

Irish Politics

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'The Political Agenda of Sinn Fein: Change without Change?'

Introduction

The development of an initially Irish-led peace process in the 1980s and 1990s has prompted discussion over whether a 'pan-nationalist' front has emerged. This has been said to embrace the Irish Government and Irish America, along with the SDLP and Sinn Fein. This paper concentrates upon the alleged policy shifts within Sinn Fein which gave rise to the belief that the Party was now pursuing an agenda scarcely distinguishable from the SDLP. It examines the extent of change within Sinn Fein's analysis and policy proposals, concentrating particularly upon the approach of the Party to the issue of Unionist consent for constitutional change in respect of the status of Northern Ireland.

Two broad perspectives have emerged in respect of Sinn Fein's agenda in recent years. Ryan suggests that the Party's agenda has switched from 'national liberation' to a desire merely for inclusive dialogue.¹ Such a scaling down of demands amounts to the twilight or death of republicanism. Ryan asserts that Sinn Fein/IRA have 'repudiated their key principles'.² He claims that the downgrading of emphasis upon a united Ireland; the agreement that the consent of Unionists is vital and the calls for parity of esteem between the nationalist and unionist traditions amount to a historic compromise with Britain out of step with the traditional republican approach. This idea that the fundamental principles of republicanism have been compromised is echoed by Breen.³

Alternatively, Unionists have tended to emphasise the continuity within Sinn Fein's approach. Little or nothing has changed. Sinn Fein remains committed to the same analysis and strategy. The basic tenets of republicanism have remained unaltered. For example, the Ulster Unionist Party in its policy outline, *The Democratic Imperative*, argues that 'SF/IRA tried to make us believe that it had changed...it still believes that the end is greater than democratic means'.⁴

This paper argues that both approaches are inadequate. The 'death of republicanism' analysis fuses ends and means. Inclusive dialogue was perceived not as a republican outcome but as a means towards the advancement of, to use republican parlance, national liberation. The 'Sinn Fein have not changed' approach of Unionists fails because it falsely links Sinn Fein's analysis of the conflict with the prescriptions of the Party. The theme of this paper is that whilst part of Sinn Fein's analysis has changed, this is unlikely to alter prescriptions.

¹ M. Ryan, *War and Peace in Ireland. Britain and the IRA in the New World Order*, Pluto, 1994.

² M. Ryan, 'The deconstruction of Ireland', *ECPR News*, 6/3, 1995, p.27.

³ S. Breen, 'Who is the real Michael Collins?', *Fortnight*, 356, December 1996, p.7.

⁴ Ulster Unionist Party, *The Democratic Imperative*, 1996, p.3.

The idea of pan-nationalism

The Oxford English Dictionary describes the term 'pan' as all. The attempted construction of an all-nationalist alliance in recent years provided momentum for the prospect of substantive political change in Northern Ireland. Much of the dynamic of politics arises from the debates within parties rather than between the political groups. This is perhaps more true of Northern Ireland than elsewhere, although the most important dynamic is the 'in-house' debate. Thus debates within nationalism and unionism have provided much of the dynamic within Northern Ireland politics in the last three decades.

Yet this was not always the case. As Quinn puts it:

'For years, anti-partitionists relied on simple ethno-geographical determinism: the people of Ireland were one, the island of Ireland was one, therefore the governance of Ireland should be one'.⁵

The rethink within constitutional nationalism has led to the outright abandonment of the first-mentioned of those ideas. However, parts two and three remain intact if one accepts the New Ireland Forum Report's advocacy of a unitary state as the definitive statement of constitutional nationalism in recent years.

The northern nationalist 'family' of the SDLP and Sinn Fein has always shared a similar historical analysis which has influenced prescription. This analysis is predicated upon the dual belief that the partition of Ireland was unjust and that politics in Ireland should therefore concentrate upon the rectification of this injustice. It is this historical analysis that leads to the two main political certainties which underpin nationalist agendas. First, self-determination for the Irish people is necessary and just. Second, a purely internal settlement is impossible within Northern Ireland.

Any construction of a pan-nationalist agenda did not therefore require a shift in thinking from one of its participants in respect of the above. It was little wonder that the Hume-Adams talks appeared to conclude in broad agreement in 1993. Provided that such dialogue centred upon the core contentions of nationalism, accord was always likely. What Hume-Adams skirted around however, was the agenda by which the two main nationalist contentions might be realised.

The SDLP approach to Irish unity

Constitutional nationalism has always lacked the holistic claims of militant republicanism. Whereas the latter has awarded itself an enduring mandate from the Irish people since 1918, the constitutional nationalism of the SDLP variety has claimed to speak only for that section of the community from whom it has obtained direct electoral support. The Party has acknowledged the presence of an alternative Ulster-Protestant-British tradition on the island, endorsing a two-tradition, equal-legitimacy approach. The SDLP has perceived compromise as a necessary part of nationalism. The primary objective is national reconciliation not liberation.

From the outset, the SDLP has favoured a united Ireland, to be achieved through peaceful means. Its 1972 policy document, *Towards a New Ireland*, desired a declaration of British withdrawal, preceded by the establishment of joint British-Irish

⁵D.Quinn, *Understanding Northern Ireland*, Baseline, 1993, pp.65*66.

sovereignty over Northern Ireland as an interim measure.⁶ In its early years, the Party was nonetheless willing to countenance power-sharing within Northern Ireland, provided this was accompanied by a significant all-Ireland dimension. The presence of a Council of Ireland encouraged the SDLP to participate in the power-sharing executive created for a short time following the Sunningdale Agreement.

Under the increasingly 'green' leadership of Hume, the SDLP has cooled on the idea of power-sharing. Instead the Party has moved towards support for what is termed 'intergovernmental coercive consociationalism'.⁷ It is hoped that a series of Anglo-Irish accords will act as the best means of reconciling the two traditions on the island. The internal and external loyalties of either community are recognised through the establishment of dynamic cooperative north-south and east-west ventures. Through the creation of these institutions, Britain's declaration of a lack of selfish, strategic or economic interest is accepted as *prima facie* evidence of neutrality.

Central to the SDLP's approach is the consolidation of Dublin influence in political arrangements in Northern Ireland. Although the intergovernmental framework has until now been seen as the 'senior partner' in this respect, North-South cooperative bodies are seen as a vital mechanism for their extension. These organisations would exist in economic, political and cultural arena. The Party insists that these bodies would not be a 'trojan horse' for a united Ireland.⁸ Whilst unhappy with the internal settlement connotations of power-sharing, the SDLP recognises the need for internal cooperation within Northern Ireland as a useful device for the building of external frameworks. Lijphart suggests that the Framework Documents contain elements for grand coalition building élites.⁹ The British Government appears to suggest in the Framework Documents that opting-out from consociational arrangements by Unionists will leave them as the mercy of unbri-dled intergovernmentalism.

For a Party whose founding constitution wished to 'promote the cause of Irish unity based upon the consent of majority of people in Northern Ireland' the SDLP has always been confronted by the problem of political stagnation, given the absence of such consent. Yet there have been few internal calls for a reexamination of the consent principle. In the New Ireland Forum 1984, the SDLP was instrumental in asserting that a solution had to be 'freely agreed to by the people of the north and by the people of the south' (New Ireland Forum Report para 5.2 (3- p27-). From the nationalist contentions outlined earlier, we can thus identify the main themes of the SDLP's approach to the achievement of Irish unity as based upon:

- 1. recognition of two traditions in Northern Ireland;
- 2. disavowal of violence;
- 3. use of intergovernmentalism, assisted by continued British neutrality, as the means of progression;

⁶ Social Democratic and Labour Party, *Towards a New Ireland, Belfast, 1972*.

⁷ M.McGovern, 'Unity in diversity? The SDLP and the Peace Process', in C.Gilligan & J.Tonge (eds), *Peace or War? Understanding the Peace Process in Ireland*, Avebury, 1997, forthcoming.

⁸ S.Farren, 'The View from the SDLP: A Nationalist Approach to An Agreed Peace', *Oxford International Review*, 7/2, 1996.

⁹ A.Lijphart, 'The Framework Proposal for Northern Ireland and the Theory of Power-Sharing', *Government and Opposition*, 31/3, 1996.

- 4. acceptance of the need for Unionist consent for a united Ireland.

Sinn Fein and the 'seven isms'

Seven core ideological undercurrents have underpinned the political thinking of Sinn Fein and the IRA. These might be described as the seven 'isms'; republicanism, based upon the support of an inclusive, independent state; nationalism, recognising the 'fact' of Irish nationhood; militarism, centred upon the legitimacy of 'armed struggle'; romanticism, based upon cultural assertions of Irishness, particularly to overcome 'west Britishness'; socialism, embracing a commitment to greater equality; anti-imperialism, based upon opposition to perceived economic exploitation and anti-colonialism, centred upon the desire to free 'occupied' Ireland. The Green Book given to IRA volunteers described the six counties of Northern Ireland as a 'directly-controlled old-style colony'.¹⁰

If 'pan-nationalism' is a reality, we might expect Sinn Fein to accept the majority of the SDLP's political analysis. If we are to assess whether Irish republicanism has changed before and during the peace process, it is worth restating core values. If the death of republicanism has occurred, to be replaced by the vagaries of weaker pan-nationalism, one might expect either of the following to have occurred. Firstly, the basic aim of the establishment of a thirty-two county united democratic socialist Irish republic may have been abandoned or downgraded. Secondly, there may have developed a change in the analysis upon which the aspiration of a 32 county Republic was predicated. It is vital that the two dimensions are separated. A partial change in analysis need not necessarily lead to a change in desired outcome.

The most explicit recent statement that the IRA has not abandoned its basic aim came in summer 1994 with the circulation of the totally unarmed strategy document which asserted that 'our goals have not changed' and that this goal was the establishment of a 32 county democratic socialist Republic.¹¹ Furthermore, neither the policy documents *Scenario for Peace* nor *Towards a Lasting Peace* endorsed interim solutions acceptable to constitutional nationalists, such as joint authority.¹² The outcome of the exercise of Irish self-determination would necessarily lead to the creation of a unitary inclusive state. What had developed was a longer timetable for British withdrawal.

The prescription thus remained the same. However, this is not to state that republican analysis has remained unaltered. Sinn Fein's analysis of the basis and balance of the conflict has altered. Crucially however, this analysis has not shifted in the most crucial respect of the need to embrace the notion of Unionist consent for constitutional change.

The reasons for change in republican analysis

The republican movement faced three particular difficulties by the late 1980s. Firstly, it had a lack of a decisive mandate amongst the nationalist population. Following

¹⁰ See for example T.P.Coogan, *The IRA*, Fontana, 1987.

¹¹ E.Mallie & D.McKittrick, *The Fight for Peace*, Heinemann, 1996.

¹² Sinn Fein, *Scenario for Peace*, 1987; Sinn Fein, *Towards a Lasting Peace*, 1992,

the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the SDLP's electoral support had stabilised and it appeared that Sinn Fein would remain the minority voice of Irish nationalism. Secondly, the IRA was coming under considerable pressure from the security forces and from revived loyalist paramilitary groups. Under new leadership, the latter had removed racketeering elements and replaced them with political figures, anxious to concentrate upon the removal of suspected republicans. Thirdly, the republican campaign appeared to have reached an impasse as the objective of British withdrawal remained distant.

Politically stalled, there was a realisation amongst many leading figures within Sinn Fein and the IRA that military pressure alone would be insufficient to remove Britain from Northern Ireland. Whilst the IRA had enough weaponry to continue its campaign for the foreseeable future, it was prepared to countenance a shift in political direction. After the bombing of a Remembrance Day commemoration in Enniskillen by the IRA, there was even a brief period when English public opinion was so enraged that it favoured keeping troops in Northern Ireland.¹³ Sinn Fein's political message was having little impact, not least because of the Broadcasting Ban imposed upon those deemed as political representatives of the IRA.

The end of abstentionism in the Republic

Coogan (1995) suggests that the origins of the 1990s peace process date back to the first indication of Sinn Fein's abandonment of the 'go-it-alone' strategy.¹⁴ This shift began shortly after the papal visit to Ireland in 1979. During his visit, the Pope condemned violence, whilst acknowledging that he too 'sought justice'. Exasperated by the refusal of the Catholic hierarchy both in Rome and Ireland to support what he regarded as a just war, Gerry Adams engaged in dialogue with church leaders, seeking clarification of their position.

A first major step from the political wilderness came in 1986. At the party's ard-fheis, Sinn Fein delegates voted by a 3-1 margin to end the policy of abstentionism in respect of the Dail. From now on, in the (unlikely) event of Sinn Fein winning seats in the southern parliament they would take their seats. The gesture had considerable symbolic importance. Having been founded partly as a result of their ideologically pure abstentionist stance, the Provisional IRA was reversing policy. In effect, Sinn Fein was recognising the southern, 26 County state, which until this point it had denounced as a neo-colonial 'puppet' state.

It was scarcely surprising that the move enraged traditionalists. One-third of the ard-fheis left to form Republican Sinn Fein, who naturally proclaimed that they were the direct lineal descendant of the 1918 Dail Eireann parliament. What was extraordinary was the speed at which Provisional Sinn Fein undertook its change of policy. The southern state had been seen as subject to the continuing social, economic and cultural domination of London. Indeed only one year earlier, Gerry Adams had asserted:

'The only thing Irish about the Irish Parliament in Leinster House is its name – the Dail – otherwise it is a British parliamentary system

¹³B.Hayes & I.McAllister, 'British and Irish Public Opinion towards the Northern Ireland Problem', *Irish Political Studies*, 11, 1996.

¹⁴T.P.Coogan, *The Troubles*, Hutchinson, 1995.

handed down by ex-colonial rulers'.¹⁵

Initially the Irish Government still refused to deal with Sinn Fein. Adams was to argue that 'the politics demanded the building of a consensus. Sinn Fein had by that point developed a position which saw dialogue as the main vehicle for resolving this problem'.¹⁶ Within two years of the *ard-fheis* decision, the Irish Government began to participate in secret contacts with Sinn Fein, as did the leader of the SDLP.

The initial Hume-Adams dialogue

Facilitated by figures within the Catholic Church including a Belfast priest, Father Alec Reid, a series of talks between the leader of the SDLP and the President of Sinn Fein took place in 1988. The dialogue took place against an unpromising backdrop. *Scenario for Peace* (1987) offered an uncompromising reassertion of the basic principles of armed republicanism:

- 1. Britain must withdraw from Northern Ireland.
- 2. The use of armed force to eject Britain is legitimate.
- 3. The 'armed struggle' is against a colonial aggressor.
- 4. British security forces, namely the RUC and UDR, must be disbanded.
- 5. All republican prisoners must be released unconditionally.
- 6. Unionists must accept a united Ireland. Those unable to do so would be offered voluntary repatriation.

Whatever *Scenario for Peace* was, it was, first, not a basis for negotiation and, second, not a switch in republican analysis. Despite this, the Hume-Adams talks began in April 1988 and exchanges of policy documents continued until September 1988. Hume attempted three things. First, he strove to persuade Adams of the futility of continued violence. Secondly, he attempted to convince Sinn Fein of British neutrality. Finally, he argued that Sinn Fein needed to develop much greater consideration of the Unionist position, presumably beyond the offer of re-settlement grants contained in *Scenario for Peace*.

Although the initial Hume-Adams dialogue ended without agreement, the fact that the dialogue occurred at all was perhaps more significant. Sinn Fein was no longer a political leper and other furtive political contacts could begin within the 'nationalist family'. Furthermore, whilst Hume had been unable to convince Adams of the merits of an IRA abandonment of violence, common ground was 'discovered' around the idea that the Irish question could only be resolved through national self-determination. All the people on the island of Ireland must be involved in the resolution of the political future of the island. The debate was to move on to the question as to how that self-determination could most fairly be exercised.

¹⁵G.Adams, in M.Collins (ed), *Ireland after Britain*, Pluto, 1985, p.8.

¹⁶E.Mallie & D.McKittrick, *op cit*, p.72.

Acknowledgement of some of Hume's arguments were apparent within Sinn Fein thinking by 1992. During that year, Sinn Fein's *Towards a Lasting Peace*, appeared to indicate a shift in republican analysis, which did not envisage the role of the British Government merely as one of 'surrender and withdrawal'.¹⁷ Significantly, the document urged Britain to become a persuader to Unionists to accept the need for a united Ireland. Suddenly, Unionist attitudes, as distinct from the British presence, appeared to be the central problem.

Urging nationalist unity, *Towards a Lasting Peace* outlined the need for Irish self-determination. All the people on the island of Ireland were to determine their future together in a process of national reconciliation. There was a downgrading of emphasis upon the need for 'armed struggle' and less stridency over the need for immediate British withdrawal. *Towards a Lasting Peace* amounted to an appeal to all nationalist Ireland to join in a common approach towards constitutional change in Ireland.

Republicanism's willingness to move towards inclusive dialogue was based upon two main aims. Firstly, Unionists would be left as an even smaller minority waged against the combined nationalist forces of the Irish Government; Irish America and northern Nationalists. If British neutrality could be confirmed, this would be insufficient to shore up the position of Unionists, particularly as the attitude of the British public was unsympathetic to the Unionist position. Secondly, it was hoped that republicans would then enter into a 'historic handshake; with the British Government in a manner reminiscent of that between the South African President de Klerk and Nelson Mandela in 1989'.¹⁸

The revival of the Hume-Adams talks

In 1992-93, the Hume-Adams talks were resuscitated. The two leaders issued a joint statement reiterating their commitment to the achievement of self-determination for the Irish people. Part of the statement declared:

'... we accept that an internal settlement is not a solution because it obviously does not deal with all the relationships at the heart of the problem.

We accept that the Irish people as a whole have the right to national self-determination. This is a view shared by a majority of the people of this island, though not by all its people.

The exercise of self-determination is a matter for agreement between the people of Ireland.'

Surviving periodic crises, the Hume-Adams dialogue and embryonic peace process continued apace. The two leaders produced a draft document, an amended form of which was to form the basis for the Downing Street Declaration in December 1993. Eight articles were contained in the draft. Article 5 declared:

¹⁷ K.Bean, 'The new departure? Recent developments in republican strategy and ideology', *Irish Studies Review*, 11, 1995, p.3.

¹⁸ K.Toolis, *Rebel Hearts*, Picador, 1995, p.329.

‘the democratic right of self-determination by the people of Ireland as a whole must be achieved and exercised with the agreement and consent of the people of Northern Ireland ...’¹⁹

That Sinn Fein was prepared to discuss consent in respect of the unit of Northern Ireland was a significant step. Until this point, the existence of Northern Ireland was not recognised. Nonetheless, the phraseology merely masked continuing differences between the constitutional nationalism of the SDLP and the republicanism of Sinn Fein. Debating the Downing Street Declaration at Sinn Fein’s national internal conference at Letterkenny in July 1994, Sinn Fein passed the following motions:

- 1. That the exercise of national self-determination is a matter for agreement between the people of Ireland.
- 2. That the consent and allegiance of unionists are essential ingredients if a lasting peace is to be established.
- 3. That the Unionists cannot have a veto over British policy or over political progress in Ireland.

What has probably not changed: the end of anti-colonialism?

To what extent had the analysis of Sinn Fein really changed? Nationalists of different shades of opinion were united in their insistence that the Northern Ireland state had failed. Any peace process therefore needed to be predicated upon the assumption that the pursuit of an internal settlement within Northern Ireland was futile. Republicans were adamant that Britain needed to abandon its colonial ambitions in respect of Ireland.

Despite public vociferous opposition to its implementation, senior republicans were prepared privately to concede that the Anglo-Irish Agreement signalled the end of British colonialism.²⁰ Arguably, the underlying theme of the Agreement was one of British neutrality concerning the future of the Union. From this point, preceding even the overt declarations of Britain’s lack of selfish, strategic and economic interest in Northern Ireland, the decline in republican anti-colonial and anti-imperialist rhetoric can be traced.

Much of Hume-Adams centred upon the belief that Britain might be persuaded to act as tacit persuaders for Irish unity. This would partly relieve nationalists themselves of the burden of obtaining Unionist consent. Sinn Fein has accepted the notion that there are two competing traditions on the island. Furthermore, the Party accepts that Unionists have an identity distinct from that merely of neo-colonial settlers. Two points need to be made however. First, parity of esteem from Sinn Fein’s point of view is seen as an equalising process designed to facilitate gains for nationalists. Second, parity of esteem does not amount to the equal validity of political ambitions.

¹⁹ *Sunday Tribune*, 28.8.95.

²⁰ E.Mallie & D.McKittrick, *op cit*.

The opening point made by Gerry Adams in his address to Sinn Fein's 1996 Ard Fheis was that 'the British government remains the continuing source of the major political difficulty endured by the people of this island'.²¹ The language of 'Brits out' had been diluted but not the substance. There was less emphasis placed upon the problem of the 'British presence' but Sinn Fein has not made the step of engaging in dialogue concerning the problem of the 'Unionist presence'. Demands for immediate British withdrawal have been superseded by calls for 'constructive disengagement'.²² Sinn Fein has refused to accept the Hume contention that Britain is neutral on the future of the Union.

What has certainly not changed: the question of Unionist consent

In arguing that the consent and allegiance of Unionists were 'essential ingredients for a lasting peace' Sinn Fein was not stipulating that Unionist consent was a precursor for the exercise of self-determination. Rather, Sinn Fein was in effect acknowledging that the result of the exercise of self-determination, presumably a unitary Irish state, could only be successful once it enjoyed the allegiance of unionists.

In effect, Sinn Fein's historical view appeared to remain intact, namely that Unionist consent and allegiance would be a consequence of the creation of Irish unity. For the SDLP, such consent was a prerequisite for the establishment of a united Ireland.

Sinn Fein had changed its view in calling on Britain to act as a persuader for unionists, although the goal of the party, the exercise of national self-determination, remained constant. The more explicit statement of the need for Unionist consent in the Downing Street Declaration, contained in the reference to the need for self-determination to be exercised on a North and South basis, was more than Sinn Fein could accept. Accordingly, it did not endorse the Downing Street Declaration.

The aim of republicans was now to enter into a covenant that:

'will do everything possible to ensure full consultation and equal citizenship for Protestants in a new Ireland..We covenant that we will insist on full recognition of the Protestant identity in the new Ireland. The right of those in Ireland who wish to retain a British passport must be guaranteed.'²³

In many respects, the position of Sinn Fein towards formal institutional recognition of the Ulster-Protestant identity has not shifted since the abandonment of the federal parliaments of Eire Nua. There is to be none. In words similar to the assertion above, Gerry Adams had declared in 1985 that Protestants 'would need to have their understandable but misguided fears about civil and religious liberties answered'.²⁴

²¹G.Adams, Speech to Sinn Fein Ard-Fheis, Dublin, 23/3/96.

²²Sinn Fein, 'A New Framework for Agreement', *Submission to the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation*, Dublin, 5/5/95, p.7.

²³*Starry Plough*, Autumn 1994, p.3.

²⁴G.Adams, in M.Collins (ed), *op cit*, p.9.

Acceptance of dual citizenship in *Towards a Lasting Peace* represented a new departure in republican strategy in that it gave a limited form of opt-out for individual Unionists in a united Ireland. Nonetheless, a central problem remained of how entry into a covenant would be possible with Unionists diametrically opposed to the ambitions of Irish republicanism. Sinn Fein continued to insist upon 'respect for the integrity of the land mass of Ireland'.²⁵

Sinn Fein also argued that it was 'only in the context of the absence of Britain that the problem can then be reduced to a question of rival attitudes being given equal respect and treatment'.²⁶ Unionists were invited to 'join with rest of the people of Ireland in formulating an agreed future' although the prospect of any agreed future and appeared remote.²⁷ What was to occur in the absence of agreement was not indicated.

Conclusion

It has been assumed that 'pan-nationalism' and the peace process began with the Hume-Adams dialogue. Yet whilst this dialogue produced some movement in Sinn Fein's analysis of the problem, it did not alter the policy prescriptions of the Party. Hume-Adams was a failure in its most crucial aspect, that of persuading Sinn Fein to embrace the need for Unionist prior consent to constitutional change. This remains a consequence of such change, not a prerequisite. McGimpsey is entirely correct in his assertion that 'the entire (peace) process ... boils down to the acceptance of the consent principle'.²⁸ The refusal of Sinn Fein to accept the need for such consent is the single most important reason why claims of the death of republicanism are unjustified.

Hume-Adams was merely kicking at an open door in enticing Sinn Fein towards inclusive dialogue. That process was already underway. Sinn Fein had shifted its thinking in accepting the possibility of a (26 county) Irish Government speaking on behalf of a 32 county Irish nation in an Irish-led peace process. Republicanism in recent years has engaged in the process of winning new allies, not producing novel solutions. Enforced isolation was as useful politically for modern republicanism as the Thompson Gun was for a military campaign. New republicanism is distinct from the 1918-1985 version by the friends it seeks, not the vision to which it aspires. This has also meant a greater separation of the political from the military, exemplified most startlingly in Adams' assertion that 'Sinn Fein is not the IRA. Sinn Fein is not involved in armed struggle. Sinn Fein does not advocate armed struggle'.²⁹

Yet even this new constitutionalism may revert to previous form. According to Mitchell McLaughlin, speaking at the 1996 Ard-Fheis, 'constitutional politics has neither the stomach nor the dedication' for the challenges that lie ahead.³⁰

²⁵Sinn Fein, 'Self-determination, Consent, Accommodation of Minorities and Democracy in Ireland', *Submission to the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation*, Dublin, 13/9/95, p.4.

²⁶*Ibid*, p.6.

²⁷Sinn Fein, *Submission to the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation*, Dublin, 25/11/95.

²⁸C.McGimpsey, 'Sinn Fein, Consent and a return to Plan B', *The Irish Reporter*, 21 February 1996.

²⁹*Irish Times*, 20/6/96.

³⁰M.McLaughlin, Opening address to 1996 Sinn Fein Ard-Fheis, 23/3/96.