

**Between nationalist populism and socialism? Sinn Féin, the politics of the radical left, and the GUE/NGL Group in the European Parliament**

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## **Between nationalist populism and socialism? Sinn Féin, the politics of the radical left, and the GUE/NGL Group in the European Parliament**

### **Abstract:**

This paper aims to raise important questions about the recent political evolution of the Sinn Féin party (SF) in Ireland. Despite that party's contemporary, if not altogether consistent, attempts to portray itself as a socialist party of the radical left, this paper argues that it remains primarily a populist nationalist party that has failed to address, let alone transcend, some of the key limitations of the militant and militaristic extreme nationalist tradition in Ireland (which passes for Irish republicanism). SF has undoubtedly undergone a process of continuous change in recent years. However, the paper argues that, far from being guided by a strategic shift towards the radical left, this process of change has more often than not been reactive, tactical and informed by pragmatism, not ideological conviction. Whilst some of the socio-economic policies that SF has evolved since the early 1990s superficially resemble those of radical left parties, the party continues to mobilise on the basis of cultural nationalism (not class); national unity and national sovereignty remain its supreme goals, with 'socialism' a tactical add-on; and aspects of the party's culture and *modus operandi* that are anathema to democratic socialism, or indeed democracy, have not been thoroughly transformed. SF's relationship with the Confederal Group of the United European Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL), to which its MEPs have belonged since it first entered the European Parliament in 2004, might be thought to involve a new strategic relationship with the European radical left. However, this paper questions the extent to which this is so. In examining what lies behind the decision to align with the GUE/NGL, the paper considers whether Group membership has had any impact on SF's policies at home or in Europe. It also raises questions about what the party's membership of GUE/NGL tells us about the nature of that EP Group itself, and about the ideological reconfiguration of the European radical left in recent years.

## **Between nationalist populism and socialism? Sinn Féin, the politics of the radical left, and the GUE/NGL Group in the European Parliament**

### **Introduction**

As students of Irish politics and history know very well, there is not one Sinn Féin (SF), but several. The party which was founded by Arthur Griffith in 1905 as a moderate, constitutional monarchist party, seeking to re-fashion Ireland's relations with England along the lines of the Hapsburg 'dual monarchy' model, has undergone several significant and thorough transformations and splits throughout its history. Indeed, both the major parties in the contemporary Republic of Ireland – Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael - are descended from SF. More recently, the contemporary SF party, led by Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, owes its existence to a split that took place in 1969/70 within the republican movement – the generic term by which both the terrorist Irish Republican Army (IRA) and its political wing, SF, are known - between 'Officials' and 'Provisionals'. The former were socialists, increasingly attracted by Soviet-style communism and drawn towards a class analysis of Irish politics. This would lead them to prioritise working-class unity across the sectarian divide in Northern Ireland, to abandon terrorism (or 'armed struggle') in favour of democratic political agitation, and to emphasise party-building, with the goal of creating a mass, workers' party. The latter were traditionalists, unwilling to abandon or question the IRA's paramilitary campaign of violence against the union between Northern Ireland and Great Britain, initially (at least) intensely hostile to Marxism and indeed to any form of politics, and given to political mobilisation on grounds of national identity, often defined implicitly in Catholic and tribalist terms. One might indeed speak of the two wings of the IRA/SF in 1969/70 in terms of Left (Officials) and Right (Provisionals), albeit allowing for the fact that such generalisations always involve simplifications. (Some members remained loyal to the Officials, not through socialist conviction, but through belief in the legitimacy of the majority of the then IRA/SF leadership which backed them; some joined the Provisionals, not because they were 'right-wing Catholics', but because they saw the Provisionals as more effective and ruthless gunmen). Surprisingly, perhaps, it is from the Provisionals that today's SF – which claims to be a 'socialist' and a 'left' party – has evolved. (The Officials having long-since evolved into the Workers' Party, which is unquestionably a Marxist-Leninist party of the communist variety). Is SF a 'socialist' or a 'left' party? Just how great has been the party's transformation? And has it been in a leftwards direction?

### **The Burden of History**

Twentieth century Irish history has bequeathed to militant Irish republicanism (or militaristic nationalism, which is much the same thing) a number of characteristics that have bedevilled attempts at a thorough transformation of the movement. Defeated in the Irish civil war of 1921-3, hard-line republicans had to watch on helplessly as the partition of Ireland into two states became a reality they could do nothing about. The majority of their more moderate ex-comrades left SF to form what would become the Fine Gael party in 1921. And in 1926, the majority of even the defeated hard-liners broke with SF and formed Fianna Fáil, effectively entering constitutional politics and leaving the most intransigent militarists and irredentists of the IRA and SF isolated on the side-lines of Irish life, with little support in either Irish state.

The IRA response was to free itself of the last vestiges of political control by the remaining Sinn Féin leaders and to proclaim itself as the legitimate Government of the country, justifying this decision by claiming that the IRA alone could faithfully represent the `true` intent of the last Dáil (parliament) to be elected before the partition of Ireland. From this decision, several consequences flow, all of enormous importance for the subsequent history and culture of the movement right up to the present day.

First, the cult of militarism received an enormous boost when the IRA Army Council effectively decreed itself the sole legitimate source of executive, legislative and judicial authority in Ireland. The IRA thus signalled its disgust and final exasperation with `perfidious politicians` who could no longer be entrusted with the destiny of the national revolution; henceforth, an almost Pavlovian dog-style reaction against `politicians` and an insistence that only the `army` could keep the true flame of pure national consciousness alive were commonplace. After 1970, the Provisionals would inherit this rejection of politics and glorification of militarism. Has SF even today thoroughly demilitarised both its way of thinking and its organisational model? This is a legitimate and necessary question to pose if we are to evaluate its claim to be a left party.

Second, it logically followed that election results in the partitioned states of Ireland could have no bearing on the IRA`s self-proclaimed legitimacy. The Irish people might be `fooled` into voting for parties which had `betrayed` the national cause. But the Irish people had no right to do wrong. The IRA henceforth required no further mandate other than that which it claimed to derive from history and tradition. Its legitimacy depended not on the consent of the living generations, but on the imprimatur of the dead. The anti-democratic nature of such solipsism should be obvious. Again, the Provisionals inherited this tradition in full. The signing of the Good Friday Peace Agreement by SF in 1998 might seem to mark an end to this thinking; but, again, it is questionable if the break is as clear-cut or convincing as this might imply.

Third, a logical extension of this form of reasoning was that the republican movement had no need to work to convince the Protestant and Unionist majority of Northern Ireland of the desirability of an independent Irish republic. All Irish nationalists and republicans subscribed to the simplifying myth of a `naturally` homogeneous Irish nation, differentiated only by external interference and British imperialism. However, constitutional nationalists - i.e. those who came to terms with the reality of partition and the existence of Northern Ireland - would to varying degrees accept the need to persuade the Unionist population of the attractiveness of territorial unity, or to cajole the British government into doing the persuading for them. Admittedly, it was not until the 1980s<sup>i</sup> that acceptance of the right of the Northern Ireland majority to withhold its consent from unity was made explicit in the political programmes of constitutional nationalism; but it was implicitly accepted as a fact of life by successive Dublin governments from the 1920s. The IRA and Sinn Féin, on the other hand, saw their role as one of ushering into de facto existence, through force of arms, a unitary Republic which already enjoyed a de jure existence. Northern Irish Unionists were constructed as a minority section of the Irish nation, temporarily lulled into a false consciousness by the machinations of British imperialism. Their consent to unification was unnecessary because no right to withhold that consent existed. Their existence as a people denied, and their culture and history trivialised, they were reduced to the status of mere dupes in the game-play of an essentially malevolent imperial power which would only yield to force of arms. A 1987 Sinn Féin document puts the position succinctly. Declaring that `those presently constituted as "loyalists"' are `a national minority in Ireland', the document offers them `a settlement based on their throwing in their lot with the rest of the Irish people ... through the process of decolonisation' starting with a British withdrawal.<sup>ii</sup> In other words, Britain must first be `forced' to withdraw from Northern Ireland, and then Ulster Protestants will discard their sense of British identity as if awakening from a long sleep. I will argue that this implicitly

sectarian and tribalist (or communalist) aspect of militant republicanism has changed little, if at all; and that it fatally undermines the credibility of claims to the status of a left party of an organisation that might better be described as mired in the mentality of Catholic Phalangism.

Fourth, with a `de jure` (i.e. imaginary) Republic - complete with its army, outline constitution, symbols and rituals, etc. - now existing inside the minds of militant republicans and commanding a legitimacy and a loyalty denied to the southern and northern Irish states, the flight from reality into a twilight world of dogma, fed by mythology, was complete. The ability to transcend solipsism and to operate as an effective political party in the `de facto` world of existing reality was fatally compromised.

Finally, a huge psychological as well as political gap was created between the movement and parliamentary politics; although, especially in the south, some grass roots Fianna Fáil activists might continue to seek refuge in the macho bravado of bar room mingling, and on occasion more serious displays of `ambiguity` (such as gun-running and providing `safe houses` for IRA terrorists), the republican movement had effectively detached itself from parliamentary life. Crucially, this was achieved, not through an assault upon `bourgeois constitutionalism` (in the name of a class revolt), but through the construction of an alternative bourgeois constitutionalist mythology. In other words, it was not constitutionalism *per se* which was overtly challenged, but the right of the Dáil majority which accepted the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 to define its terms, and the right of the peoples of Ireland to assent to a constitutional settlement of which the IRA disapproved. For decades, the republican movement would inhabit a strange off-centre bourgeois universe where eccentric school teachers and would-be lawyers (refusing to take the oath of allegiance to either existing state) would debate the finer points of `rights of inheritance`.

### **From Officials to the Workers' Party: Lessons of an Incomplete Transformation**

`The accumulated military experience of activists in an armed movement makes adaptation to subsequent democratic politics extremely difficult.' Roy Johnston.<sup>iii</sup>

Following the defeat of the IRA campaign of 1956-62, a section of the IRA and SF leadership sought to debate the reasons for the movement's obvious political irrelevance and inability to wage an effective campaign against the partition of Ireland. Under the leadership of Cathal Goulding (Chief-of-Staff of the IRA from 1962) and Tomás MacGiolla (President of SF from 1962 also), they argued for the adoption of radical social and economic policies, the involvement of the movement in social and economic agitation, the prioritisation of politics over militarism and the development of a class analysis of Irish society. These Official leaders would even invite intellectuals from the Communist Party, such as Roy Johnston, to help the republican movement formulate new politics. Initially, the idea of a National Liberation Front, involving the IRA, SF, the Communist Party and other `progressive` groups, would give way to a more ambitious goal: the desire to transform the republican movement itself into a mass, workers' party – a new communist party.

In short, the `Officials' embraced a radically new approach, encapsulated in the so-called `stages theory' of struggle. This referred to the doctrine that the goal of the organisation's political strategy ought to be to unite working class Protestant and Catholic communities in a civil rights campaign to establish democratic government in Northern Ireland. Whilst this non-sectarian campaign was being waged in the north, the republican movement would be leading southern workers in an anti-imperialist alliance, paving the way for united working class action to overthrow bourgeois rule in both parts of Ireland. This radical reformulation of the movement's politics, embracing politics over militarism, and gradual reform over an immediate British

withdrawal, would eventually - though not without much trauma - subvert the very existence of the physical force tradition amongst the 'Officials', undermining their republican credentials altogether as they were transformed into a post-republican Marxist political party.<sup>iv</sup> This process reached its apogee in 1977 when Official Sinn Féin became renamed Sinn Féin the Workers' Party, and again in 1982 when it dropped the Sinn Féin label altogether and became, simply, the Workers' Party. (Thereafter, the Provisionals would have sole claim to the Sinn Féin name, at least until they, too, split in 1986).

This not the place to enter into a full discussion of the evolution of the Workers' Party. The subject has been covered extensively elsewhere.<sup>v</sup> For now it is sufficient to note that the Workers' Party gained a reputation for strong party discipline and intense grass-roots activism in the Republic during the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s which allowed it to achieve a measure of electoral success, culminating in the election of seven TDs (parliamentary deputies) and an MEP in 1989. (In Northern Ireland, where its calls for non-sectarian working-class unity fell on deaf ears, it rapidly declined). This reputation for discipline and hard work went hand-in-hand with a well-deserved reputation for policy and ideological innovation – indeed, the WP effectively jettisoned all of the central planks of traditional Irish republican ideology and embraced Marxism as its guiding creed. There was one exception to this rule – and it was to prove fatal. In one respect, the WP's transformation was incomplete. Although the party had rejected armed struggle in favour of class politics, and the building of a mass, working-class party in place of paramilitary structures, the Official IRA was not disbanded.

Tragically, this aspect of Irish republicanism's anti-democratic heritage was not confronted openly and honestly, but swept under the carpet and ignored. One might even say that it was re-legitimised through the language of Leninist-Stalinist democratic centralism. The Official IRA – or 'Group B' as it would refer to itself – remained in existence as a shadowy, self-perpetuating elite within the party. It might now cite the Leninist imperative to have a 'revolutionary' vanguard that would prevent the mass party from falling prey to 'opportunism' to justify its continuing existence to itself (its existence was denied to the public at large and indeed to the bulk of the party membership), but essentially the same old secretive, hierarchical, mistrustful style of politics remained in place. The collapse of the USSR, and the end of Soviet financial aid to the Workers' Party, would push the Official IRA's illicit fund-raising activities more and more into the open. Such activities – indeed, the continued existence of the Official IRA at all, long after its own political analysis had logically undermined its reason for existing – also fatally compromised the Workers' Party's attempts to win support amongst Northern Irish Protestant workers, even though such attempts were repeated and earnest.

The contradictions involved in this final and fatal failure to complete the process of transformation led to a devastating split in the WP in 1992. Six of its seven TDs and its MEP and a majority of the membership left to form a new, post-communist party, Democratic Left, which merged with the Labour Party in 1999. What remained of the WP was a small rump which has been unable to exert any influence on Irish politics ever since. The lesson of the WP's incomplete transformation is that the most successful and impressive attempt ever in Irish history to build an electorally credible, activist, class-based, radical left party, which eschewed nationalism, was undermined and fatally compromised by an inability to effect a true rupture with the IRA's secretive, elitist and undemocratic *modus operandi*. Would the Provisionals do any better? Would they learn from the WP's experience?

### **The Provisionals: Adaptation without Transformation**

*From Éire Nua to the Hunger Strikes: the bankruptcy of right-wing militarism?*

From their creation in 1969/70, the Provisionals sought to restate a traditionalist position of intransigent nationalism, militarism, and disdain for political compromise by mounting a paramilitary defence of the Catholic ghettos in Northern Ireland and working to overthrow the northern state. In December 1969, the IRA army convention finally tackled the question of parliamentary abstentionism (behind which loomed the bigger issue of participation in politics, including electoralism); it voted to approve the Official leadership's proposal to overturn the ban on participation in the London, Belfast and Dublin parliaments. At the Sinn Féin annual conference in January 1970, the debate over abstentionism was prolonged and bitter, with both sides using it as a proxy for the larger dispute that was now tearing the movement apart ...<sup>vi</sup>, whether to engage in armed struggle aimed at overthrowing the Northern Ireland regime or remain on the reformist path mapped out by the Dublin-based Official leadership.

The substantial minority that defended abstentionism as a cardinal principle (rather than a tactic) of republicanism eventually walked out, to form the Provisionals. By agreeing to abandon abstentionism, the leadership had, in the eyes of the minority, made explicit its decision to turn away from the primacy of physical force. According to a sympathetic commentator, the minority position was that 'the republican movement was being wrenched away from its ideological groundings by a Communist-influenced coterie ... Sinn Féin ought not to be in the business of constructing worthless National Liberation Fronts - it should be performing propaganda work on behalf of an IRA that is fighting to destroy, not reform, the Six County entity.'<sup>vii</sup>

The 1969-70 split highlights the enormous - perhaps insurmountable - difficulties associated with maintaining unity within the republican movement whilst engaging in a process of root and branch reform of its ideological and organisational traditions. It was not simply the *rate* or the *degree* of change that caused problems. The questions that generated the most bitter controversies, then and ever since, (parliamentary abstentionism, the role of the IRA and the primacy of armed struggle, the nature of politics and the embrace of pragmatism, the definition of imperialism, the 'defence' of northern Catholics and the stubborn reality of Ulster's Protestant community) struck at the heart of the fundamentalist beliefs of many republicans. The leadership was seen as dismantling the mythology upon which the movement fed. Moreover, it was replacing the familiar comforts of historical continuity and moral purity with what was for many republicans an altogether more suspicious concept - *political change*.

A good example of this attitude may be seen in the person of Ruairí O'Brádaigh, Gerry Adams' predecessor as president of Provisional Sinn Féin, who argued, 'I was having no part of any constitutionalism and I was not going to see the Republican movement subverted and turned into something *that was contrary to its nature* ... What was it all about since 1922? Why not accept the bloody Treaty in the beginning and be done with it?'<sup>viii</sup>

'By and large, the first Provos were the keepers of the flame, the die-hard traditionalists who were not particularly interested in ideological nuances and who still looked at the second Dáil [of 1921] as the source of all governmental legitimacy on the island.'<sup>ix</sup> However, for some younger members this traditionalist strain was not incompatible with the search for a political line that would be supportive of the armed struggle and traditional republican shibboleths. This search for a politics that could command wider popular support amongst at least some sections of the Irish people, which could then be marshalled in the terrorist struggle against the alleged British occupation of Northern Ireland, became a touchstone for the younger IRA/Sinn Féin leadership (epitomised by current Sinn Féin president, Gerry Adams). All those who joined the Provisionals were united on at least one point: the necessity to wage an armed campaign in Northern Ireland as a prelude to forcing the overthrow of the Stormont<sup>x</sup> parliament, and the removal of the British troops stationed in the province since August 1969.

The first Chief-of-Staff of the Provisional IRA, Seán MacStiofáin, embodied several features of the new organisation. A fundamentalist and puritanical Catholic, scarcely able to hide his disgust at the greater availability of contraception and other fruits of the 'English' sexual revolution<sup>xi</sup>, he was hostile to constitutional politics, and saw the overwhelmingly priority as an armed campaign against British rule in Northern Ireland. He was also widely regarded as bitterly anti-Protestant. He was once (in)famously quoted as allegedly saying, 'What does it matter if Protestants get killed. They're all bigots, aren't they?' Although MacStiofáin claimed to have been misquoted, as Sanders argues<sup>xii</sup>, what was important was not so much if he uttered those words, but the fact that most Protestants believed he did. The IRA's armed campaign without question contributed to sectarian polarisation in Northern Ireland and set back any prospect of united working class action.

Once this campaign was up and running, some of the Provisional leadership (especially O'Brádaigh and Daithi O'Conaill) began to think in terms of a political strategy to accompany the Provisional IRA's attempts to force British withdrawal. However, as Bishop and Mallie have argued<sup>xiii</sup>, the Provos saw political education in similar terms to religious instruction; 'the republicanism of most Provisionals required belief in a particular view of the world, rather than a detailed prescription of how to change it. The political message of the early years was simple and easily remembered. The border was the problem. Who had put the border there? The British ... Clearly the thing to do was to remove the British.'

The document that Provisional Sinn Féin adopted in 1971 was called *Éire Nua* (New Ireland). The content of this programme contained a vague commitment to 'Christian socialism', but this was defined in terms of a traditional, decentralised Gaelic philosophy, *Comhar na gComharsan* (Neighbours' Co-operation), 'founded on the right of worker-ownership [which] is native Irish as well as being co-operative or distributist in character.'<sup>xiv</sup> The declared aim was 'to outline a social and economic system which would strike a balance between Western individualistic capitalism ... and Eastern Soviet state capitalism ...'. As such, its central thrust is instantly recognisable to those who have studied earlier attempts, inspired by Catholic social teaching, at doing just that. Of course, in the Provisionals' case, nothing remotely as coherent as a Christian Democratic project ever emerged; but *Éire Nua* is not unrelated to earlier policy fumbblings of Clann na Poblachta - a radical nationalist party, inspired by social Catholicism, which formed part of the southern Irish Government in 1948-51 before disintegrating in the late 1950s. The other main feature of the programme was a rather esoteric schema for a federal structure of government with each of the four historic provinces of Ireland having its own parliament. In the case of Ulster, of course, the six counties of Northern Ireland would be joined by three (overwhelmingly Catholic) Ulster counties belonging to the existing southern Irish state - thereby 'solving' the inconvenient side-issue of a Protestant and pro-British majority in the existing Northern Ireland state.

In terms of international policy, *Éire Nua* claimed of course that SF and the IRA were an anti-imperialist organisation. However, the innate conservatism of the programme and the anti-communism of the Provisional leadership meant that SF/IRA made little effort at this point to win favour with left-wing or progressive anti-imperialist and national liberation movements throughout the world. Indeed, these, especially if supported by the USSR, were often viewed 'with a good deal of suspicion'.<sup>xv</sup> The leadership confined its efforts to visits to the Basque country and promotion of its notion of a Celtic Federation on the fringes of Europe. (Thus, solidarity with the more extreme fringes of Breton nationalism was regarded as far more important than dialogue with the French left, for example).

According to Coogan<sup>xvi</sup>, 'the debate [regarding the document] was not on the customary lines of [armed] force versus constitutional action (the Provisionals were clearly in favour of force), but of having a political programme to put forward to show that the Provisionals were not merely mindless gunmen.' But, notwithstanding the distraction of the *Éire Nua* programme, that is exactly how the Provisionals continued to behave and to be perceived. This is scarcely surprising, given that the IRA was involved in an all-out murderous campaign of violence in Northern Ireland throughout the 1970s, a campaign that produced no visible political gains but which left hundreds, including many innocent civilians, dead.<sup>xvii</sup>

Despite O'Brádaigh's anxiety that the 'public should not see Sinn Féin [in the south] solely as a support group for the struggle in the north', this was precisely the outcome of the concentration of all the movement's resources on the IRA's campaign. Indeed, the subordination of SF to the IRAS was taken as axiomatic by the O'Brádaigh generation of republicans. Under his leadership, the movement developed little if any political profile; indeed, SF, at this juncture, can scarcely be regarded as a political party at all, as that term is usually understood – more as a support and logistics network for the IRA. The Provisional IRA, moreover, launched a coordinated violent campaign against members and supporters of the Officials in Belfast in October 1975. In the space of two weeks, over 100 armed attacks against the Officials were launched, leaving eleven dead and more than fifty wounded. What is interesting from our point of view is that O'Brádaigh justified the attacks at a press conference in Belfast by accusing the Officials of 'acting like Communists all over the World' by trying to establish a 'totalitarian Marxist social republic'.<sup>xviii</sup> Such rhetoric was designed to go down well in the highly conservative heartlands of Irish America from where much of the Provisionals' funding came.

By the end of the 1970s it was becoming obvious to many of the younger members of the Provisionals, especially in Northern Ireland, that the military strategy and lack of political vision of the O'Brádaigh and MacStiofaín leadership was leading them nowhere. They tried to address this difficulty in the writings of Gerry Adams during 1976-77, and in the important speech marking the limitations of Provisional evolution between 1970-77, made by Jimmy Drumm at Bodenstown in June 1977: 'We find that a successful war of liberation cannot be fought exclusively on the back of the oppressed in the Six Counties ... the isolation of socialist republicans [sic] around the armed struggle is dangerous and has produced the reformist notion that "Ulster" is the issue, which can somehow be resolved without the mobilisation of the working class in the 26 counties.'<sup>xix</sup> Many commentators have noted that this language, ironically, is eerily reminiscent of the position adopted during the 1960s by those who went on to become the Officials. As the latter moved away from republicanism altogether, part of their analyses were 'taken up by Adams and his supporters.'<sup>xx</sup>

By the end of the 1970s, the Provisionals had little to show for their first decade of armed struggle. The failure to build SF into a campaigning political party and a general sense of political isolation, at home and abroad, were felt to contribute to the increasing stagnation of that armed campaign. Under the leadership of Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness a new breed of Provisional increasingly began to emerge – not yet questioning terrorism, but accepting the need for a strong political movement in support of terrorism, and a decisive over-coming of the movement's isolation. This so-called 'social republicanism' would superficially seem to herald a shift to the Left. But how real was this shift?

*From the rise of Adams to the Peace Process: a shift to the Left?*

'Armed struggle is a necessary form of resistance. Armed struggle becomes unnecessary only when the British presence has been removed ... if at any time Sinn Féin decide to disown the armed struggle they won't have me as a member.' Gerry Adams, November 1986.<sup>xxi</sup>

The Adams generation of leaders received a powerful political boost in 1981 when IRA prisoners in the Maze prison near Belfast began a hunger strike in support of their demand for political status. The subsequent refusal of the British Government to budge on this issue, and the deaths of ten hunger strikers, created an explosive climate within the Catholic community which the Provisionals moved to exploit politically. The election of the hunger striker, Bobby Sands, to the Westminster parliament (Sinn Féin held his seat, following his death on hunger strike) marked a new electoral presence by the Provisionals. In the south, too, the movement secured the election to the Irish parliament of two hunger-strikers in the general election of June 1981, although both seats were subsequently lost in February 1982. In Northern Ireland, however, the organisation's electoral presence was to prove more permanent.

During the hunger strikes and their immediate aftermath, both the IRA and Sinn Féin enjoyed by all accounts a substantial influx of new blood in the north. Already, at the 1981 Sinn Féin conference, Danny Morrison had asked if any delegate would seriously object if the republicans came to power with a ballot paper in one hand and an Armalite rifle in the other. This clearly suggested a *tactical* entry into 'normal' politics, with the intention merely of harnessing electoral support to the terrorist struggle. In the wake of the hunger strikes, the pressure for organisational and political adaptation increased. First, a real possibility seemed to exist at last for Sinn Féin to broaden its support beyond its heartland ghettos and capture the leadership of the Catholic community in Northern Ireland from the constitutional nationalist party, the SDLP. Second, the effect of the hunger strike campaign was simultaneously to shift priorities back towards Northern Ireland and to encourage the emergence of a new generation of mainly northern leaders (both in the IRA and Sinn Féin). As Gallagher puts it, 'the older and more conservative group, nurtured in the sterile traditions and symbols of southern abstentionism, were edged aside by younger northern members who believed that the IRA's mandate came from "the situation in the north" rather than legalistic arguments about what happened in 1921 or 1938. Northerners increasingly made the running in the party.'<sup>xxiii</sup> Third, the IRA Army Council clearly authorised a greater involvement in electoral politics, seeing this as a way in which support for the armed struggle could be increased. The movement, moreover, was anxious that the political initiative which the hunger strikes had handed to it should not be lost. Pressure for a reconsideration of the policy of abstentionism increased. It was still absolutely clear, however, that electoral mobilisation was seen as a way of furthering popular support in the Catholic ghettos of Northern Ireland, in the south, and abroad, for the IRA's campaign of violence. Any suggestion that the movement might follow the precedent set by the hated Officials and follow electoral participation with an embrace of the non-violent path was vigorously rebutted. The Provisionals might be prepared to 'adapt' in order to harness new energies to the demands of the armed struggle, but they saw no need to question either their end or their means - no need to 'transform' their project.

In October 1982, Sinn Féin ditched the federalist policy enshrined in the *Éire Nua* document, returning to the demand for a unitary Republic. This was seen as a practical recognition on the part of the newly-ascendant northerners in the leadership that 'concessions' designed to win Protestant favour were futile and unnecessary; the movement had effectively set itself on course for a show-down with the Protestant population. In preparation for greater electoral involvement candidates of Sinn Féin were required to declare unambiguously their support for the IRA's armed struggle. In June 1983, in the Westminster general election, Sinn Féin won an impressive 13.4% of the total vote in Northern Ireland (around 40% of the Catholic vote), and Gerry Adams was elected as MP for West Belfast. Adams refused to take his seat at Westminster, in line with the abstentionist policy. However, a clear hint of impending change was the debate which

followed over whether Sinn Féin should take up any seat which it might win in the European Parliament. 1983 saw the resignation from the leadership of two key traditionalists - Daithi O'Conaill and Ruairí O'Brádaigh - in protest against policy changes which they perceived as violating key principles. Adams was then elected Sinn Féin president in succession to O'Brádaigh.

Throughout the 1980s, the Provisionals maintained an electoral presence in Northern Ireland, although a political breakthrough in the south eluded the organisation, seen as too closely tied to the IRA and, in any case, as committed to abstention from the Irish Dáil. Concern about this failure to capitalise upon the alienation of working-class and unemployed youth in the urban areas of the south from politics culminated in a major policy change in 1986 when the IRA army convention authorised the abandonment of abstentionism from the southern parliament (but not from the Westminster parliament, where an oath of allegiance to the British crown posed an insurmountable obstacle). It was not until June 1997, however, that Sinn Féin would win its first seat in the Dáil. Sinn Féin councillors, north and south, had already been permitted to take their local authority seats. When the 1986 Sinn Féin conference faithfully ratified the IRA decision, a small minority of traditionalists, led by O'Brádaigh, O'Conaill and MacStiofaín walked out and created a new organisation, Republican Sinn Féin. However, this group has remained wholly marginal to subsequent developments, despite positioning itself as the political wing of hard-line IRA splinters during the 1990s and 2000s.

Sinn Féin polled badly in the 1987 general election in the south - a mere 1.9% - and failed again to make any headway in either the 1989 or 1992 elections. Adams and the new leadership might denounce those who associated the adaptation to electoral politics in the north with a repetition of the `mistakes` of the Officials, and insist that, this time, there would be no watering down of militant nationalism or of support for the armed struggle; but the reality was that the Provisionals found themselves increasingly imprisoned by their own contradictions.

First, although the party had acquired a solid tier of local councillors, especially in Northern Ireland, electoral politics remain firmly tied to the logic of the IRA's armed struggle. An implicit, if not yet explicit, potential contradiction existed between the sort of community-based local politics - complete with campaigning against unemployment, campaigning for urban regeneration, and operating citizens' advice bureaux - which Sinn Féin was increasingly involved in by the 1990s, and an IRA campaign which involved bombing so-called `economic targets` and committing terrorist atrocities which offended many ordinary Catholics. Whilst many, perhaps all, of its candidates and councillors continued to faithfully express support for IRA violence, it might also be hypothesised that some came to perceive the contradiction between continuing electoral success and continuing violence, especially as the lives of Sinn Féin candidates and councillors were placed firmly `on the line` by loyalist death squads. Were the party to win, and actually take up, any seat(s) in the southern Dáil, the pressure of electoralism would increase. Increasingly, Adams in particular, was forced to walk a tight rope, trying to protect the party's electoral flank by selectively criticising IRA `mistakes` and warning the IRA to be `cautious`, and at the same time stressing overall loyalty to the IRA.

Second, by the early 1990s, the IRA military campaign in Northern Ireland (and on mainland Britain also) was clearly not succeeding, twenty-five years on. The Provisionals were forced to concede that they could not defeat the British militarily, taking comfort in the fact that Britain probably could not defeat them militarily either. In short, stalemate had ensued, in a strictly military sense. Yet, the IRA had little incentive to call off its campaign. To do so, without substantial gains, would mean negating the sacrifices of the past twenty-five years, and admitting that the movement had been following a false path. To many - probably, at this stage,

the majority - of republicans, the mere integration of Sinn Féin into the political mainstream, with a seat at the negotiating table with the British Government, would certainly not be enough. Why should the movement settle for transformation into just another political party? That would be tantamount to admitting that the 1969-70 split was a mistake. Elements within the Sinn Féin leadership were anxious to terminate an armed campaign which they knew they could not win, and which a 1992 policy document described as 'an option of last resort when all other avenues to pursue freedom have been attempted and suppressed'<sup>xxiii</sup>; but they were unsure how to do so. The leadership concluded that nothing short of a British declaration to leave Northern Ireland - in effect, to force Northern Ireland out of the United Kingdom - would suffice to justify calling off the IRA campaign permanently in the eyes of many republicans, and that a new pan-nationalist and internationalist political strategy was needed to bring this about.

Finally, and importantly from the point of view of our discussion of SF, socialism and the European Left is concerned, the 1980s and early 1990s under the Adams leadership saw a major attempt to project a new image for the movement abroad. The previous emphasis on 'Celtic solidarity' gave way to a drive to project SF/IRA as an anti-imperialist liberation movement. During these years, the movement devoted resources to the development of an international department and developed links with the PLO, the ANC in South Africa, and a host of other progressive (and perhaps not-so-progressive, if we include Colonel Khadafy's regime in Libya and even the North Korean regime) movements and governments. These efforts were greatly enhanced by the emotional prestige generated by the IRA prisoners' hunger strikes in the early 1980s, which allowed the movement to portray itself internationally as well as domestically, as the victim of British imperialism, standing up to the hard-line intransigence of the Thatcher regime. Those who wished, for their own reasons, to swallow this line, turned with renewed interest to the Provisionals. The USSR, for example, stung by Western criticism of its human rights record and its invasion of Afghanistan and imposition of martial law in Poland, gave less favourable coverage to the Workers' Party in the 1980s and more to the Provisionals. The SF/IRA hunger strikers were hailed in the Soviet Press as 'Ulster Patriots' resisting a brutal British government.<sup>xxiv</sup> It is a moot point as to whether this signal from Moscow facilitated the 'love-in' between certain Western European communist parties and SF that began at around this time. The French Communist Party (PCF) may have named streets in municipalities under its control after IRA hunger striker Bobby Sands in the 1980s, and continued to tell itself that SF is an anti-imperialist party ever since. But this was a largely one-sided illusion. Such acts of solidarity did not change the average SF/IRA member's view of communism any more than the renaming of streets in honour of Sands in the Islamic Republic of Iran would win them to the cause of militant Islam. The party welcomed its new allies in the cause of 'anti-imperialism' wherever it found them and its embrace was both pragmatic and promiscuous. Its motivation was probably multi-faceted: to overcome international isolation and gain the sort of prestige that the PLO or ANC attracted; to strengthen its bargaining power in dealings with the British government; to open new channels of weapon procurement for the IRA<sup>xxv</sup>; and, to be sure, to give vent to the self-perceptions of some of its leaders and activists that they were Ireland's answer to the Algerian or Nicaraguan freedom fighters.

Martyn Frampton, in his survey of SF foreign policy during this period<sup>xxvi</sup>, remarks that the contact with several Marxist-inspired liberation movements and governments during this period involved ties that the anti-communism of Sinn Féin during the 1970s would never have permitted. But in a telling passage he cautions us against drawing the false conclusion that this represented a fundamental shift to the left, and argues that it was a move born out of pragmatism, not ideological conviction. He quotes Gerry Adams himself as disavowing any 'contamination' with Marxism. Adams stated: 'there is no Marxist influence within Sinn Féin. I know of no one in Sinn Féin who is a Marxist or who would be influenced by Marxism'. In just

a few years time, the Adams leadership of SF concluded that the key to its success lay in the United States. Enticing the US Government to play a major role in the Northern Irish peace process now became the party's primary goal.

*From the Peace Process to today: the Triumph of Pragmatism?*

By 1992-3, there were already signs of open discussion within the SF/IRA ranks about the movement's inability to carry the 'armed struggle', or terrorist campaign, to a victorious conclusion. In the party newspaper, *An Phoblacht-Republican News*, for example, on 8 April 1993, Dublin party member Owen Bennett wrote:

Armed struggle is not of course wrong in principle – it can play a part in overall strategy. But at the moment it seems to be the physical expression of a lack of strategy and its chief characteristic is its aimlessness ... the armed struggle is deeply unpopular with the bulk of the Irish people who still cherish the ideal of Irish unity. And there have been those all along who have argued about the potential the armed struggle has to damage that cause and who have urged caution. If the Republican Movement had listened to their friends, they would not now be in the grips of their enemies.

Increasingly, such views would win out over those of members such as Seán MacBrádaigh who argued, in the same newspaper on 27 May 1993, that '...the tactic of armed struggle ... is clearly succeeding. The "long, hard war" is still the correct analysis'.

The SF leadership spent the next few years preparing the way for an IRA ceasefire and the launch of what became known euphemistically as SF's 'peace strategy'. The cornerstone of that strategy would be the tactical downplaying of terrorist activities (although, for some time, the movement sporadically reverted to them in order to gain political advantage) and of radical socio-economic policies in favour of the pursuit of a broad-based pan-nationalist alliance involving SF and the petty bourgeois Catholic nationalist SDLP party in Northern Ireland as well as the Fianna Fáil party in the Republic. SF sought to use this informal alliance to persuade the UK government to act as a 'persuader' of the NI Unionist community. The idea, in other words, was that the UK government should declare a date for British withdrawal from NI and cajole the Protestant Unionist majority there into accepting this. This failed to materialise, although the so-called Downing Street declaration of 1993, which accepted that the UK would not stand in the way of a United Ireland if the people of Northern Ireland vote for it, was deemed sufficient to lead to an IRA ceasefire in 1994. SF would soon attempt to involve the US government in what became known as the NI peace process, with the hope of persuading Washington to put pressure on the British government to persuade the Ulster Unionists. An extension of this logic would later seem them place their hopes in the EU as a possible 'persuader' for Irish unity. Although this strategy has failed to date, an aspect of it is important from the point of view of this study: the fact that SF's political strategy now rested upon securing the involvement, on the side of Irish nationalism, of the US administration. Even after the Clinton Democratic administration (traditionally, the Democrats are supported by most Irish-Americans) gave way to the much less palatable administration of George W. Bush, SF found itself currying favour in Washington as the key to moving the NI situation in its favour. In March 2003, Gerry Adams led a party delegation

to the White House to celebrate St Patrick's Day with President George W. Bush, even though the event had been moved forward from 17 March (St. Patrick's Day itself) to 13 March to accommodate the timetable for the US invasion of Iraq - a war which SF condemned.<sup>xxvii</sup> Henceforth, the anti-imperialist message would have to be balanced with pragmatic support for US leadership. It is difficult to imagine any radical left European left party finding its strategy dependent on US foreign policy in this way.

This is not the place to recount the story of SF's involvement in the Northern Ireland peace process.<sup>xxviii</sup> The party's evolution over the next twenty years would, as always, be full of ambiguities and contradictions – but, after tortuous trials, would eventually lead it to sign the Good Friday Peace Agreement in 1998; to accept, after the passage of more years, the decommissioning of IRA arms and the legitimacy of a reformed Police Service of Northern Ireland; to declare a definitive end to IRA violence in 2007 – a move that was perhaps hastened by public revulsion of the involvement of drunken IRA members in the death, after a pub brawl, of an unarmed Catholic civilian, Robert McCartney, in 2005; then finally, to enter government in coalition with its hated enemies, the Democratic Unionist and Ulster Unionist parties in 2007. Rather than engage in a chronology of these events, I would like to single out for discussion some aspects of the pragmatism of SF's peace strategy over the past 20 years that have profound implications for any examination of its credentials as a socialist, or indeed, a democratic party. There has been considerable debate in Ireland in recent years over whether certain aspects of the compromises, twists and turns of SF policy – such as participation in the political and governmental institutions of a Northern Ireland that is still part of the United Kingdom, recognition of the legitimacy of the police and judicial forces, and *apparent* acceptance of the principle that there cannot be a united Ireland until the majority of the population of Northern Ireland consent to it – imply an abandonment of the basic tenets of Irish republicanism. The question has been raised, and not only by republican dissidents, as to whether SF is still a republican party, or has in effect become another constitutional nationalist party. What concerns us here is not the (alleged) abandonment of republicanism, but whether SF can be considered either a fully democratic or a socialist party.

A first point to note concerns the implications of the much-commented upon low levels of ideological awareness and political sophistication that characterised many of those who joined the Provisionals during the 1970s. This is, of course, the generation from which the leadership of the SF party from the 1990s to the present day would emerge. Alonso<sup>xxix</sup>, whose book is based on extensive interviews with many IRA ex-prisoners and other members of this cohort, reminds us that 70% of those convicted of IRA offences in the early 1970s were under the age of 21; they were overwhelmingly, young, macho, uneducated, insecure and prone to the appeal of simplistic nationalist myths. Their motivation for joining the IRA/SF tended to be a combination of family precedent, a desire to defend their Catholic communities against perceived Protestant attack, and the appeal of romantic nationalism. Once in prison, their political education tended to consist of reading a few pamphlets and books on Irish history written from a republican perspective. To this reading, some 'anti-imperialist' tracts, such as Franz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* would later be added, in the late 1970s and 1980s. This was not a highly politicised generation; it lacked the

indoctrination in dialectical materialism and Marxist historiography that was typical of Official IRA prisoners, who would later play a role in the evolution of the Workers' Party. If there were Provisionals who approached politics in similar terms to Italy's Red Brigades, dreaming of a paramilitary-led Marxist revolution, they were a tiny minority. The majority were motivated by authoritarian romantic nationalism. The hierarchical nature of the IRA's paramilitary structures, involving obedience to senior officers, is also important to bear in mind. In the Provisional tradition, much more so than the Officials, the political was always subservient to the military. SF was always subservient to the IRA. The IRA's dominance over its so-called political wing was never seriously questioned. This authoritarian political culture was therefore a part of SF's legacy, as much as the IRA's, from the beginning. These factors, along with a great deal of skilful leadership and ruthless tactical manoeuvring<sup>xxx</sup>, explain how the Adams/ McGuinness leadership was able to effect such radical changes in IRA/SF strategy during the past twenty years without suffering more damaging splits in the ranks than have actually occurred; and why such splits have tended to come from hard-line militarists rather than any far left perspective.

The authoritarian nature of SF is worth comment. As Alonso points out, the party leadership has constantly blocked off political alternatives, branding those opposed to the leadership's strategy as 'anti-republican' and 'enemies of the peace process'. Anyone who has dared to question the leadership line has risked being isolated within the close-knit republican neighbourhoods of Belfast and elsewhere, ostracised and even subjected to pickets of their homes.<sup>xxxii</sup> Internal repression has on occasion been used: the IRA, for example, threatened to shoot former member and hunger striker John Nixon because he was going to stand as an independent candidate in elections against Sinn Féin.<sup>xxxiii</sup> A long line of SF members who have argued for a slightly more radical or anti-neo-liberal stance – for example, the Donegal county councillor Thomas Pringle (now an independent parliamentary deputy) or the Member of the Legislative Assembly of Northern Ireland, John Kelly<sup>xxxiiii</sup>, have been forced to leave the party. The leadership cult has helped maintain organisational unity and discipline, but at the price of the political underdevelopment of SF as a party. Another of those forced out, County Down councillor, Martin Cunningham, declared that SF had come to represent 'dictatorship, just dictatorship ... anybody who disagrees with the party is sent on their way – quite a few republicans have gone and what have they been replaced with? It is not a democratic party.'<sup>xxxiv</sup> Even Eoin Ó Broin<sup>xxxv</sup>, who has represented SF on both Belfast and Dublin city councils and acted as head of SF's European affairs department, has admitted that the party inherited an organisational model that is 'highly centralised in its distribution of power and vertical in its structure of command.' It places excessive emphasis on discipline and loyalty rather than debate and internal democracy. However, Ó Broin disingenuously claims that these qualities are shared with other left parties. That is not true at all of Green left, 'new left', and democratic socialist parties, nor parties such as the Italian *Rifondazione Comunista* that are close to the social movements. It is only true of those hard-line communist parties from which SF is most ideologically distant. (And, of course, of far right parties).

Crucially, Ó Broin fails to make any mention of IRA control of the party. Yet given everything we know about republican history in Ireland, this is a vitally important history. For what is at work, in the case of SF, is not just a republican version of `democratic centralism`. But rather a peculiar organisational model in which the paramilitary wing dominates the political movement, either openly, as in the past, with the IRA literally issuing instructions to SF and the latter acting as a support act to the former; or secretly, as happened with the Officials, despite their Marxism. There is little evidence that the Provisionals have learned the lessons of the Officials' failure to complete their transformation, and considerable circumstantial evidence that they (the Provisionals) are still mired in the militarist mindset. For example, the IRA, critically, has never gone away. Its 2007 declaration of a permanent ceasefire made no mention of disbandment, nor has there ever been any. Yet why, we might ask, if SF has embraced the path of democratic politics unequivocally, is the IRA still needed?

One of the few Ulster Protestants to become an elected representative for SF – Dr Billy Leonard, who was elected for the party to the NI Legislative Assembly – significantly resigned from the party in 2011, arguing that the tentacles of the IRA extended throughout the party, with ex-IRA officers dominating the party structures at every level. He wrote, `While you had so-called democratic structures, there always seemed to be other meetings and the majority of them had people in key positions who were ex-army [IRA]`<sup>xxxvi</sup>. There have also been constant reports of continued IRA involvement in criminal activity. For example, in 2010, the Fine Gael party's Justice Spokesperson in the Irish parliament, Charles Flanagan, raised reports of IRA and SF members' involvement in a money counterfeiting factory that has been uncovered in County Laois and which was said to have involved the forgery of tens of millions of Euros. Of course, such rumours are always vigorously refuted by SF. However, until there is evidence that the IRA has been disbanded, and SF party structures demilitarised, it is likely that SF's claims to be a fully democratic (let alone socialist) party will continue to be distrusted by many in Ireland. Moreover, pleas for greater party democracy that do not tackle the issue of paramilitary control are disingenuous if not downright dishonest.

Another aspect of the party's missing transformation is its failure, or rather refusal, to come to terms at the ideological and moral levels with the legacy of the 30-year long armed struggle or terrorist campaign. Neither SF nor the IRA have ever apologised for the huge sufferings and waste of lives, property and political opportunities that the armed struggle involved. When convenient, SF distances itself from the more unpalatable episodes by maintaining the fiction that SF and the IRA are separate organisations. In reality, most of the time, the party is happy to celebrate and glorify the armed struggle in marches and parades, books and posters, tee-shirts and music. The myths that the IRA is an `undefeated army' and that terrorism was fully justified in the past are constantly repeated. The justification offered by SF officials for the abandonment of armed struggle in favour of the peace process is that it is simply a change in tactics. Ó Broin, for example, repeats constantly the claim that the armed struggle was `merely a question of tactics', and that its abandonment represented no repudiation of principle<sup>xxxvii</sup>. Apart from the fact that this is simply dishonest – the armed struggle was no

mere tactic for the Provisionals, but their guiding principle, their *raison d'être* for many years – it raises some serious questions. If armed struggle was a tactic, is commitment to the peace process also a tactic? If armed struggle was 'justified' in the past, could it also be deemed justified in the future? And if nothing fundamental has changed in the party's republicanism beyond a switch in tactics, what is to say that SF/IRA will not switch back to armed struggle/terrorism in the future if peaceful, democratic politics do not seem to be delivering the movement's goals? Can a party that lives with such ambiguity be considered either democratic or socialist? Moreover, can a stubborn refusal to come to terms, openly and honestly, with the sectarian nature of much of the IRA's armed campaign<sup>xxxviii</sup> and its disastrously divisive impact on working-class communities be deemed compatible with a claim to be 'socialist' or 'left'? No convincing answer to these questions has ever been offered and until this changes the questions must continue to be posed.

As is well known, SF's support bases, north and south of the Irish border, are quite varied. In Northern Ireland, its support has little if anything to do with 'socialism'. It competes with the moderate nationalist SDLP party as the voice of the Catholic nationalist community. Its support base is defined, if not explicitly in religious terms, then certainly in cultural nationalist (Gaelic Irish) terms. In the south, its support base is much narrower and combines rural pockets of extreme nationalism and a substantial urban, working-class protest vote, above all in Dublin. It is perhaps in Dublin, where SF has appealed to those who have lost most from economic change, that SF most resembles a radical left party. However, O'Malley<sup>xxxix</sup> points out that not only does SF's support base resemble those of many far-right parties in other European countries – young, male, under-educated, long-term unemployed, etc. – but that its supporters are more inclined than other voters to voice anti-immigrant and intolerant views characteristic of far-right parties. It would be far too simplistic, however, to see SF as a far-right party. Its leadership has eschewed anti-immigrant sentiment and has indeed spoken up in defence of immigrants' rights. Some have seen this as evidence of a convergence with the policy positions of the European left. Well, this is true up to a point. However, this, in turn, ignores that fact that extreme Irish nationalism has never been anti-immigrant (immigration being a very recent phenomenon in Ireland, in any case); it has been anti-English. Anglophobia remains a potent aspect of SF's nationalism and in this respect at least its nationalist populism is still xenophobic.

Having commented on some organisational and ideological factors that throw doubt upon SF's commitment to the left, its policy U-turns over the past twenty years are also significant. Having despaired of the ability of the IRA through armed struggle to force a British withdrawal from Northern Ireland, followed by Irish unification, the republican leadership has placed all of its faith in SF's much-vaunted 'peace strategy'. This appears to hinge on achieving unity by stealth through rapid political progress for SF, north and south of the border. In NI, SF has reaped a huge political dividend for abandoning violence and has now replaced the SDLP as the biggest party of the Catholic, nationalist community. It now polls around 22%/23% of the vote in NI as a whole. Progress in the south has been much slower, peaking at around 10% at the most recent general election there. Since 2007, SF has participated in coalition government in the north with its once-derided Unionist enemies. The

price for such coalition has been the down-playing in practice of rhetorical opposition to neo-liberalism in favour of implementation of privatisations, hospital closures, public-private finance initiatives in the public sector, etc. In short, SF in government in the north has acted like any other centre-right or centre-left party in Europe that has chosen to work with neo-liberalism rather than go against the tide. In the south, SF's goal is clearly to get into government in coalition with other parties as soon as possible. SF seems to think that if it can reach a position where it is in government in both Irish states, and a SF Minister for Agriculture in the north can sit down with a SF Minister for Agriculture in the south to plan for an all-Ireland agricultural policy, for example, that this is the way to achieve Irish unity by stealth. Admittedly, there is debate within SF as to which parties should be its preferred coalition partners in the south. Those figures such as Ó Broin, who sees himself as representative of the 'left' of SF, would prefer a coalition with Labour, the Greens and smaller socialist parties. The party majority probably see a coalition with the centre-right Fianna Fáil party as more realistic. At any rate, the strategy has led to a down-playing of radical policies and left-wing rhetoric in recent years and an emphasis on economic policies that are, at best Keynesian and frequently not as radical as that. Thus, Frampton<sup>xi</sup> talks of how Gerry Adams moved the party towards the centre in the late 1990s, reassuring the business community that SF was 'business-friendly', urging multinationals to play a role in stimulating growth, and telling the Dublin Chamber of Commerce in 2004 that SF had no plans to raise taxes. Naturally, the collapse of the Irish economy since 2008 with the exposure of massive corruption in the banking and finance sectors and the imposition of harsh financial measures by the European Central Bank and others, has afforded greater opportunity for anti-establishment and populist rhetoric, above all insofar as the financial constraints imposed on Irish governments can be seen as a violation of national sovereignty. But the SF leadership continues to restrain any 'left turn' that could jeopardise its role in government in the north or its coalition hopes for the south.

Ó Broin admits that pursuit of coalition with Fianna Fáil led to the abandonment of 'left' policies in 2007 when SF made an economic U-turn on fiscal policy; it supported low taxes, offered no meaningful job creation or public finances policy and abandoned wealth/tax redistributive policies a week before polling day. He argues that such a stand alienated left-wing voters and contributed to a poor electoral result in 2007.<sup>xii</sup> He claims that a post-election internal review left many dissatisfied because ideological and strategic issues were left unaddressed. The Party's relaunch 'in September 2007, under the heading Engaging Modern Ireland, contained a mixture of common sense and political spin, but again avoided engagement with the more substantive issues that lay behind the electoral disappointment'.<sup>xlii</sup>

Tellingly, Ó Broin concedes that the primacy of nationalism in SF's thinking meant that what he calls its 'socialism' always remained 'relegated to a future point in the struggle, would always be underdeveloped, as the more immediate needs of the national struggle took precedence.' It would remain rhetorical and declaratory and involve no serious critique of capitalism in the 1980s. Nor was it developed in the 1990s, as all attention focussed on the so-called peace strategy in NI. SF remained isolated from debates within the European left, and fell back on rhetorical left republicanism, which was superficial and lacked strong roots.

SF even abandoned rhetorical support for statist and planning solutions and adopted a weakly-defined 'community empowerment' ideology.<sup>xliii</sup> There is much to be said for this analysis. Unfortunately, what it omits is that Ó Broin's own prescriptions also remain trapped within a superficial and rhetorical 'left republicanism', as must any leftist critique of SF that fails to tackle those aspects of militaristic, sectarian/communal and nationalist-populist aspects of Irish republican history that set SF apart from most parties of the European left.

### **Sinn Féin and the European Left**

Sinn Féin opposed Ireland's membership of the then EEC in 1973. That said, it played no part in the referendum campaign on membership. In accordance with its policy of non-recognition of the Irish state and abstention from elections, it urged a boycott of the EEC membership referendum. (Sources that claim that SF campaigned against membership are confused. It was *Official SF* – now the Workers' Party – that campaigned for a 'No' vote). SF remained rhetorically committed to withdrawal from the EEC/EU into the 1990s. It boycotted the first European Parliament (EP) election in 1979. It contested its first EP election in 1984 and won its first seats in the EP in 2004, with the election of Bairbre de Brún in Northern Ireland and Mary Lou McDonald in Dublin. Until then, Europe has featured little in the policy considerations of foreign policy pronouncements of SF. As Stephen Hopkins<sup>xliv</sup>, points out, when Frampton published his 2004 study of SF's foreign policy, the EU merited not a single mention. The party fought against ratification of the Nice Treaty in Ireland's referenda of 2002-3, as it did again with the Lisbon Treaty in 2008. With Nice, the party argued that the Treaty violated national sovereignty and reduced Ireland's weight in the world. And it highlighted the violations of Irish sovereignty and neutrality that a common European army and common foreign and defence and security policies threatened. (All of these themes were to be fully compatible with the policy of radical left parties, but in SF's case the primary motivation was nationalist.). With Lisbon, the party returned to these themes but also, in truth, campaigned on themes of defending workers' rights and trade union rights. This may well reflect left-wing influence but, in reality, has to be set alongside what we have already written about the party's move towards the centre in practical terms in Ireland.

By the time SF entered the European Parliament in 2004, it was becoming abundantly clear to the SF leadership that the British government was not going to issue a unilateral declaration to withdraw from NI, or act as a 'persuader' or cajoler of the Protestant/Unionist majority there. Against this dawning realisation, we have to set SF's 'conversion' to the idea that the European Union might be utilised as a force working in favour of a united Ireland. Increasingly, SF came to see the EU – and in particular its own presence inside the EP – as another way of breaking out of its political isolation. Whether through its MEPs campaigning for the right of the Irish language to be fully recognised, or seeking allies in the campaign for a united Ireland, or lobbying for funds that could strengthen the lot of the Catholic nationalist community in Northern Ireland, SF came to see new opportunities. Having campaigned *against* Ireland joining the euro currency, within a few years SF was campaigning *in favour* of the euro being introduced in Northern Ireland – because this would create an all-Ireland common currency zone and drive a wedge between the NI economy and that of the rest of the UK<sup>xlv</sup>. Thus, for pragmatic reasons connected to its nationalist objectives, SF moved in a

relatively short period of time and without much internal debate from all-out rejection of the EU to what Agnes Maillot calls `soft euroscepticism'<sup>xlvi</sup>

*Sinn Féin and the Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL)*

When SF's two newly-elected MEPs entered the European Parliament in 2004, it was by no means a fore-gone conclusion that they would join the Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL). Indeed, given the party's anti-communist origins and its recent involvement with terrorism, its alignment with a group that included communist, new left and green left parties might even be considered an anomaly. In fact, it was a pragmatic decision that largely suited both sides, each for its own reasons.

According to former SF MEP Mary Lou McDonald, before the 2004 elections, senior SF party official Mitchell McLaughlin and some other party members went to Brussels and held a series of meetings with the Socialist, Green and other groups<sup>xlvii</sup>. All options were considered. The non-aligned ranks did not appeal to SF on either practical grounds (in terms of resources) or political grounds (in terms of overcoming the party's isolation); in addition to policy differences with the Socialists, SF might have faced a veto from the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), which was unwilling to have a party with such recent association with terrorism in the Socialist Group's ranks<sup>xlviii</sup>. The Greens were clearly attractive, especially with the presence in the Green/EFA group of Catalan and other nationalist and regionalist forces<sup>xliv</sup>. However, the Irish Green party would have objected<sup>l</sup>. In the end, the decision to join GUE/NGL was facilitated by the fact that Group Chairperson Francis Wurtz, MEP, of the French Communist Party (PCF), visited both Belfast and Dublin for meetings with SF leaders in an effort to recruit them to the GUE/NGL camp<sup>li</sup>. (The PCF was one of those communist parties which had, since Soviet days, held a romantic view of the Provisionals as `fighters against British imperialism' and Wurtz had attended the funeral of IRA hunger striker Bobby Sands back in 1981<sup>lii</sup>).

What clinched the deal for SF was the fact that GUE/NGL was a Confederal Group, in practice being a very loose-knit group of MEPs from differing backgrounds with no attempt to move beyond each party's own sovereignty or to impose discipline on voting patterns. For de Brún, `this was a very strong consideration. We are free to vote in accordance with our own republican policy. None of the other Groups here have the amount of freedom there is within GUE/NGL. This was a very strong point for us'.<sup>liii</sup> For McDonald, also, the confederal nature of the Group was `critical'. `We had to satisfy ourselves that we would never come under any pressure to modify our republican policy, and we never have. The broad left nature and loose structure of the Group convinced us that there would be space for our policies.'<sup>liiv</sup> The decision to join GUE/NGL was therefore a pragmatic one and not, perhaps, primarily ideological in nature. Asked if the party's relationship with GUE/NGL is now a permanent one, or subject to review, McDonald argues that `things can change. I wouldn't be absolutist about it. However, we are very comfortable with it.' The fact that GUE/NGL contained communist parties was considered a negative factor, but not, in the final analysis, a deal breaker. According to McDonald again, `There was a level of caution to be honest. We knew

that [being in a common Group with Communists] would cause alarm with a lot of people who voted for me ... There was resistance internally to some extent. The thing was debated extensively. We are not a communist party, and never will be. However, GUE/NGL is not a communist group.' Indeed, it is inconceivable that SF would ever have considered joining the old Communists and Allies group, were it still in existence, and highly unlikely that they would have been invited to do so (given the then Italian Communist Party's (PCI) strong opposition to terrorism).

Within GUE/NGL, SF has attended meetings of a loose caucus of the NGL side of the Group, extended now to include itself and the Dutch Socialist Party. This arrangement does not imply a policy or ideological convergence with the Nordic 'green left' or 'left libertarian' parties. For example, in debates within the European Parliament over development aid policy, SD has voted with the right-wing parties against abortion rights – no doubt with an eye to its conservative Catholic nationalist support base in Northern Ireland. And on agricultural and fisheries policy, it has tended to vote with Southern European MEPs. However, its self-projection as part of the NGL is a useful way of distinguishing itself from both the hard-line communist parties (KKE and PCP, for example), and the 'federalists' of the European Left Party (EL). The latter is a concept that is anathema to SF.

SF's membership of the GUE/NGL is, then, a pragmatic move and not, to date at any rate, one that seems to have made any real difference to the party in terms of policy, ideology or general European orientation. The party was attracted to GUE/NGL precisely because it offers it a base from which to advocate its Irish nationalism without impinging on its autonomy. National sovereignty, defence of the nation state, Irish unity, Irish neutrality and opposition to any further European integration remain its key hall-marks. Naturally, this agenda endears it to some elements of GUE/NGL more than others. None of it, however, is intrinsically left-wing. For GUE/NGL, acquiring SF as a member party meant acquiring two new MEPs (in 2004) – a crucial consideration given its fragile numerical basis. The very incoherent and heterogeneous nature of the Group – it is widely perceived as a rather ineffective and incoherent assortment of various odds and ends of differing leftist persuasions – help explain why it was able to absorb without difficulty a populist nationalist party given to leftist and anti-imperialist rhetoric. The existing members of GUE/NGL seem to have been unconcerned with SF's recent support for a terrorist campaign, or with the issue of just how left-wing it really is. As regards the former question, according to Sanna Lepola, deputy secretary-general of the GUE/NGL, 'the issue [or terrorism] never arose, to the best of my knowledge. Probably most people, if they thought of it at all, thought that it is in the past now.'<sup>lv</sup> As regards the latter issue, although SF's questionable left-wing credentials do not seem to have affected its membership application in any way, there is at least some evidence that the issue has arisen in some quarters of the GUE/NGL since. According to one senior GUE/NGL official, 'I sometimes think we are too left-wing for them [Sinn Féin]. To my mind, for example, they lack a clear grasp of what equality means. They think exclusively in terms of communitarian equality – between Catholic and Protestant communities in Northern Ireland.'<sup>lvi</sup>

In terms of whether or not there has been policy transfer as a result of SF's membership of the GUE/NGL, it seems likely that there have been some effects. McDonald maintains that GUE/NGL membership helped to bolster support for stronger policies in favour of workers' rights and social protection within the party. And whilst neither policy transfer from the European left, nor critical engagement in the wider debates that have taken place on the radical left in recent years, have gone as far as either Ó Broin (on the SF left) or McDonald (one of its more pro-European leaders) would wish, there is some evidence of change. One way of measuring this is to examine the party's manifesto for the 2009 EP elections.

Sinn Féin's manifesto<sup>lvii</sup> for the 2009 European elections paid markedly more attention to workers' rights, trade union rights, social protection, and environmental issues than its 2004 manifesto had done. Even so, nationalist and populist rhetoric remained uppermost. The manifesto emphasized three themes. First, the party mobilized voters on the basis of cultural nationalism rather than class or socialism, highlighting its presence in the European Parliament in order to 'build support in Europe for Irish reunification' and to make the Irish language an official and working language of the EU. Second, the party called for institutional reform of the EU, although this, too, was couched in terms of 'national interest' as much as democratic terms. Thus, the party described any revised Lisbon Treaty referendum as 'anti-democratic and a bad deal for Ireland', called for a new Treaty 'reflecting the concerns of the Irish people', demanded a strengthening of national parliaments and local councils, and called for people in Northern Ireland to have a vote in any future Irish referenda on EU Treaties. Third, the party supported an agenda of strengthening workers' rights, opposing further privatizations, and EU action to tackle unemployment and end poverty. Again, however, this was given a distinctly nationalist flavour. For example, SF pledged to be 'the strongest advocates of Irish economic sovereignty and all-Ireland tax harmonization' and to fight to ensure that health and education policy 'remain the exclusive responsibility of Member States'. SF thus set itself emphatically against those parties of the radical European left that argue for the development of strong EU health and education policies.

Interestingly, the manifesto contained no mention whatsoever of the party's membership of the GUE/NGL group in the European Parliament – perhaps a tacit acknowledgement that an overt association with communist parties might repel some of the party's electoral base – and no mention of 'socialism'. Indeed, SF was the only Irish political party that belonged to a Group within the EP that failed to mention its existence at all in its manifesto for the elections. SF had hoped to build upon its leading role in the first Lisbon Treaty referendum and upon the strong public backlash against the government parties. In theory, the party should have been pushing at an open door in 2009. Yet, its share of the vote remained as it was in 2004 and its best chance of winning a European Parliament seat, securing the re-election of Mary Lou McDonald in Dublin, fell victim to a resurgent Socialist Party whose class-based appeal to disenchanted Dublin workers was undiluted by nationalist rhetoric. The Socialist Party is a small Trotskyite party whose victorious MEP, Joe Higgins, an unrepentant and unambiguous working-class Marxist, would go on to join the GUE/NGL Group also.

The Socialist Party success in Dublin proves that Sinn Féin does not have a monopoly of the working-class protest vote, nor is SF necessarily the most convincing voice of left-wing criticism of EU neo-liberalism. As Maillot puts it, 'Sinn Féin's left-wing discourse might not be sufficiently convincing for a critical percentage of the electorate who seem to prefer the more obvious and familiar left-wing discourse of a Socialist to that of a candidate whose party is still not, in spite of its best efforts, fully identified with left-wing politics.'<sup>lviii</sup> Or put

another way, substantial numbers of Dublin working-class voters prefer left-wing socialism to left-sounding nationalism.

### **Tentative Conclusions: Sinn Féin, Democracy and Socialism: What remains to be said?**

This paper has been concerned with whether or not Sinn Féin may be considered to be part of the emerging family of radical left parties in Europe. With the possible exception of a few hard-line neo-Stalinist parties, such as the Greek Communist Party (KKE), the overwhelming majority of radical left parties nowadays, whether they belong to the communist, ex-communist, left democratic socialist, green left, or 'new left' traditions, believe profoundly in democracy, including the institutions of representative liberal democracy. They wish to strengthen and deepen democracy – not abolish it. This paper therefore takes it as axiomatic that to be a part of the family of radical left parties, a party must also be fully committed to democracy.

This paper has argued that there are a number of serious and important reasons why SF's status as part of the emerging family of European radical left parties should be questioned, even doubted. Its conclusions can now be summarised.

1. Sinn Féin is primarily a nationalist party, which seeks to mobilise its voters on the basis of a mixture of ethnic and cultural nationalism. In Northern Ireland, its support is exclusively based within the Catholic and nationalist community where SF convincingly projects itself as the most militant defender of that Community's interests. This inevitably brings it into conflict with the Protestant majority in Northern Ireland, whose traditions and beliefs SF has consistently ignored or belittled. This is scarcely the profile of a secular, democratic socialist party. The party leadership does deserve credit for eschewing anti-non-white racism in Ireland and championing the rights of immigrants. However, its nationalism remains infused with an extreme Anglophobia that other Irish political parties, adapting to modernisation, have long since abandoned.
2. SF has undoubtedly changed in recent years, adopting more progressive-sounding and 'pro-worker' social and economic policies. So far, these changes remain within the long-standing Irish tradition of 'social republicanism' or 'left republicanism', In Ireland, 'social republicanism' refers to the periodic adoption by the republican movement of progressive economic and social policies *in order to win broader (above all working-class) support for extreme nationalism*. It does not necessarily equate with socialism, however that is defined.
3. SF's organisational culture remains highly centralised and authoritarian. The same could be said of some radical left parties, of course; particularly those from a communist tradition. Indeed, parties in general, across the political spectrum, have been prone to pressures towards centralisation, professionalism and cult of the leadership in recent years. In SF's case, however, the issue is different and specific. It concerns the paramilitarisation of the party. The party needs to demonstrate that the IRA does not operate as a secret, conspiratorial elite within the party, controlling its development. Party members who were never IRA members need to be able to

participate fully and effectively in debates and policy-making forums on an equal basis with party members who were IRA members (and possibly still are). At stake here are the party's full commitment to democracy and its identity as a left party. Can a party that has not fully broken with the paramilitary mindset be a radical left party in Europe today? Why does the IRA still exist?

4. SF needs to come to terms with its history since 1970. Its continued glorification of the terrorist violence that the republican movement engaged in for nearly three decades, and which left thousands dead and injured; its refusal to admit that it ever was mistaken; and its insistence that the switch from armed struggle to politics was merely a change in tactics, all leave many people in Ireland doubting its democratic and socialist credentials. If armed struggle was a tactic, presumably peaceful, democratic politics is also a tactic. Does this mean it reserves the right to return to violence, if the new tactic fails? Is this compatible with claims to belong to the European left?
5. The primacy given to nationalism in SF's thinking has led to a discernible shift towards the centre ground of politics in recent years. Its ministers in the coalition government of Northern Ireland have offered no defiance of neo-liberalism, but have implemented policies such as privatisations and Public Private Finance Initiatives that the party, rhetorically, claims to abhor. By the admission of one of its own officers, such redistributive and welfarist policies as it advocates in Northern Ireland remain within the 'same economic consensus on generating growth as the other parties'.<sup>lix</sup> In the Republic, its primary goal seems to be entry into coalition government – possibly with the centre-right Fianna Fáil – as soon as feasible, and this has already led to the jettisoning of even Keynesian economic policies in advance of elections. It seems as if the new left-sounding policies may be deemed a 'mere tactic', subject to change in the interests of nationalism.
6. SF's entry into the GUE/NGL Group in the European Parliament and largely guided by pragmatic considerations. By itself, the alignment does not mean that SF is now a fully-fledged European left party. The very heterogeneous and incoherent nature of the Group helps mask the extent to which SF remains an anomaly. As does the fact that it is probably more difficult to define what constitutes a radical left party today than at any time in the post-war era.

Sinn Féin has changed and will continue to change. The direction of that change is often unpredictable, driven as it is by external forces, namely the dynamics of the Northern Ireland peace process. The one truly consistent aspect of the current SF's ideology and identity since its foundation in 1970 is its extreme and uncompromising nationalism. By contrast, its 'socialism' is a fairly recent and possibly tactical 'add-on'. Sinn Féin may yet evolve into a party that students of the radical European left would recognise as 'part of the family'. But it has not done so yet, and faces formidable challenges and obstacles before doing so. For now, my contention is that Sinn Féin is at best a guest of the family, not a fully fledged relative.

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- <sup>i</sup>The 1984 Report of the (nationalist) New Ireland Forum and the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement both enshrined the principle of consent. See Jon Tongue, 'The Political Agenda of Sinn Féin: Change without Change', *Contemporary Political Studies*, Vol. 2, (1997), pp. 750-760.
- <sup>ii</sup>Sinn Féin, *A Scenario for Peace*, (Dublin, 1987).
- <sup>iii</sup> Roy Johnston, *Century of Endeavour: a Biographical and Autobiographical View of the Twentieth Century in Ireland* (Dublin, 2006), p.413.
- <sup>iv</sup>For a full discussion of this process see Richard Dunphy, 'The Contradictory Politics of the Official Republican Movement, 1969-1992', in Richard Deutsch (ed.), *Les Républicanismes Irlandais* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes), 1997; and Richard Dunphy and Stephen Hopkins, 'The Organisational and Political Evolution of the Workers' Party of Ireland', *Journal of Communist Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (September), 1992; pp. 91-118.
- <sup>v</sup> In addition to Dunphy and Hopkins (1992) and Dunphy (1997), see Sean Swan, *Official Irish Republicanism, 1962-72* (Lula, 2006), and Brian Hanley and Scott Millar, *The Lost Revolution: The Story of the Official IRA and the Workers' Party* (Dublin, 2009).
- <sup>vi</sup>Kevin Kelley, *The Longest War: Northern Ireland and the IRA* (Dingle, 1982), p. 126.
- <sup>vii</sup>Kelley, *The Longest War*, pp.126-7.
- <sup>viii</sup>Cited in P. Bishop and E. Mallie, *The Provisional IRA* (London, 1988), p.136. Emphasis added. Of all the eccentric nit-pickers and intransigent fundamentalists that Irish republicanism has produced in the twentieth century, none perhaps was more doggedly solipsistic than Ruairí O'Brádaigh. The full extent of his self-righteousness is conveyed, perhaps unintentionally (given its occasional hagiographic impulses), in Robert W. White's biography, *Ruairí O'Brádaigh: The Life and Politics of an Irish Revolutionary* [sic] (Bloomington, 2006).
- <sup>ix</sup>Kelley, op. cit., p.127.
- <sup>x</sup>Until the imposition of direct rule from Westminster in the early 1970s, Northern Ireland had its own regional parliament and Government within the United Kingdom. The parliament sat at Stormont castle, near Belfast.
- <sup>xi</sup>See, for example, the remarkable interview with MacStiofaín in Rosita Sweetman, *On Our Knees* (London, 1972).
- <sup>xii</sup> Andrew Sanders, 'Problems of Class, Religion and Ethnicity: A study of the relationship between Irish Republicans and the Protestant working class during the Ulster "Troubles", 1969-1994', *Irish Political Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (February, 2009), p.101.
- <sup>xiii</sup>Bishop and Mallie, op. cit., pp.327-330.
- <sup>xiv</sup>Sinn Féin, *Éire Nua* (Dublin, 1971), p.4. The programme was revised and extended in June 1972. Further discussion of this document can be found in: Kelley, op. cit., pp.131-4 and 197-9; Bishop and Mallie, op. cit., pp.328-32; and Henry Patterson, *The Politics of Illusion: Republicanism and Socialism in Modern Ireland* (London, 1989), pp.166-9.
- <sup>xv</sup> Martyn Frampton, 'Squaring the Circle': the Foreign Policy of Sinn Féin, 1983-1989', *Irish Political Studies*, Vol 19, No. 2, (Winter 2004), p.48.
- <sup>xvi</sup>Tim Pat Coogan, *The IRA* (London, 1987), p.468.

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<sup>xvii</sup> According to Rogelio Alonso, *The IRA and Armed Struggle* (London, 2007), p.5, around 50% of all the approximately 3,600 deaths that took place during the most recent Northern Ireland civil disturbances (1969-99) were caused by the Provisional IRA, with the figure rising to 58.8 % if murders by other republican splinter groups are included. Moreover, Alonso reports, the IRA has killed twice as many Catholics as have been killed by the (British) security forces. It is even the case that more IRA members have been killed by the IRA itself than have been killed by the army or police. Alonso concludes that the IRA is not the victim but the main aggressor.

<sup>xviii</sup> Hanley and Millar, op. Cit., p.318.

<sup>xix</sup> Further details of this move towards so-called `active republicanism` may be found in Bishop and Mallie, op. cit., pp.332-5; Kelley, op. cit., pp.262-5; and Patterson, op. cit., pp.161, and 166.

<sup>xx</sup> Patterson, op. cit., p.166.

<sup>xxi</sup> Quoted in *Andersontown News*, 22 November 1986.

<sup>xxii</sup> Michael Gallagher, *Political Parties in the Republic of Ireland* (Manchester, 1985), p.96.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Sinn Féin, *Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland* (Dublin, 1992), pp.10-11.

<sup>xxiv</sup> See Chris Skillen, `Pravda's Provos: Russian and Soviet manipulation of new from Ireland', *Irish Political Studies*, Vol. 8 (1993), p.75 passim.

<sup>xxv</sup> It is well known that the IRA obtained weapons from sources such as the Libyan regime of the Colonel, FARC guerrillas in Colombia, and several members of the then-existing Soviet bloc. Indeed, one former member of the Workers' Party leadership, who requested anonymity, told the present author that the WP intervened repeatedly with Moscow to beg them to end Soviet, Bulgarian and East German supplies of arms to the Provisionals.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Martyn Frampton, `Squaring the Circle": the Foreign Policy of Sinn Féin, 1983-1989', *Irish Political Studies*, Vol 19, No. 2, (Winter 2004), p.55.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Frampton, op. Cit., p.44.

<sup>xxviii</sup> See, for example, Michael Cox, Adrian Guelke, and Fiona Stephen, *A farewell to arms?: Beyond the Good Friday Agreement*, (Manchester, 2006), for a good summary of events.

<sup>xxix</sup> Alonso, 2007. Op. Cit.

<sup>xxx</sup> The moral philosopher, Timothy Shanahan, in the first detailed examination of the morality of the IRA campaign to be published, argues, for example, that the armed struggle, or terrorist campaign, was pursued by the republican leadership long after they were aware that it was achieving nothing and would eventually have to be abandoned. They nevertheless considered it convenient to continue with the violence while they manoeuvred for political advantage – Timothy Shanahan, *The Provisional IRA and the Morality of Terrorism* (Edinburgh, 2009).

<sup>xxxi</sup> Alonso, 2007, p.126.

<sup>xxxii</sup> Alonso, pp. 135-6.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Mentioned in Martyn Frampton, *The Long March: The Political Strategy of Sinn Féin, 1981-2007* (Basingstoke, 2009), p.144.

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<sup>xxxiv</sup> Quoted in Frampton, 2009, op. Cit., p.117.

<sup>xxxv</sup> Eoin Ó Broin, *Sinn Féin and the Politics of Left Republicanism* (London, 2009), p.304 passim.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> *The Belfast Telegraph*, 21 June 2012.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Interview with Eoin Ó Broin, Dublin, 16 June 2010.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> The republican leadership continues to argue that the IRA's campaign was not aimed at the Protestant community in Northern Ireland. But that is not how the overwhelming majority of Protestants, or indeed many neutral observers, see the campaign. The great majority of part-time members of the local security forces who were targeted by the IRA were Protestants, and on occasion the IRA engaged in massacres of Protestant workers. Alonso (2007, p.24) quotes one former Provisional IRA member who told him that 'in fact we engaged in a nakedly sectarian apartheid movement where we only worked on the Catholic population and we never studied what it would take to unite Protestant and Catholic'. He notes that IRA campaign put back the cause of a united Ireland and polarised Protestant and Catholic communities to an ever greater extent.

<sup>xxxix</sup> Eoin O'Malley, 'Why is there no Radical Right Party in Ireland?', *West European Politics*, Vol. 31, No, 5, 2008.

<sup>xl</sup> Frampton, 2009, pp.141-3.

<sup>xli</sup> Eoin Ó Broin, 2009, p.242.

<sup>xlii</sup> Eoin Ó Broin, Op. Cit, p.283.

<sup>xliii</sup> Op. Cit., pp.296-7.

<sup>xliv</sup> Stephen Hopkins, 'Sinn Féin and the radical left in Europe: Natural partners or Awkward Allies?', paper presented at the Political Studies Association annual conference, Edinburgh, March 2010.

<sup>xlv</sup> Interview with Aengus O'Snodaigh, T.D., SF parliamentary spokesperson on EU affairs, Dublin, 15 June 2010.

<sup>xlvi</sup> Agnès Maillot, 'Sinn Féin's approach to the EU: Still more "Critical" than "Engaged"?' , *Irish Political Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 4, December 2009, p.571.

<sup>xlvii</sup> Interview with May Lou McDonald, Dublin, 16 June 2010.

<sup>xlviii</sup> Interview with Socialist MEP Proinsias de Rossa, Brussels, 28 June 2010.

<sup>xlix</sup> McDonald interview.

<sup>l</sup> Interview with Irish Green Party representative, Richard More O'Ferrall, Brussels, 1 July 2010.

<sup>li</sup> Interview with Bairbre de Brún, MEP, Brussels, 30 June 2010.

<sup>lii</sup> McDonald interview.

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<sup>liii</sup> De Brún interview.

<sup>liv</sup> McDonald interview.

<sup>lv</sup> Interview with Sanna Lepola, deputy secretary-general of the Confederal Group of the GUE/NGL, Brussels, 1 July 2010.

<sup>lvi</sup> Interview with senior GUE/NGL official who requested anonymity, Brussels, 2 July 2010.

<sup>lvii</sup> Sinn Féin, *Manifesto for the European Parliament elections 2009* (Dublin, 2009).

<sup>lviii</sup> Maillot, op. Cit., p.572.

<sup>lix</sup> Ó Broin, 2009, p.301.