ballad of the White Horse* “The great Gaels of Ireland are the men God made mad, for all their wars are merry and all their songs are sad.”¹ To any student of Irish history, this could not be more valid. During the 800 years of English occupation from 1169 to 1921, rebelling became an integral part of Irish history. Rebellions in Irish history were so common that the term “Irish Rebel Tradition” has become a commonly used expression and “Irish Rebel Music” forms its own genre of music. During the major periods of history in which revolution was a worldwide phenomenon, such as the turn of the 19th century and the 1860s, Ireland attempted to join in. The Wolfe Tone rebellion of 1798, in which Theobald Wolfe Tone led a group of revolutionaries known as the “United Irishmen” in revolt, was influenced by the ideas of the American Revolution and the French Revolution, both of which occurred around this time. The Fenian Uprising in 1867, organized by the Irish Republican Brotherhood, occurred at the same time as the Boxer Rebellion in China, and the American Civil War. When the rest of the colonial world rebelled, Ireland usually attempted to join in, but continued to be unsuccessful for almost 800 years.

¹G.K. Chesterton, *The Ballad of the White Horse*, <http://gutenberg.org/cache/epub/1719/pg1719.txt> (accessed November 4, 2013).

Finally in 1918, in the wake of World War I and Woodrow Wilson's call for national self-determination, Ireland saw a successful rebellion. In the Irish War for Independence, Irish rebels were finally able to defeat British forces and gain a form of independence. This was largely due to the development of the Irish Republican Army (IRA). While the IRA did have a political agenda and was active from 1918 on, it was not until 1981, when it allied with the Sinn Féin party, that the IRA actively entered the political sphere to form a unified republican organization which combined politics and armed struggle as a means of ending the British occupation.

CHAPTER ONE

THE IRISH REBELLION AND THE FOUNDING OF THE IRA AND SINN FÉIN

The Irish Republican Army was not “founded”, rather it was developed from earlier organizations by Michael Collins and Harry Boland in the wake of the 1916 Easter Rising. The 1916 Rising, led by the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) and the Irish Volunteers, was a failed attempt by Irish revolutionaries to push the British out of Ireland. Disagreement over when and where to stage the Rising led to a disaster, and after only six days, the IRB garrison at the General Post Office in Dublin was forced to surrender and fourteen IRB leaders were executed. After the failure of the Rising, Michael Collins, Thomas Ashe and Harry Boland, all high ranking members of the IRB council, began to reform the Irish Volunteers into a guerilla fighting force. Twentieth century Irish historian Tim Pat Coogan notes, “Behind the scenes IRB organizers, principally Michael Collins and Thomas Ashe...were directing this activity as they went about the country reorganizing the IRB and enlisting more and more young Irishmen in a volunteer army sworn to fight for the Irish Republic.”² By 1918, an Irish newspaper *An tOglach* expressed the result of this development when it published the statement, “The Irish Volunteers

²Tim Pat Coogan, *The IRA* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2002), 22.

are the Army of the Irish Republic.”³ The leadership of the Irish Republican Brotherhood had taken command of the soldiers of the Irish Volunteers to form the Irish Republican Army.

The IRA played a crucial role in both the Irish War for Independence (1918-1921) and the subsequent Irish Civil War (1922-1923). At the conclusion of the Irish War for Independence, Michael Collins signed the Anglo-Irish Treaty (1921) with the British Government. IRA scholar Richard English sheds light on the circumstances under which the treaty was signed; “The IRA were probably far from beaten, at least in the sense of being on the verge of utter collapse; but they had no sign of imminent victory....There had never been any chance of a formal military victory over their imperially powerful opponent, nor – in practice – of the British recognizing an Irish republic.”⁴ Some refused to accept this situation, and the “anti-treaty” arm of the IRA, those who opposed the Anglo-Irish Treaty, split from Collins’s leadership in order to oppose the new “Irish Free State”. This caused a conflict between the anti-treaty IRA and the Free State Army, which had remained under Collins’s rule, and led to the outbreak of the Irish Civil War.

The anti-treaty IRA did not support Collins’s new “Free State” government because this designation meant that Ireland was not fully independent from Britain. The Irish Free State, formed by the Anglo-Irish Treaty, was granted dominion status, meaning that while it was independent in domestic affairs, it was still somewhat subject to British rule in foreign affairs, and the members of its new governing body, the Dáil Éireann, were required to swear an oath of allegiance to the King of England. High ranking members of the IRA, such as Boland, believed that Collins had sold the Irish people out by accepting a peace treaty which kept Ireland

³ Coogan, *The IRA*, 24.

⁴ Richard English, *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 29

subservient to England. They were also appalled that Collins agreed to the continued partition of Ireland. The Anglo-Irish Treaty upheld the previously passed Government of Ireland Act (1920) which separated six counties in the northeast corner of Ireland from the Free State. This portion of Ireland became “Northern Ireland” which was to remain completely under British control. Historian Dermott Keogh sums up the opposing views on the treaty in his work *Twentieth Century Ireland*; “For de Valera [Éamon de Valera was the president of the IRB council and the leader of the anti-treaty party] the Treaty meant an acceptance of colonial status with all the trappings of imperialism – an oath of allegiance, a governor general, British bases, and partition....For Michael Collins...the Treaty was ‘a stepping stone’ and ‘freedom to achieve freedom’.”⁵

After this change in leadership, the IRA became a constant problem to the Irish and British governments on the island, carrying out frequent bombing campaigns and sectarian violence. Through all of this, the members of the anti-treaty IRA refused to recognize the government of Ireland as legitimate, claiming that the IRA was the true successor to the second Dáil (the pre-treaty revolutionary government) and therefore the legitimate representatives of Ireland. Because of this stance, the IRA refused to contest elections and preferred to advocate violent means to its end. It was not until the 1980s that the IRA, through its association with Sinn Féin, became committed to political force as well as violence.

The Sinn Féin party was founded by Arthur Griffith in 1905 as an attempt to revitalize his “Irish-Irelanders” movement and create a new republican party dedicated to British withdrawal and a united 32 county Ireland. This new party would replace the Irish Parliamentary Party, a party dedicated to obtaining “Home Rule” from England, a more representative form of colonial government, rather than independence. Sinn Féin was founded on an abstentionist policy,

⁵ Dermott Keogh, *Twentieth Century Ireland* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan Ltd, 2005), 2-3.

meaning that the members would contest elections, but refuse to take seats in the British parliament. The theory behind abstentionism was that if Sinn Fein won enough seats and did not sit in parliament, parliament could not claim to represent the Irish people, and a *de facto* Irish government could be set up.⁶ The party was unsuccessful in reaching this goal and remained insignificant until after the 1916 Rising. After the Rising many of the IRB leaders felt that they needed to consolidate their public support base. In order to do this, they began to join Sinn Féin, coopting the party and bringing more recognition and popularity to its cause. Irish historian Owen McGee commented that the IRB was “essentially concerned with the rise of the Sinn Féin Party, as it knew, as did Griffith (and as had the old IRB), that no independence movement could be launched, let alone succeed, unless it was based around an abstentionist strategy.”⁷ Sinn Féin remained a more or less abstentionist party for over 50 years until the party fractured in the 1970s into the Official Sin Féin and Provisional Sinn Féin. In the 1980s, Sinn Féin was finally ready to join with the IRA to form a united republican political front against British control in Ireland.

⁶ Owen McGee, *The IRB: The Irish Republican Brotherhood From the Land League to Sinn Féin* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), 308-311.

⁷ McGee, *The IRB*, 358.

CHAPTER TWO

IRA IDEOLOGY: THE *GREEN BOOK*

The main factor which linked the ideology of the IRA with the ideology of Sinn Féin was that both organizations were “republican”. In the context of 20th century Ireland, republican is a term used for someone who believes in the idea of a united Irish Republic. Republicans wanted to end the partition created by the Government of Ireland Act, unite the six northern counties with the 26 counties in the Republic of Ireland, and form a united 32 county Irish Republic. In 1979 the Provisional IRA released their *Green Book*, which was a handbook for IRA volunteers. The *Green Book* covers various topics ranging from “keeping your mouth shut” to “an outline of how you will be treated in prison if you are captured by British forces”. One of the most important ideological sections in the *Green Book* is the section which opens the handbook. This section of the handbook outlines the IRA ideology: its commitment to republicanism, the political and cultural stance of the movement, justification for armed campaign, and strategies for ousting the British from Ireland.

The IRA has a clear and legitimate reason to propagate republican ideology because of its view of its own legitimacy as representatives of the Irish People. This belief is stated immediately on the cover of the 1979 *Green Book*; “Commitment to the Republican Movement is the firm belief that its struggle both military and political is morally justified, that war is morally justified and that the Army is the direct representative of the 1918 Dáil Éireann

Parliament, and that as such they are the legal representative of the Irish Republic.”⁸ In this statement the *Green Book* presents the case that the IRA is descendant from the original Dáil, the revolutionary Irish government. This claim gives even more insight into the republican ideology of the IRA. The ideology of the revolutionary Dáil was rooted in the 1916 “Proclamation of the Irish Republic” and the ideas of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. The sections of the Proclamation which relate to republicanism are as follows:

We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible.

We hereby proclaim the Irish Republic as a Sovereign Independent State, and we pledge our lives and the lives of our comrades-in-arms to the cause of its freedom, of its welfare, and its exaltation among the nations.

In this supreme hour the Irish nation must, by its valour and discipline and by the readiness of its children to sacrifice themselves for the common good, prove itself worthy of the august destiny to which it is called.⁹

These three statements reflect the roots of 20th century republican ideology and therefore reflect the ideology of the IRA. The first quote from the Proclamation says that Ireland belongs to the people of Ireland, not to the British. The *Green Book* declares that the IRA’s position has been “One of sustained resistance and implacable hostility to the forces of imperialism.”¹⁰ It also states that “the nationhood of all Ireland has been an accepted fact for more than 1000 years and has been recognized internationally as a fact,” and “The objective of the 800 years of oppression ‘is economic exploitation with the unjustly partitioned 6 counties remaining Britain’s directly controlled old-style colony’ and that the Republic of Ireland remains under the

⁸ IRA General Army Council, *Irish Republican Army “Green Book” (Volumes I&II)*, 1, <http://tensmiths.files.wordpress.com/2012/08/15914572-ira-green-book-volumes-1-and-2.pdf> (accessed September 16, 2013).

⁹ Padraig Pearse, “The Proclamation of the Irish Republic, 24 April 1916,” *CAIN Web Services*: <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/pir24416.htm> (accessed October 10, 2013).

¹⁰ *Green Book*, 4.

‘continuing social, cultural, and economic domination of London.’”¹¹ These are clear statements of the republican belief that Ireland should be Irish and that the British at this time had too great a control over Irish affairs. The second and third quotes from the Proclamation reference sacrifice and resistance. This aspect of republican ideology, the idea that force can and should be used against the British, is especially prevalent in the IRA ideology.

Another tenet of the IRA ideology can be found in this republican belief that Ireland belongs to the Irish people. The IRA holds the belief that the only solution to the current problem in Ireland includes a full evacuation of the British presence from Irish soil, referred to in the *Green Book* as the “Brits Out” strategy.¹² A key part of this belief is the idea that the only way to finally rid Ireland of British influence is through violent resistance. The *Green Book* even goes so far as to claim that the IRA has a moral right to engage in warfare:

Note: The moral position of the Irish Republican Army, its right to engage in warfare, is based on:

- a)The right to resist foreign aggression
- b)The right to revolt against tyranny and oppression
- c)The direct lineal succession with the Provisional Government of 1916, the first Dáil of 1919 and the second Dáil of 1921.¹³

The belief outlined here is potentially very convincing to an IRA volunteer. It justifies the entire IRA military campaign by putting the blame for the violence entirely on the British. In this statement, the IRA uses words such as “oppression”, “aggression”, and “tyranny” to justify its actions. This relates back to the idea that Irish rebellions of the past, such as 1798, 1867, 1916 and 1918, arose in periods of world-wide rebellions against tyrannical governments. The

¹¹ *Green Book*, 3.

¹² *Ibid.*, 8.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 4.

IRA ideology sprung from these old Irish rebellions, and the campaign in the late Twentieth Century was seen by the IRA as a continuation of these rebellions, as evidenced by the reference to the 1916 Provisional Government as well as the 1919 and 1921 Dáil. By linking its fight to other Irish struggles of the past, the IRA allows its ideology on warfare to be morally justified as a fight for freedom from tyranny and oppression. Under this qualification it was very hard for republicans to argue against the IRA campaign of violence.

After declaring that the British must leave Ireland, the *Green Book* continues on to discuss how violent resistance, now declared morally right, is the only solution to the problem.

The book presents a five point strategy of guerilla warfare which aims at ousting the British:

1. A War of attrition against enemy personnel which is aimed at causing as many casualties and deaths as possible so as to create a demand from their people at home for their withdrawal.
2. A bombing campaign aimed at making the enemy's financial interest in our country unprofitable while at the same time curbing long term financial investment in our country.
3. To make the Six Counties as at present and for the past several years ungovernable except by colonial military rule.
4. To sustain the war and gain support for its end by National and International propaganda and publicity campaigns.
5. By defending the war of liberation by punishing criminals, collaborators and informers.¹⁴

Looking at this outline allows one to see what the IRA focuses on as important to British control of Ireland. The first of these is public opinion. The first strategy point says that the IRA wants to cause high profile casualties which will result in support for withdrawal by the British public, and the fourth point mentions propaganda and publicity campaigns, showing that the IRA understands the importance of public opinion both in Britain and Ireland. Further down the page

¹⁴ *Green Book*, 8.

in the *Green Book* it declares that “The I.R.A. volunteer receives all his support voluntarily from his people,” while the British forces are supported “by involuntary taxation.”¹⁵ This ideological point, that public support is key to the movement, will become important to the IRA during the hunger strikes in the 1980s and will heavily influence its move to politics. The IRA sees economics as another important factor in the British occupation. Point two states that they want to make “the enemy’s financial interest in our country unprofitable.”¹⁶ The IRA understands that the British have significant economic investments in Ireland, specifically in the North, and that attacking and destroying these investments will lessen the importance of Ireland to the British Empire. Once Ireland becomes less important to the British Empire, the British will become less inclined to remain a presence in Ireland.

Point five makes reference to collaborators and informers, a problem which had plagued Irish rebellions since the beginning of British occupation; almost all previous rebellions had failed because of informers leaking information. This point once again ties the IRA campaign to the rebellions of the past, adding more justification to their fight. Finally, the IRA understands that any colonial government wants a colony which is subservient and easy to govern. Point three focuses on making the governing of Northern Ireland inconvenient for the British. They aim to make it “Ungovernable except by colonial military rule,”¹⁷ a method of government which is ineffective, unpopular and unprofitable. This method of colonial rule had caused Britain to lose both the American colonies in the 18th century and India earlier in the 20th. If it worked there, the IRA reasoned, it could conceivably work in Ireland as well. This point of

¹⁵ *Green Book*, 8.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

strategy ties the other points about public opinion and economics together. The five point guerilla strategy outlines the IRA ideology on how to carry out an effective campaign. It contributes to their justification for violence and warfare and points out specific strategies which the IRA supports. This section of the *Green Book* concludes by declaring:

By now it is clear that our task is not only to kill as many enemy personnel as possible but of equal importance to create support which will carry us not only through a war of liberation which could last another decade but which will support us past the ‘Brits Out’ stage to the ultimate aim of a Democratic Socialist Republic.¹⁸

The last ideological points which can be seen in the *Green Book* are those relating to cultural restoration and socialist politics. The emphasis on cultural restoration once again reverts back toward IRB-era republican ideology. Pádraig Pearse, the author of the *Proclamation of the Irish Republic*, was a strong advocate of restoring the Irish language. As a poet he saw the importance of language to a national identity and fought relentlessly to encourage the Irish language to be restored. The IRB in the 19th century also pushed for other forms of cultural advancement. The IRB was influential in both the creation of the Gaelic League and the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), organizations which support Irish sports, Irish dance, Irish music, and especially in the case of the Gaelic League, the Irish language. In addition to the Gaelic League and the GAA, IRB members also provided financial benefits to the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, a theatre committed to presenting Irish literature on the stage. Historian Tim Pat Coogan notes that the IRB used these organizations to “arouse a very definite awareness among young people of a distinctively Irish culture and identity.”¹⁹ This cultural awareness propagated by the IRB in the early 20th century was also propagated by the IRA in the *Green Book*; “Culturally we

¹⁸ *Green Book*, 8.

¹⁹ Coogan, *The IRA*, 17.

would hope to restore Gaelic, not from the motivation of national chauvinism but from the viewpoint of achieving with the aid of a cultural revival the distinctive new Irish Socialist State: as a Bulwark against imperialist encroachments from whatever quarter.”²⁰ This cultural ideology of the IRA is clearly an extension of the republicanism established by the IRB around the turn of the century.

The final ideological point found in the *Green Book* is the IRA’s dedication to building a “Socialist Republic”. As with the other ideological points the roots of this can be found in the leadership of the 1916 Rising. James Connolly, an IRB member and a ringleader of the 1916 Rising, was an ardent socialist and labor organizer. His socialist beliefs made their way into the IRB and were central to the 1916 Rising. This dedication to a socialist republic continues to be present in the IRA and is mentioned multiple times in the *Green Book*. The first page of the handbook describes what a typical volunteer should expect of the army. The book states, “He should examine his political motives bearing in mind that the Army are intent on creating a socialist republic.”²¹ A few pages later, while rejecting both the traditional Eastern and Western systems of government, the book says that the IRA “seeks a third, socialist alternative which transcends both Western individualistic capitalism and Eastern state capitalism, which is in accordance with our best revolutionary traditions as a people.”²² These excerpts clearly point out that the IRA is preparing to create a socialist republic. This does not mean that the IRA was a political movement when it published the *Green Book* (at this time they were still refusing to

²⁰ *Green Book*, 5.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

²² *Ibid.*, 4.

contest elections and make political moves), but it means that once the war was won, the new government created by the IRA will be a socialist one. The ideal government is presented here:

A Government system which will give every individual the opportunity to partake in the decisions which will affect him or her: by decentralizing political power to the smallest social unit practicable where we would all have the opportunity to wield political power both individually and collectively in the interests of ourselves and the nation as a whole. Socially and Economically we will enact a policy aimed at eradicating the Social Imperialism of today, by returning the ownership of the wealth of Ireland to the people of Ireland through a system of co-operativism, worker ownership, and control of the industry, Agriculture and the Fisheries.²³

The IRA *Green Book* of 1979 outlines the ideology of the movement at the time directly before the shift towards electoral political participation occurs. It points out the republican, military, cultural and political values of the Irish Republican Army and ties them all to the revolutionary traditions and history of the Irish people. The *Green Book* shows that the IRA believes that it is truly dedicated to the freedom and happiness of the Irish people. This dedication, and the underlying ideals which support it, is what ultimately brings the IRA into the political sphere in 1981 through the channel of the Sinn Féin party.

²³ *Green Book*, 5.

CHAPTER THREE

IDEOLOGY OF THE SINN FÉIN PARTY

The Sinn Féin party shares much of its ideology with the IRA. As noted earlier, they are most closely united by their mutual commitment to republicanism in Ireland. For Sinn Féin, republicanism is most closely associated with ending partition. The most important tenet of republicanism to Sinn Féin is ending partition by removing the British presence in Northern Ireland. In the peace process document *Building a Permanent Peace in Ireland* (1996), Sinn Féin states:

[Previous peace initiatives] failed because they were based on the false assumption that the constitutional crisis in Ireland could be resolved by a partition arrangement or with the minimum cognizance of democratic Irish nationalist aspirations. These failures are a product of partition, stemming from the Government of Ireland Act (1921).²⁴

This statement shows the dedication of Sinn Féin to ending partition, therefore ending the problems of violence and inequality in Northern Ireland.

²⁴ Sinn Féin Party, *Building a Permanent Peace in Ireland*, January 10, 1996, <http://sinfein.ie/contents/15213> (accessed September 17, 2013).

The best place to begin looking at this form of republican ideology is by looking at the Sinn Féin party constitution written in 1917 and the redrafted Sinn Féin constitution written in 1951. The preamble to the 1917 constitution declares, “Sinn Féin aims at securing the

International recognition of Ireland as an independent Irish Republic. Having achieved that status the Irish people may by referendum freely choose their own form of Government.”²⁵ This constitution, written in 1917, was influenced by the leaders of the 1916 Rising who chose to integrate their cause with the Sinn Féin movement. In 1918 Sinn Féin released a manifesto to complement its constitution. This manifesto, released before the general election in 1918, clarifies the Sinn Féin republican political policy:

Sinn Féin aims at securing the establishment of that Republic

1. By withdrawing the Irish Representation from the British Parliament and by denying the right and opposing the will of the British Government or any other foreign Government to legislate for Ireland.
2. By making use of any and every means available to render impotent the power of England to hold Ireland in subjection by military force or otherwise.
3. By the establishment of a constituent assembly comprising persons chosen by Irish constituencies as the supreme national authority to speak and act in the name of the Irish people, and to develop Ireland's social, political and industrial life, for the welfare of the whole people of Ireland.²⁶

This policy has two major points in it, the first of which is a commitment to abstentionism. The Sinn Féin leadership in 1918 decided that the best way to “render impotent the power of England” was to refuse to take seats in British parliament. In point three the manifesto explains

²⁵ Irish Commandants, “The Constitution of Sinn Féin,” *Corpus of Electronic Texts Edition (CELT)*: <http://www.ucc.ie/celt/published/E900007/index.html> (accessed October 10, 2013).

²⁶ Sinn Féin Standing Committee, “The Manifesto of Sinn Féin as prepared for circulation for the General Election of December, 1918,” *Corpus of Electronic Texts Edition (CELT)*: <http://www.ucc.ie/celt/online/E900009/text001.html> (accessed October 10, 2013).

that the candidates running on an abstentionist policy, if elected, would choose instead to create an Irish assembly which would not answer to British rule. The second major idea in the manifesto lies in point two, which refers to a commitment to using “any and every means available” to rid themselves of British rule. This is an important point, because in the aftermath of the 1980’s hunger strikes, Sinn Féin would attempt to distance itself from this commitment to “any means” by eventually condemning offensive violence and finally dedicating themselves to disarmament. At the time of the manifesto however, the party was controlled by IRB leaders and therefore had a strong military component to it. The 1917 constitution and 1918 manifesto clearly espoused the republican platform of ending British rule in Ireland. Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams said in 1996 that in 1918 “Sinn Féin became the principal vehicle of republicanism, supporting the armed campaign of the IRA and maintaining a policy of abstention from British parliament.”²⁷

In 1951 Sinn Féin experienced a reorganization. Sinn Féin president Margaret Buckley was demoted to a lower rank and new leadership came into power. Historian Michael Gallagher writes that “Sinn Féin’s 1951 Árd-Fheis [Party Convention] saw a takeover by the IRA, which drew up a new constitution for the party.”²⁸ The claim that the IRA “took over” Sinn Féin is a stretch, but the new constitution did reflect many of the republican ideals espoused by the IRA at the time. This 1951 constitution outlines a few Sinn Féin objectives:

²⁷ Gerry Adams, *Before the Dawn: an Autobiography* (New York: William Marlow and Co Inc, 1996), 72.

²⁸ Michael Gallagher, *Political Parties in The Republic of Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), 95.

The complete overthrow of English rule in Ireland.

To bring the Proclamation of the Republic, Easter 1916, into effective operation and to maintain and consolidate the Government of the Republic, representative of the people of Ireland based on that Proclamation.

To establish in the Republic a reign of social justice, based on Christian principles, by a just distribution and effective control of the Nation's wealth and resources, and to institute a system of government suited to the particular needs of the people.

To promote the restoration of the Irish Language and Irish Culture and the widest knowledge of Ireland's history; to make Irish citizens conscious and proud of their traditional and cultural heritage; and to educate the citizens of the Republic in their rights and responsibilities.²⁹

These objectives appear very similar to the goals and ideology of the IRA outlined in the *Green Book*. Sinn Féin's republicanism can be seen in the first short statement; advocating the "overthrow of English rule in Ireland" is a clear statement of republican ideology. In the same way as the IRA did in the *Green Book*, Sinn Féin tied itself to Irish history and earlier movements by stating that they plan to bring the *Proclamation of the Irish Republic* into effect. The third objective is vaguely similar to the IRA statement of dedication to a socialist republic. It calls for a "reign of social justice" and "just distribution" of wealth and resources. This is similar to the *Green Book* statement which called for "returning the ownership of the wealth of Ireland to the people." Finally, the last objective calls for the same kind of cultural restoration as the IRA called for in the *Green Book*. The 1951 constitution shares many values with the 1917 constitution and with the ideology presented in the IRA *Green Book*. It is a clear statement of Sinn Féin republican ideology and dedication to the republican cause in Ireland.

²⁹ Coogan, *The IRA*, 259.

Another place where republican ideology can be seen in Sinn Féin documents is in the documents related to the Northern Irish peace process. These documents, written in the 1980s and 1990s, reinforce the Sinn Féin commitment to ending partition and facilitating a British withdrawal from Ireland. In the document *A Scenario for Peace* (1989) Sinn Féin declares, “The ending of partition, a British disengagement from Ireland and the restoration to the Irish people of the right to exercise self-sovereignty remain the only solution to the British colonial conflict in Ireland.”³⁰ In *A Bridge to the Future* (1998) Sinn Féin asserts that:

Sinn Féin sees a 32 county republic, working through a new relationship with our nearest neighbours, based upon our mutual independence, as the best way to eradicate the range of political, social, economic and other inequalities which effect the people of this island...We want to end the union. An Irish Republic represents a model of society, on which the people of the island can build a new future for ourselves.³¹

Both of these documents espouse the Sinn Féin commitment to ending partition, a united Ireland, and an end to the British presence on Irish soil. This commitment to republicanism is a central part of the Sinn Féin party ideology.

In the post hunger strike era, the republican ideology of Sinn Féin very closely mirrored the republican ideology of the IRA. However one major difference separated the organizations for some time. While the IRA justified its violence as a moral campaign, Sinn Féin was opposed to violence as a means to an end. This idea is reflected in almost all of its peace documents in which Sinn Féin supported disarmament and an end to the violence. The Sinn Féin document *Building a Permanent Peace in Ireland* (1996) states that “A clear and absolute objective of a

³⁰ Sinn Féin Party, *A Scenario for Peace*, November, 1989, <http://sinnfein.ie/contents/15210> (accessed September 17, 2013).

³¹ Sinn Féin Party, *A Bridge to the Future*, March 8, 1998, <http://sinnfein.ie/contents/15211> (accessed September 17, 2013).

lasting peace settlement is the removal forever of the gun from the political equation in Ireland. This is an absolute requirement.”³² *A Bridge to the Future* declares, “The six counties is a highly militarized zone. A complete demilitarization of the situation is required.”³³ Sinn Féin wanted to move from violence to peaceful politics and in this matter it was initially at odds with the IRA. However Sinn Féin did defend the IRA, claiming that, while it did not condone violence, the IRA was predominantly a defense force whose existence was only due to British aggression. In *Towards a Lasting Peace* it asserts that the “Armed struggle for republics is an option of last resort.”³⁴ In *Building a Permanent Peace in Ireland* it states that “A major role of the IRA has always been the defense of the nationalist people from attack. Fear of attack is real.”³⁵ This seemingly contrary stance allowed Sinn Féin to continue to support the IRA by putting the blame for violence on the British forces. In the introduction to *A Bridge to the Future*, Gerry Adams, the Sinn Féin president, sums up the Sinn Féin ideology when he writes, “In the first instance [this document] sets out Sinn Féin’s goals as an Irish republican party. Our political objective is a united Ireland free of British interference. Everything we do is intended to advance that entirely legitimate and realisable goal.”³⁶

The IRA and Sinn Féin are both republican organizations, and in the end they have both striven for the same goal: a united Irish Republic. Because Sinn Féin was the only republican

³² Sinn Féin Party, *Building a Permanent Peace*.

³³ Sinn Féin Party, *A Bridge to the Future*.

³⁴ Sinn Féin Party, *Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland*, October 1994, <http://sinnfein.ie/contents/15212> (accessed September 17, 2013).

³⁵ Sinn Féin Party, *Building a Permanent Peace*.

³⁶ Sinn Féin Party, *A Bridge to the Future*.

political party and the IRA was the strongest republican military organization in the 1980s, it was no surprise that the two came together in 1981 to change the balance of Northern Irish politics.

CHAPTER FOUR

INTO THE EIGHTIES: THE PRISON MOVEMENT

Prior to the 1980s the IRA had a political agenda, but continued to see the armed struggle as the only means of achieving this goal. The IRA saw itself as the legal representatives of the Irish people, and believed that it was its duty to restore Ireland to the Irish. The strategy to accomplish this was twofold. First, the British must be forced out of Ireland. Because of their economic and political interests, the British could only be persuaded to leave through a campaign of physical force against these interests. Once this was completed, the IRA, as the successors to the Second Dáil, could begin creating a new socialist Irish Republic. This ideology caused a split in the organization in 1969.

The main body of the IRA decided to begin contesting elections in Northern Ireland, and a large portion of the membership opposed them. In the late 1960s, the Irish nationalist population in Northern Ireland attempted to emulate the civil rights movement in the United States of America. This attempt was a failure and resulted only in more violence and the emergence of various loyalist paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland. Eventually the British military had to be brought in to Belfast to stabilize the situation. The situation continued to worsen, and on 12 August 1969, riots erupted in Londonderry. The violent British response to these riots initiated the “Battle of the Bogside”, in which republican agitators over time formed a “Free Derry” in the Irish nationalist ghettos outside the city walls. Free Derry was an Irish

nationalist haven which British forces did not enter. Historian Brian Hanley comments that “The leadership [of the IRA] believed that the ‘best way for people to engage the police and B-Specials [a special forces unit of Northern Irish police] was the way that things developed in the Bogside’, through mass protests.”³⁷ In the Bogside, violence had succeeded where peaceful protest had failed. In the wake of the failed civil rights movement and the strong IRA presence at the Battle of the Bogside, many members were convinced even more that political and social agitation was ineffective, and that violence was the only answer. In his book *The IRA*, Tim Pat Coogan interviewed an IRA man, known by his code-name “Pat”, who said, “A lot of the Army were apathetic to Sinn Féin. They weren’t interested in politics.”³⁸ The IRA was thus split into two factions, the “Official IRA”, (hereafter referred to as the “Official IRA”) dedicated to politics and defensive force, and the “Provisional IRA” (hereafter referred to simply as the IRA) dedicated to offensive aggression. Historian Gordon Gillespie explains the split further:

Divisions within the IRA had been growing since August 1969 between the Southern, Marxist, leadership and those in the North, whose main concern was, initially at least, was the defense of Catholics and who argued for more military action. A statement from the ‘Provisional Army Council’ on 28 December [1969] signaled a split in the IRA between what would become the Official and Provisional wings.³⁹

The Provisional IRA remained committed solely to violence until they joined with Sinn Féin to contest the Fermanagh-South Tyrone by-election in 1981.

³⁷ Brian Hanley, “‘I Ran Away’? The IRA and 1969,” *History Ireland* 17, no. 4 (July-August 2009): 26, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27726041> (accessed September 17, 2013).

³⁸ Coogan, *The IRA*, 478.

³⁹ Gordon Gillespie, “1969: How the Crisis Unfolded,” *History Ireland* 17, no. 4 (July-August 2009): 18-19, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27726039> (accessed September 17, 2013).

Gillespie also comments on the split in the Sinn Féin Party around the same period of time; “The split in the IRA became clearer in January 1970 at the Sinn Féin Árd Fheis (conference) in Dublin, when a vote to abandon the policy of abstention from the Dáil triggered the break between the Provisional and the (more Marxist) Official Sinn Féin.”⁴⁰ The newly formed “Provisional Sinn Féin” party, unlike the new Provisional IRA, continued to believe that the British could be forced out if a confederate Irish government was formed through political agitation in the form of abstentionism and non-contestation of elections.

A strong republican tradition was the annual Bodenstown speech at the grave of Wolfe Tone, the leader of the failed 1798 rebellion. In 1977, IRA member Jimmy Drumm spoke these words written by Sinn Féin members Gerry Adams and Danny Morrison in his keynote speech; “We need a positive tie-in with the Irish people....the forging of strong links between the republican movement and the workers of Ireland and radical trade unionists will create an irrepressible mass movement.”⁴¹ By 1977, Sinn Féin was inching toward political involvement, but needed a spark to ignite their movement. The events surrounding the hunger strikes in 1980 and 1981 provided them with the “tie-in” they needed with the Irish people. It brought these two organizations, Sinn Féin and the IRA, together to combine politics with violence in a final push to eradicate the British presence in Ireland.

The explicit union of violence and politics has its roots in the 1981 IRA hunger strike, and the hunger strike has its roots in two British policies in the 1970s. The first of these was “Operation Demetrius” in 1971. This policy allowed for the internment of supposed IRA members without evidence of crime and without a trial. Operation Demetrius, commonly

⁴⁰ Gillespie, “1969: How the Crisis Unfolded,” 19.

⁴¹ English, *Armed Struggle*, 217.

referred to as “internment”, was responsible for bolstering the ranks of the IRA because many people who were previously uninterested in the republican cause saw the injustice carried out by the British and began to support the IRA. This support base would become crucial to the IRA and Sinn Féin when they chose to contest a by-election in 1981. Richard English writes that Operation Demetrius served to “strengthen resistance to the government and to unite the Catholic people in opposition to the authorities.”⁴² Internment was also responsible for putting many ardent republicans and future hunger strikers behind bars. Even Gerry Adams, the future president of Sinn Féin, was interned during Operation Demetrius. In his 1996 autobiography, *Before the Dawn*, Adams writes, “Internment had been undertaken to smash the IRA, but, far from succeeding in its aim, it confirmed the IRA in its role and bolstered popular support.”⁴³ Internment put the IRA behind bars and bolstered its support base, but it was the removal of the Special Category Status which sent the prisoners into a series of protests which would change the way the IRA operated in Northern Ireland.

Operation Demetrius was followed by the implementation and subsequent removal of Special Category Status for IRA prisoners in Northern Ireland. This status, granted in 1972, created a special category of political prisoners for all prisoners convicted during “the troubles”, the period of confrontation between republican and loyalist paramilitary forces in the 1970s and 1980s. The political prisoner, or prisoner of war, status granted prisoners several privileges such as the right to wear their own clothes and to be exempt from prison work, the right to be held in the same section of prison as their brothers-in-arms, and extra visits and packages from the outside. This status remained in place for a few years, but caused unrest within the loyalist

⁴² English, *Armed Struggle*, 140.

⁴³ Adams, *Before the Dawn*, 165.

community. These people wanted to remain part of the United Kingdom and wanted the IRA members to be punished more harshly for their efforts to end the union. The unpopularity of the Special Category Status rose to such a degree that Lord Chancellor Gardiner declared in 1975:

The introduction of Special Category Status was a serious mistake....It should be made absolutely clear that Special Category prisoners can expect no amnesty and will have to serve their sentences....We recommend that the earliest practicable opportunity should be taken to end the Special Category.⁴⁴

Finally, in 1976, the Special Category Status was removed. Despite the fact that Northern Ireland Prime Minister James Chichester-Clark said in 1971, “Northern Ireland is at war with the IRA provisionals,”⁴⁵ after 1976, the prisoners were treated as common criminals rather than political prisoners or prisoners of war. The removal of Special Category Status motivated members of the IRA to take a strong stand against their treatment in British prisons. Members of the IRA and Sinn Féin were outraged at what they believed to be an injustice and a contradictory policy. Sinn Féin politician Tom Harley said years later, “By its nature internment means that it makes political prisoners of those who are interned....The British seek to undermine the whole political ethos of the struggle and what emerges is the policy of Ulsterization, criminalization and normalization.”⁴⁶ The refusal of the British to treat the IRA prisoners in a fashion which they believed they deserved to be treated caused the prisoners to begin protesting.

The first protest was started in the Long Kesh prison, located in Country Antrim a few miles outside of Belfast, in 1976 by Ciaran Nugent, the first man to lose Special Category Status.

⁴⁴ Coogan, *The IRA*, 482.

⁴⁵ Adams, *Before the Dawn*, 146.

⁴⁶ English, *Armed Struggle*, 187-88.

Because prisoners lost the right to wear their own clothes with the end of Special Category Status, Nugent was told to wear a prison uniform, which he refused claiming that “they’ll have to nail them to my back.”⁴⁷ He started the “Blanket Protest” in which convicted IRA prisoners who believed that they should have Special Category Status refused to wear prison uniforms, choosing instead to wrap themselves in blankets. This method of “going on the blanket” sparked the second protest, the “Dirty Protest”. Between 1976 and 1980, prisoners on the blanket were not allowed to leave their cells to use the bathroom without a uniform on, having to use slop buckets instead. When guards began throwing the prisoners slop back into their cells, the prisoners began smearing excrement on the walls and dumping urine out the windows in an attempt to keep their floors clean. In addition, the prisoners refused to wash themselves, as this also required wearing a uniform to leave the cell. Historian Richard English says in his work *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA*, “But now, with the blanket, no-wash and dirty protests, the campaign of the incarcerated republicans took on a new, highly charged significance within the republican struggle, dominating their own publicity and becoming the focus for much of their energy and effort.”⁴⁸ Initially the IRA leadership outside the prisons was opposed to the protests, believing that if they failed, the blow to IRA propaganda would seriously diminish public support. The leadership did not consider that, if successful, the public support boost would be immense. They did not know at the time that these protests would develop into a prison movement so popular that it would catapult the IRA into politics.

The blanket protest and the dirty protest carried the prisoners into the 1980s. By that point they were frustrated and tired. In 1980 a decision was made by the prisoners to put forth a

⁴⁷ Coogan, *The IRA*, 487.

⁴⁸ English, *Armed Struggle*, 190.

set of demands to draw public attention to their struggle and clarify to the people, as well as the British government, what they wanted. Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams, IRA man Brendan Hughes and others drafted the “five demands” in 1980. The “five demands” was a list of requirements for proper treatment which the prisoners felt must be met by the British. Failure to meet these demands would result in continued protests. The “five demands” were as follows:

1. The right to wear their own clothes.
2. The right not to do prison work.
3. Free association with fellow prisoners.
4. Full 50% remission of their sentences.
5. Normal visits, parcels, education and recreational facilities.⁴⁹

The point of these demands was to reacquire a form of Special Category Status for IRA prisoners. The prisoners threatened that if these demands were not met, a hunger strike would ensue. Despite threats, the British rejected the demands by simply ignoring them. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher felt that the demands gave the prisoners too many rights which they did not deserve, and on 6 November 1980 Secretary of State for Northern Ireland James Prior announced:

The central demand of the hunger strikers—for political prisoner status—could not be conceded for three reasons; (a) it would be morally wrong to accept that crimes committed for political reasons were different from other crimes; (b) the claim for political status had been rejected by the European Commission on Human Rights in June; and (c) because it would produce a violent Protestant backlash, and give encouragement to terrorists everywhere.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Coogan, *The IRA*, 489.

⁵⁰ Paul Dixon, *Northern Ireland: The Politics of War and Peace* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 177.

The British government was not going to budge on this matter. This caused the prisoners to carry out their threat and begin a hunger strike in October 1980.

Before moving into the events and results of the hunger strike, it is important to look at the special significance Special Category Status held for the republican prisoners. This status was important because, even though the movement had not yet officially moved into politics, the prisons were full of IRA men who had nothing but time to discuss politics and form political opinions. Sinn Féin prisoner Jim Gibney, who would later become very instrumental in pushing Sinn Féin and the IRA into electoral politics, said of his time in prison:

If you look at the political leadership today of Sinn Féin, most of them were in prison at one time in their lives. They used their period of imprisonment to develop their political ideas into the party and into the struggle. You use the knowledge you gain in prison because you have time to read and time to study ideas on the outside.⁵¹

The claim that the prisoners were part of a political conflict was the first step the IRA made onto the political scene in Northern Ireland. In 1978, Archbishop of Armagh Cardinal O’Fiaich and his chief public relations officer Jim Cantwell drafted a statement in reaction to the blanket and dirty protests. In this statement they said, “The authorities refuse to admit that these prisoners are in a different category from the ordinary, yet everything about their trials and family background indicates that they are different.”⁵² Thomas McElwee, a prisoner in the Long Kesh “H-Block” section (a special structure where most IRA prisoners were held), wrote in a

⁵¹ Jim Gibney, “Frontline: The IRA and Sinn Féin,” interview by PBS (1998),

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/ira/inside/gibney.html>.

⁵² David Bresford, *Ten Men Dead: The Story of the 1981 Hunger Strike* (New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1987), 140.

secret prison communication (comm)⁵³, “The weapon of the criminalization policy must be removed from the British by achieving political status for Republican POWs.”⁵⁴ Both of these statements exemplify the idea that these prisoners were not normal prisoners. McElwee’s reference to POWs, and O’Fiaich’s comment about the nature of the prisoners’ backgrounds both point to the fact that the IRA’s campaign was more than simply an aggressive campaign of violence. It puts the IRA prisoners in a special category, a political category. This argument, that the IRA prisoners were political prisoners and should have Special Category Status, was the first real indication that the IRA’s struggle was moving in a political direction. This budge towards politics became a shove in 1981.

The hunger strike of 1980 began on 27 October and lasted only until 18 December. The 1980 hunger strike, led by a prisoner named Brendan Hughes and involving seven men and three women, generated publicity and support for the IRA, and shed a negative light internationally on the British administration and its handling of the situation. By December, the British decided that they had to end the strike before someone died and caused more damage to the British government’s reputation. On 18 December 1980, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Humphrey Atkins issued a statement, first to the IRA, then to the public:

I want to spell out for you and your families what will happen when the protest ends. First of all, any such prisoner will be put into a clean cell as, I hope, all prisoners will end their protest. We shall have the task of cleaning out all the cells right away and this should take a week or 10 days. Within a few days, clothing provided by the families will be given to any prisoners giving up

⁵³ Prisoners were able to communicate with each other and with the outside organization through use of “comms”. These were written on small pieces of paper, usually toilet paper or cigarette rolling paper, and transported in and out of prison, usually in the smuggler’s anal cavity, during visits.

⁵⁴ Bresford, *Ten Men Dead*, 187.

their protest to that they can wear it during recreation, association and visits.⁵⁵

Initially this appeared to be a victory for the IRA prisoners as it met three of the “five demands”; wearing their own clothes, recreation time, and association and visits. The problem, however, was not solved. The British were slow to fulfill their promises, and when the promises were met, they were on the British terms, not on those of the prisoners. One example of this was the status of the “civilian clothes” issued to the prisoners. While the prisoners demand for civilian clothes indicated that they wanted to wear their own clothes, the British had a different interpretation of the demand. When the families brought clothes for the prisoners to wear, these were discarded and replaced by standard issue civilian clothes; essentially a uniform under a different name. Trickery such as this caused the IRA prisoners to become disgruntled, and in 1981 a second hunger strike was started, one which would have political ramifications for both the IRA and the British and would alter the course of the war between the Britain military and the Irish Republican Army.

⁵⁵ Coogan, *The IRA*, 491.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE 1981 HUNGER STRIKE AND THE ELECTION OF BOBBY SANDS

The IRA hunger strike of 1981, one which would claim the lives of ten republican prisoners and bind Sinn Féin with the IRA, was led by a prisoner named Bobby Sands. Sands had been interned in 1972 and later charged with possession of four pistols which were “found” at his house. He spent four years in prison. He was released and subsequently arrested again in 1976, after the end of Special Category Status; this time he was caught driving a getaway car from the scene of an attempted bombing. He had three suspects and a gun with him, and was sentenced to fourteen years for “possession with intent”. In both instances Sands refused to recognize the authority of the court which sentenced him.⁵⁶ He was not involved directly in the first hunger strike, but after the duplicity of the British in regards to their promises he announced that a second hunger strike would begin and that it would not be broken until the demands were met and promises were carried out. On 23 January 1981 he published a statement which said:

A second hunger strike cannot and will not end in defeat because as I have said before, when the balance of conformity outweighs that of resistance, then criminalization is indeed winning....Because comrades, at the end of the day, men will die and the responsibility of ending this protest once and for all will

⁵⁶ Bresford, *Ten Men Dead*, 39.

not lie with dead comrades, but with you...victory will be ours, because we have the will to win. And we will win.⁵⁷

Sands and the other prisoners were committed to the strike, but in the same way that they were opposed to earlier prison protest movements, the IRA Army Council and Sinn Féin both expressed reservations about the strike out of fear that it would fail. Despite this the strike began on 1 March 1981. The structure of this strike was different from that of the first strike. Instead of men all going on strike at the same time, they would stagger themselves so that when each one died a new striker would begin his fast. This would extend the protest, create more public awareness and eventually contribute to the mass popular support the IRA would gain over the following months.

Roughly one month after the strike began, a plan was conceived to accelerate the fulfillment of the demands. When Frank Maguire, the Member of Parliament (MP) for Fermanagh-South Tyrone, died at the end of March, it was decided that the imprisoned Bobby Sands would stand for election to his seat. The prisoners were convinced that if Sands won, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher would have to grant concessions or be forced to allow a Westminster MP to die in a British prison. IRA prisoner Laurence McKeown later expressed the thought process of many prisoners behind the decision to stand Bobby Sands; “We thought it would greatly improve Bobby’s chances of living, that the Brits would not want one of their own MPs to die on hunger strike.”⁵⁸ Sands himself was of the idea that a movement into the political scene was a necessary step for the IRA. He wrote in a comm, “our guns may kill our enemies, but unless we direct them with the politics of a revolutionary people, they will eventually kill

⁵⁷ Coogan, *The IRA*, 497.

⁵⁸ English, *Armed Struggle*, 199.

ourselves.”⁵⁹ He saw the importance of the gun, but he also saw the importance of politics being used to aim that gun. With this knowledge, Sands ran on the Sinn Féin ticket, and the two organizations, IRA and Sinn Féin, forged a political alliance that still exists today.

This political move was immediately opposed by the Social Democrat and Labour Party (SDLP) candidate Austin Currie. The SDLP was a nationalist, but non-republican political party which sought compromise with the British government. Because they were a nationalist party the SDLP wanted more representation for Irish nationalists in the Northern Irish government, but because they were not a republican party they believed that a solution could be found without forcing the British to leave. Due to the fact that Sinn Féin was primarily a political agitation movement and was not involved in electoral politics, the SDLP dominated the Irish nationalist political scene in Northern Ireland, and feared the growing popularity of Sinn Féin and the IRA. When Sands chose to run on the Sinn Féin ticket, the SDLP candidate refused to back down, despite the fact that running two nationalist candidates would split the vote and create a clear channel for a loyalist candidate to win a seat in one of the most populous nationalist regions in Northern Ireland. The IRA Officer Commanding (OC) in the Long Kesh prison, Brendan “Bik” McFarlane, wrote in a comm on 29 March, “One thing is very clear—the Brits fear us taking this seat, hence the SDLP opposition. If Austin Currie runs against Bob the split vote will allow West [Harry West was the Unionist Party candidate] to take the seat...I think we should not allow ourselves to be intimidated or bluffed out of this election.”⁶⁰ Sinn Féin and the IRA were making a move onto the political scene which was opposed by both nationalist and loyalist

⁵⁹ Adams, *Before the Dawn*, 285.

⁶⁰ Bresford, *Ten Men Dead*, 76.

parties, yet they believed that they should push on because of the significance winning the seat could bring to the republican movement.

Sands was also opposed by a fellow republican candidate named Noel Maguire, brother of the deceased MP Frank Maguire. The IRA began to put pressure on both Maguire and Currie to drop out of the race, clearing the way for Sands to be the only nationalist candidate. Despite the numerous letters and petitions for him to step down, Maguire refused to believe that Sands would actually stand for election, and felt that he was serving the republican community by staying in the race. He was eventually convinced that he should step down and allow Sands to become the only nationalist candidate when Sands's nomination became official, but Currie was more hesitant. The SDLP leadership finally conceded to the demands of Sinn Féin and told Currie to stand down. Currie, however, refused to listen and continued to insist that he would stand. While the republican leadership was convinced that Sands could defeat Currie, they were still worried that Currie would steal nationalist votes and as a result West would emerge victorious. Currie was eventually worn down, and Sands ran against West, winning the seat on 9 April 1981. Despite the fact that he was now a Westminster MP, Sands died on 5 May 1981 after 66 days on hunger strike.

The election and subsequent death of Sands had two major results for the IRA and Sinn Féin. The first of these was a huge boost of public support. Brendan McFarlane questioned in a comm the day after the election whether or not the British would concede that the election proved the IRA had support.⁶¹ In another comm, an IRA prisoner code named "Tony H5" wrote:

Fr. Murphy [a Roman Catholic priest who constantly visited the hunger strikers in order to convince them to abandon the strike]

⁶¹ Bresford, *Ten Men Dead*, 84.

was saying that he thought that there was a good chance that the British Government will act on the issue now seeing as we got 30,000 people to stand behind us...With the result of the election there is a feeling here tonight which has not been here in a long time.⁶²

Sinn Féin representatives outside the prison agreed with these prisoners. Gerry Adams said, “His victory exposed the lie that the hunger strikers—and by extension the IRA and the whole republican movement – had no popular support,”⁶³ and Jim Gibney said, “I thought that she [Thatcher] had run her campaign on the basis that the prisoners didn’t have any support. Here was a test of that support. He won...handsomely.”⁶⁴ These optimistic assumptions about the stance of the British government turned out to be premature. In May Foreign Secretary Lord Carrington said, “Do not tell me the IRA represents people in Northern Ireland. They have no status, they are not accepted by anyone.”⁶⁵ The British government could make whatever claims they chose to, but the general consensus was that the people supported the IRA much more than the British leadership would let on. This can be seen in the support for other hunger strikers, such as Kieran Doherty and Joe McDonnell, as they ran for MP and Teachta Dála (TD, Irish government equivalent of MP) seats in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. It could also be seen in the mass attendance at hunger striker funerals, occasions which turned into political rallies and had to be broken up by the police on numerous occasions. Public support for the IRA was thriving, and the IRA could now see that political action was a surefire way to build a strong public support base. By joining this public support with the political skills of Sinn Féin, the IRA began to step into politics.

⁶² Bresford, *Ten Men Dead*, 85.

⁶³ English, *Armed Struggle*, 200.

⁶⁴ Gibney, “The IRA & Sinn Féin,” *PBS*.

⁶⁵ Bresford, *Ten Men Dead*, 97.

The second result of the Sands campaign was that it taught the Sinn Féin party about contesting elections. Prior to that point Sinn Féin had not been contesting many elections, choosing instead to protest the legitimacy of the Northern Irish government. Gerry Adams commented that at the time of the 1981 by-elections “We Sinn Féin activists had no idea of how to run an election campaign, but we had to learn at breakneck speed or face humiliation.”⁶⁶ The Sands election flung the IRA and Sinn Féin into Northern Irish politics, and sparked a new movement which united the two organizations in a double edged attack against the British occupation in Northern Ireland. This political activity continued with varied success in the Republic of Ireland general election in June 1981 as well as in Northern Ireland. While hunger strike candidate Joe McDonnell narrowly lost his campaign for the Sligo-Leitrim TD seat, fellow striker Kieran Doherty was successful in winning the seat for Cavan-Monaghan TD in the Dáil Éireann in Dublin. After Sands’s death, his campaign manager Owen Carron ran for and won his now vacant MP seat in Westminster. After hearing of these successes, one prisoner wrote:

We (the Movement) have made more gains in the past six months than at any other period of our struggle. We have generated a considerable amount of support, but our most significant gains have been our election victories. We can, technically speaking, claim to have took over from the SDLP as the representative of the population due to the fact that we have a seat in Westminster and the SDLP have none. The decision of Sinn Féin to fight W. Belfast elated me as I am firmly of the opinion that in order to achieve a socialist republic we will have to go into politics seriously.... I think that we should fight the war on as many fronts as possible and if the support is there, well we may well use it!⁶⁷

The hunger strike was the major turning point for the republican movement in Northern Ireland. It caused a change in the movement which allowed it to become very successful in

⁶⁶ Adams, *Before the Dawn*, 291.

⁶⁷ Bresford, *Ten Men Dead*, 319-320.

achieving its goal of a united Ireland under Irish rule. IRA leader Martin McGuinness said, “Not since the declaration in arms of the Irish republic on the steps of Dublin’s GPO [General Post Office] in 1916 has any event in modern Irish history stirred the minds and hearts of the people to such an extent as the hunger strike of 1981.”⁶⁸ Senior Sinn Féin member Jim Gibney said:

I think it was probably one of the highest points in terms of convincing Republicans of the merits of electoral politics....It was very, very difficult before Bobby Sands was elected to argue internally that the way forward, or one of the ways forward was through standing Sinn Féin in elections.⁶⁹

In September 1980, the IRA was a military organization and Sinn Féin was a protest movement. By September 1981, these two organizations had formed the seed of a political force which would grow over the following twenty five years into the majority nationalist party in Northern Irish politics.

⁶⁸ English, *Armed Struggle*, 204.

⁶⁹ Gibney, “The IRA & Sinn Féin,” *PBS*.

CHAPTER SIX

THE ARMALITE AND BALLOT BOX

The hunger strikers planted the seed, but the members of the republican movement had to make decisions over the next few years which would grow that seed into an active political party. Gerry Adams said of the republican movement, “now, in the wake of the hunger strikes, it had established a greater political and moral weight than at any other time in my lifetime.”⁷⁰ The propaganda surge from the hunger strike was so large that it even attracted international attention to the IRA’s struggle in Northern Ireland. In 1986, the former American Ambassador to Ireland William B. Shannon said, “The hunger strike was the greatest political propaganda coup for the IRA in the last decade.”⁷¹ The truth of this statement cannot be denied, but it would be equally true to expand Ambassador Shannon’s statement so that instead of being the greatest political propaganda coup of the decade, the hunger strike should be seen as the greatest coup of the century. By this point in time, Sinn Féin and the IRA had linked the two wings of the republican movement, armed struggle and political rhetoric, together, and both organizations immediately began to work on expanding this movement to include electoral political action.

⁷⁰ Adams, *Before The Dawn*, 316.

⁷¹ Coogan, *The IRA*, 504.

The evidence for the IRA interest in politics, as well as the strengthening of this relationship between Sinn Féin and the IRA, can be seen in a comm sent from Brendan McFarlane, the IRA OC in the Long Kesh Prison, to “Brownie”, Gerry Adam’s code name:

To Brownie from Bik Sun 26.7.81

...We’ve been thinking in various ways of exploiting our situation to the full maximum gain on the ground, especially in the Free State. [Many of the IRA men still referred to the Republic of Ireland as the ‘Free State’ because they still did not recognize the Irish government as legitimate at this point in time.] The climate now is ripe to make significant progress and establish a firm base down there which is a necessity for future development and success in the final analysis. To allow opportunities to slip by (opportunities which may not present themselves again) would be a grave mistake. We are examining the possibility of contesting elections and actually making full use of seats gained—i.e. participating in the Dáil. Such an idea presents problems within the Movement....There are obvious dangers in promoting ideas that could and possibly would be classed as departure [from] policy...to be honest, I only asked Jake [Jake Jackson was another prisoner who had been close to Sands during his strike] last week to think on the Free State elections lines....He recognizes it as our big chance at finding a permanent base, without which we’ll never get to the end of the road.⁷²

This comm reveals useful information about the changing ideology in the republican movement, specifically within the IRA. The existence of such correspondence itself points to the deepening ties between the IRA and Sinn Féin. The protest movement brought the two organizations closer together as they worked on documents such as the “five demands” and propaganda projects associated with the hunger strikes and election campaigns. In this comm, written during the final weeks of the hunger strike, McFarlane (IRA) is looking for advice from Adams (Sinn Féin). He mentions that he has talked to other IRA men, such as Jake Jackson, and he is worried about the ramifications this change in ideology could have on the IRA. McFarlane

⁷² Bresford, *Ten Men Dead*, 257-258.

turns to Adams to coach him through these doubts. This comm shows that the IRA and Sinn Féin were becoming one united republican movement as a result of the political action begun during the hunger strike.

In addition to the closeness between republican leaders, this comm also reveals much about the mindset of high ranking IRA men at this time. It was a very unique time in the history of the IRA. Political involvement, a method previously shunned by the IRA, had all of a sudden proven to be the greatest propaganda project it had ever embarked upon. It had transformed the image of the IRA in the public mind from violent agitators to a political force which wanted to stand up for the people of Ireland and would now do so using non-violent means in addition to their current armed struggle. McFarlane was clearly of the opinion that the chance to enter politics was a great opportunity and he supported the efforts made by the IRA prisoners to put themselves out into the political sphere. He recognized politics as a chance to form a “permanent base” which was “necessary for future success”, but was worried that a drastic change in the abstentionist policy would splinter the movement as it did in 1969.

The true importance of this comm is that it shows a serious shift on the part of the IRA prison leadership toward political involvement. As mentioned earlier, the prisons had been a hotbed for development of republican ideology. By putting large numbers of republicans in confined prisons together, the British made the mistake of creating a breeding ground for republicanism. The prisoners began to rapidly develop political ideas so that by the time of the 1981 elections, they truly felt that political involvement was a necessary factor in obtaining the ultimate goal of republicanism, forcing the British out of Ireland. Gerry Adams even stated that after the hunger strike “some of the ideas we had theorized while incarcerated could now be put

to the test.”⁷³ The IRA, led by the prisoners, had jumped on the political wagon and would soon be joined by Sinn Féin.

The 1981 Sinn Féin Árd Fheis (convention), was held in October and November of that year. By that time the hunger strike had ended. After intervention from the church and some of the strikers’ families had resulted in strikers being forced to end their hunger strike involuntarily, the IRA had declared the strike over. Adams had worked with the British to negotiate the facilitation of a version of the “five demands” which partially satisfied both sides. The publicity and propaganda associated with the hunger strike was over. Sinn Féin and the IRA needed to continue building and maintaining their support through the newfound channel of electoral politics. As noted above, the IRA prisoners influenced the IRA leadership to begin an electoral strategy based on the success of the hunger strikers. On 31 October 1981 at the Árd Fheis, Danny Morrison, a senior member of Sinn Féin known for his outspoken support of the IRA, delivered a speech which became immortalized in republican ideology and brought Sinn Féin into the political arena with the IRA.

Morrison’s famous question addresses the concerns of both militant and electoral republicans. He asks, “Who here really believes we can win the war through the ballot box? But will anyone here object if, with a ballot paper in one hand and the Armalite in the other, we take power in Ireland?”⁷⁴ The first part of this question addresses the concern of militant republicans. As expressed by Brendan McFarlane’s comm, there was a real fear among the republican leadership that the adoption of electoral politics would cause a split in the IRA as many in the republican movement felt that a 180 degree turn from militancy to politics was a betrayal of

⁷³ Gerry Adams, *Hope and History: Making Peace in Ireland* (London: Brandon, 2003), 18.

⁷⁴ Dixon, *Northern Ireland*, 181.

traditional republican values. When Morrison asks, “Who here really believes we can win the war through the ballot box?” he is implying that no one wants to turn fully towards politics in a rejection of the armed struggle. Such a drastic change would destroy the republican movement and Sinn Féin would be no different than the SDLP. His first question implies that the republican movement is not making a shift toward being a solely political movement.

The second question posed by Morrison, the part of his speech most often quoted by modern day republicans, asks, “Will anyone here object if, with a ballot paper in one hand and the Armalite in the other, we take power in Ireland?” Morrison presents the Sinn Féin *Árd Fheis* with a new model of republicanism; a model which is a fusion of politics and violence. The “ballot paper in one hand” represents the new electoral politics strategy being adopted by many republicans. In the wake of the hunger strikes and the success of electoral politics, the republican movement could no longer ignore the power of contesting elections in creating a support base. Elections created an opportunity for propaganda which could not be ignored. Therefore Morrison encouraged Sinn Féin to proceed with the “ballot paper in one hand”.

In the other hand, argued Morrison, should be the Armalite. “Armalite” was a reference to an American rifle which had become popular within the ranks of the IRA. The “Armalite in the other hand” represented the continued armed struggle. No one believed that the British would be voted out of Ireland; in fact, despite contesting elections, both Sinn Féin and the IRA still held an abstentionist policy in Northern Ireland. For republicans, elections were a propaganda tool to gain support for the real heart of the movement, the armed campaign against the British army. Jim Gibney summed up the belief of several Sinn Féin members toward electoral politics at the time; “The traditional Republican approach to political struggle was through armed struggle. Now, the struggle had to evolve, space had to be created to allow Sinn

Féin as a political party in its own right to emerge. Republicans had to endure that development....I think that it was just part of this process of evolution.”⁷⁵ With this attitude in the forefront, the *Árd Fheis* adopted Morrison’s plan and joined with the IRA to create a two-front war in which to fight the British. The battle now became one of violence *and* politics.

The IRA entered the political scene in 1981, but it was not until 1986 that it saw electoral politics as more than a propaganda tool. 1986 marked the end of abstentionism in the republican movement, first by the IRA and then officially by Sinn Féin. At the 1986 IRA General Army Convention on 14 October 1986, the IRA decided to end its abstentionist policy in the *Dáil*. It felt that, at least in terms of the Republic of Ireland, it was counterproductive to win seats and refuse to take them. It could not claim to represent the Irish people if it did not stand up for them in the Irish government. The two key resolutions passed by the convention ended both the ban on IRA members advocating sitting in Parliamentary seats, a step toward ending abstentionism in Westminster as well as in the *Dáil*, and the ban on members taking their seats in the *Dáil*, ending the long standing abstentionist policy of the IRA.⁷⁶ Problems arose when certain factions within the IRA opposed this move, and the IRA splintered once again, as Brendan McFarlane had feared. This new group called itself the “Continuity IRA”, and continues to stand by abstentionism today.

The 1986 Sinn Féin *Árd Fheis* in November adopted a similar resolution. Gerry Adams said that “By 1986 I argued that the military stalemate between the Brits and republican forces could only be resolved by a political settlement.”⁷⁷ The bolstering of support gained from

⁷⁵ Gibney, “The IRA & Sinn Féin,” *PBS*.

⁷⁶ English, *Armed Struggle*, 250.

⁷⁷ Adams, *Before the Dawn*, 317.

contesting elections had still proven unable to give the IRA the backing they needed to win a military conflict. Five years after beginning the “ballot box and Armalite” strategy, the IRA was no closer to winning the war than they were before the hunger strikes. As the IRA had realized in October, Sinn Féin now realized that a greater emphasis needed to be put on the political aspect of the struggle; maybe it *was* possible to vote the British out of Northern Ireland. Sinn Féin member Jim Gibney said of the abstentionist policy, “I think that abstentionism was a millstone round Sinn Féin’s neck. [Ending it] brought Sinn Féin and republicans a dose of reality.... You cannot build a political party without recognizing and accepting the institutions of that state.”⁷⁸ Violent republican bomber Gerry Kelly, responsible for the 1973 London Bombing, contributed to the argument from his prison cell; “Abstentionism by Sinn Féin helps the other parties to misrepresent republicanism and go unchallenged.... The republican movement should be in there, challenging them daily.”⁷⁹ These views, those of Adams, Gibney and Kelly, were popular enough to cause the *Árd Fheis* to end the Sinn Féin abstentionist policy. In the same way as the IRA, Sinn Féin split, with the newly formed “Republican Sinn Féin” wing continuing abstentionism to this day. The IRA and Sinn Féin had both ended abstentionism and were now working together on two fronts to fulfill their republican aim of forcing the British occupiers out of Ireland forever.

The strongest evidence supporting this view, that the 1981 hunger strikes was the incident which launched the IRA into politics, can be found in the election results in Northern Ireland from 1973-2011 (see Appendix). This document from the Northern Irish “ARK” website, breaks down the election results for local elections, Westminster Parliament, regional elections, and

⁷⁸ Peter Taylor, *Behind the Mask: The IRA and Sinn Féin* (New York: TV Books Inc., 1999), 337.

⁷⁹ English, *Armed Struggle*, 251.

European Parliament.⁸⁰ The first graph shows the combination of all elections results. In this graph, Sinn Féin is non-existent from 1973-1981. Sinn Féin comes onto the scene in the 1982 section, after choosing to adopt the “ballot box and armalite” strategy, and continues to grow in popularity up to 2004, at which time it has become the dominant nationalist party in Northern Ireland.⁸¹

When the results are broken down into sub-categories, it is still evident that 1981 was a turning point for Sinn Féin and the IRA. In 1981, Sinn Féin took no seats in local government elections. By 1985, they had taken 12% of the vote and continued to climb until 2011 where they polled 25% of the vote, second only to the Democratic Unionist Party’s (DUP) 27%. In terms of regional elections, Sinn Féin did not contest in 1975. The 1982 results show that they took 10% of the vote, climbing to 27% by 2011, again second only to the DUP’s 30%. In elections to the British Parliament at Westminster, Sinn Féin polled 13% in 1983. In 2011, Sinn Féin held 26% of the vote, the highest out of any Northern Irish political party. Finally, the European election results show Sinn Féin increasing from no-contest in 1979 to 13% in 1984 and 26% in 2009, again the highest out of any Northern Irish political party.⁸² These results can all be attributed to the adoption of the “ballot box and armalite” strategy by the IRA and Sinn Féin. Fluctuations in percentages are related to various events such as IRA ceasefires, declared and broken, over the 1980s and 1990s, and the successes and failures in the peace process of the 1990s.

⁸⁰ These results are from general elections in Northern Ireland only. Therefore elections of hunger strikers such as Sands in by-elections are not recorded.

⁸¹ “Election Results in Ireland since 1973,” Nicholas Whyte in *Access Research Knowledge Northern Ireland (ARK)*, (last updated May 26, 2013) <http://www.ark.ac.uk/elections/gallsum.htm> (accessed October 21, 2013).

⁸² Whyte, “Election Results In Ireland Since 1973.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

SINN FÉIN AND THE IRA: ONE UNITED REPUBLICAN MOVEMENT

Up to this point it is clear that both Sinn Féin and the IRA were moving in the same direction. They both saw the value of electoral politics and have made strides towards engaging the British on all possible fronts. The theory that the 1981 hunger strike united the IRA and Sinn Féin and launched the republican movement into electoral politics appears to hold true. The only real question that remains is whether or not Sinn Féin and the IRA are one and the same organization. If they are not, if they are simply two separate republican organizations, then the entire argument that the IRA entered politics in 1981 is disproved. Without the link between Sinn Féin and the IRA, all one can say is that a few IRA men began to contest elections on Sinn Féin tickets. In order to prove that the IRA made a real commitment to entering politics as well as continuing their armed struggle it is imperative to prove that the IRA and Sinn Féin are two branches of the same organization.

To say that both movements are republican movements is a nice place to start, but it is not enough; both have been republican since their founding, but the two organizations did not come together to take action until the 1980s. Some evidence has been presented already: IRA men contesting elections on the Sinn Féin ticket, Sinn Féin helping the IRA with hunger strike propaganda and both organizations making the same drastic ideological decisions within weeks

of each other. Most people in Northern Ireland have associated the two organizations as one since the 1980s. Even the British government saw the two as inextricably linked. While all of these point to the link between Sinn Féin and the IRA, the strongest evidence comes from two things: cross membership between the two organizations, specifically the leaders, and the establishment of Sinn Féin as the voice of the IRA.

Cross membership between Sinn Féin and the IRA is a tradition dating back to 1916 when the IRB coopted the Sinn Féin party. Throughout the 20th century many Sinn Féin members came from the IRA. When questioned on this trend of Sinn Féin members in the 1980s and 1990s having spent their youth in the IRA, Jim Gibney responded, “Quite a few republicans obviously have passed through the ranks of the IRA and passed through prison. There’s no doubt about that.”⁸³ One of these men was IRA leader and Sinn Féin member Martin McGuinness. Gerry Adams mentions McGuinness’s cross membership in his book *Hope and History*; “He also served several terms of imprisonment in the South for IRA activities. Martin was now a senior Sinn Féin leader.”⁸⁴ Although Adams himself claimed that he was never a member of the IRA, most historians agree that he was at least a member, if not a commander. This is not surprising seeing as he was raised by a republican IRA family. In his autobiography, Adams mentions that both his father and grandmother were staunch members of the IRA.⁸⁵ He also writes that “Almost twenty years have passed since Long Kesh [Belfast Prison] was opened...on any one of the many days since then, at least one of us has been in there.”⁸⁶ Adams’s own experience as well as his brief mention of McGuinness’s cross membership and

⁸³ Gibney, “The IRA & Sinn Féin,” *PBS*.

⁸⁴ Adams, *Hope and History*, 20.

⁸⁵ Adams, *Before the Dawn*, 25.

⁸⁶ Adams, *Cage Eleven* (Dingle Co. Kerry: Brandon), 11.

Gibney's comments on the IRA-Sinn Féin conveyor belt both point to the fact that Sinn Féin and the IRA were inextricably linked through cross membership as well as ideology.

The other fact which points to a true union between the IRA and Sinn Féin is that starting with the hunger strikes and continuing onto the peace talks in the 1990s, Sinn Féin became the mouthpiece for the IRA. During the hunger strike in 1981, the IRA was constantly in contact with the British government attempting to find a solution through various channels. One of these channels was Gerry Adams, president of Sinn Féin. The IRA would pass demands and statements on to Adams, and he would pass these on to the public or to the British. One such example can be seen in this comm from Brendan McFarlane to Adams:

To Brownie [Adams] Sat 1.8.81 from Bik [McFarlane]

...the pressure appears to be hardening in the direction of the A/C [Army Council] to call a halt. Do you want a statement from us outlining the position in regards to hunger strike? I've just told Ricky to get down a paragraph or two on A/C moral obligation aspect and if you feel it helps then bang it out. Don't mean to jump the gun by us stating A/C policy. Just felt a need to say something....⁸⁷

The IRA inside the prisons would send messages and statement to Adams, and the British and others on the outside would send messages back, again through Adams. Fr. Denis Faul, a Roman Catholic priest who was instrumental in convincing strikers' families to help end the hunger strike, recalls turning to Adams to send messages to the IRA leadership; "Adams was the one that did all the talking....Mr. Adams agreed to ask the IRA to order the men off the hunger strike. We thought at that stage that was the only way we could get them off."⁸⁸ As Sinn

⁸⁷ Bresford, *Ten Men Dead*, 281.

⁸⁸ Taylor, *Behind the Mask*, 290.

Féin President, Adams was the middle man between the IRA and others during the hunger strike, and Sinn Féin continued this role during the peace talks in the 1990s.

Several attempts were made at a peace settlement in Northern Ireland over the course of the 1990s before a successful peace initiative, the Belfast Agreement, was signed in 1998. Throughout all of the peace efforts, failed conferences, and “talks about talks”, Sinn Féin was constantly associated with the IRA. The British government saw such a strong connection between the two republican organizations that Sinn Féin was prohibited from taking part in “all party” talks several times over the course of the decade due to the fact that the IRA refused to declare a ceasefire. While denying that the IRA was the “military wing” of Sinn Féin, Adams did admit that Sinn Féin and the IRA were working together towards a peace settlement; “As I or Martin McGuinness started to engage more and more with the IRA leadership on the question of a peace process and the potential for Sinn Féin to play a pivotal role in this, the IRA showed that its courage wasn’t just about making war. It was prepared to help create the conditions for making peace.”⁸⁹ The important part of this statement is that Adams was working with IRA leaders to “create conditions for peace.” With Sinn Féin leading the way and doing the talking, the republican movement, both the IRA *and* Sinn Féin, were ready for peace.

From the hunger strikes in the 1980s to the peace talks in the 1990s, Sinn Féin spoke for the IRA. Through all of this time, cross membership existed in a large number between the two organizations, and fueled the republican drive. All of this was possible because the IRA and Sinn Féin were part of one united republican movement. The series of events which began with the Bobby Sands election in 1981 had created a situation in which Sinn Féin and the IRA were

⁸⁹ Adams, *Hope and History*, 33.

no longer separate. They had become the same, and had created a strong republican political party.

CONCLUSION: ON THE ONE ROAD

The IRA and Sinn Féin are both organizations which have been around longer than Ireland has been an independent nation. Both are republican organizations; both were founded on and are still dedicated to creating a united 32 county Ireland completely free from British control. These two organizations, sharing a common goal, have been working together since 1981 to reach this goal, and have made great strides since then. The Belfast Agreement of 1998 did not eradicate the British presence, but, in the same way Michael Collins's Anglo-Irish treaty did in 1921, it created the "freedom to achieve freedom" in Northern Ireland.

Historian Brian Feeney wrote in his book *Sinn Féin: A Hundred Turbulent Years*, that prior to the hunger strikes "The IRA leaders saw Sinn Féin merely as a support group and a mouthpiece for the IRA, an organization in which people, mainly men past military age, could act as cheerleaders for the IRA."⁹⁰ After the hunger strikes, this was clearly not the case; a strong union had grown out of the sacrifice of the ten IRA hunger strikers. Jim Gibney said in 1998, "the space has been created because of political events for Sinn Féin to emerge as a significant political force."⁹¹ The union between Sinn Féin and the IRA is still strong today and has grown into a very powerful political party. In fact, as evidenced by the election results

⁹⁰ Brian Feeney, *Sinn Féin: A Hundred Turbulent Years* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 198.

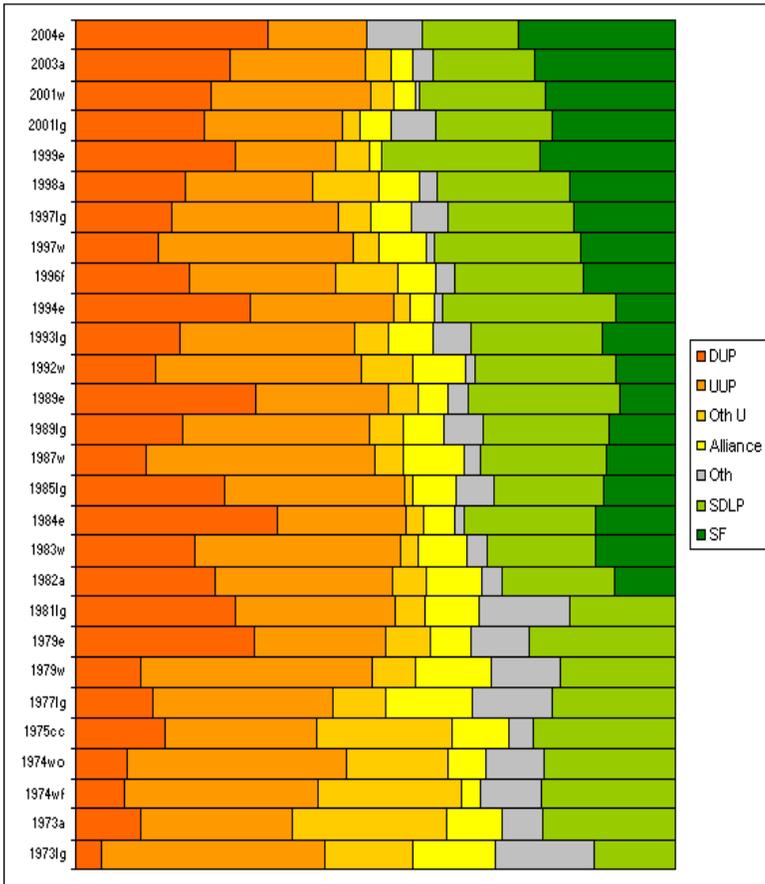
⁹¹ Gibney, "The IRA & Sinn Féin," *PBS*.

presented earlier, Sinn Féin is the dominant nationalist party in Northern Ireland. This could never have happened without the union created by the 1981 hunger strike. It gave both Sinn Féin and the IRA the ability to see the power of public support and of electoral politics, and it created the union which influences Northern Irish politics to this day. The republican movement still fights on; hoping that one day the British will be entirely gone from Ireland. Gerry Adams affirms the movement's continued dedication to this quintessential republican principle at the end of his book *A Pathway to Peace*:

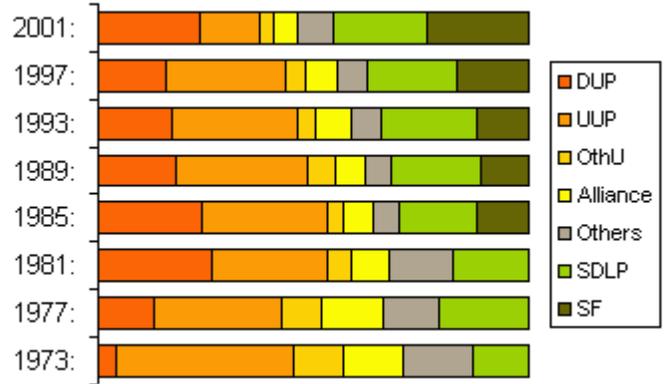
The onus is on the British government to ensure a peaceful transition to a united and independent Ireland. The shape of that society is a matter for the Irish people. Only when Britain recognises that right and initiates a strategy of decolonization along these lines will peace and reconciliation between Irish people and between Britain and Ireland be established.⁹²

⁹² Gerry Adams, *A Pathway to Peace* (Dublin: The Mercier Press Limited, 1988), 92.

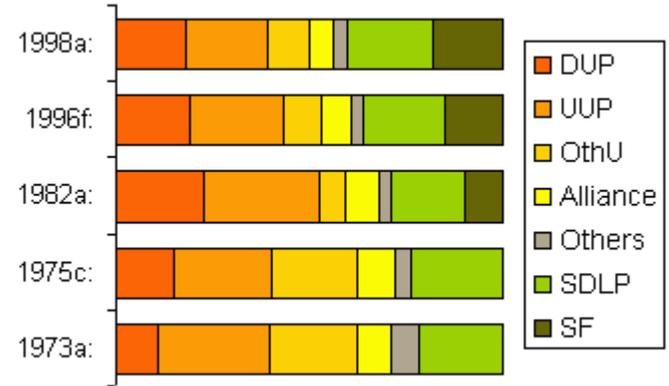
APPENDIX



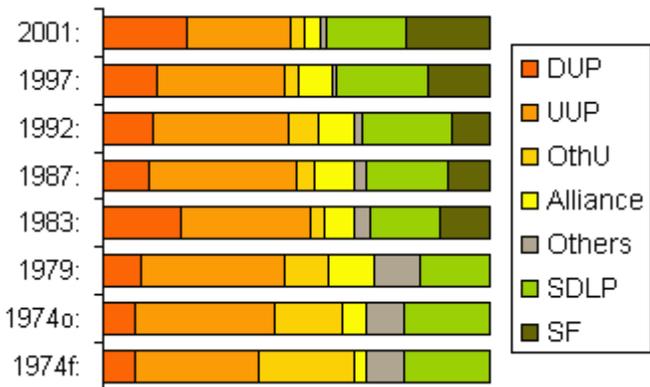
All Northern Irish Elections



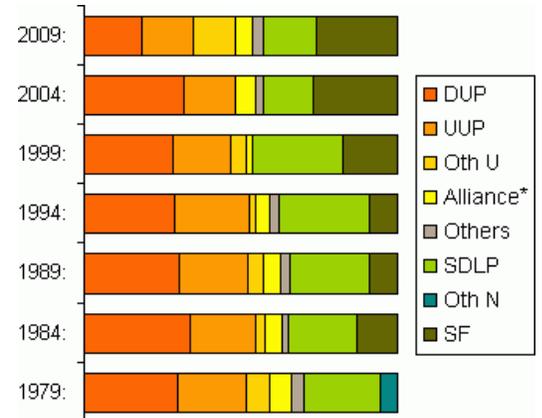
Local Government Elections



Westminster Elections



Regional Elections



European Elections

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