

S.B. No. 1 (Plain)

**METROPOLITAN POLICE**

S.D.S.

Special Report

SPECIAL BRANCH

29th day of December 19 81

SUBJECT

Reference to Papers

BOX 500

Provisional  
Sinn Fein

135/80/204

1. The following information has been received from a secret and reliable source:-

2. "During the weekend of 31st October - 1st November 1981 two members of the Troops Out Movement (TOM) Steering Committee and one member of the TOM Literature Collective were delegated to attend, in Dublin, the annual Ard-Pheis (Conference) of Provisional Sinn Fein. TOM was the only Irish Solidarity/Withdrawal organisation to be invited from England.

3. As a result of their observations these three persons prepared a report on the major debates that took place. The report has not been widely circulated and is for TOM members only.

4. Part of this document includes a report (from the same source) on the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP) Ard Pheis, a copy of which is attached.

5. The three TOM members who attended are believed to be:-

Privacy

TO [redacted]  
4 JAN 1982

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Trevor  
Butler

CHIEF SUPERINTENDENT

REPORT OF THE SINN FEIN ARD-FHEIS 1981

October 31st - November 1st

Provisional Sinn Fein invited the Troops Out Movement to attend its annual Ard-Fheis (Conference) as observers: two members of Steering Committee and one member of the Literature Collective were delegated to go by Steering Committee. We were the only solidarity/withdrawal organization from Britain to be invited - unfortunately we didn't ask why this was so. There was also an observer from the <sup>United</sup> Black Youth Movement in Bradford and thirty other foreign observers, mostly from West European solidarity movements but also one from Argentina. As usual, the foreign observers were very warmly received but more so this year because of the international dimension which the hunger strike has opened up.

The Ard-Fheis was extremely well organized, and we should learn from it. The agenda was printed out with standing orders first and then all the motions (213!) numbered and listed under headings - Policy, Women's Affairs, Prisoners, Constitution etc. This made it very easy to follow the debate: the chair announced which motion was under debate, its number was written on a blackboard, the mover introduced it and everyone wishing to speak for or against it queued up by the side of the platform. The chairing was very firm and this resulted in greater democracy, not less. Naturally not all the motions were debated; it was announced at the beginning of each session which ones would be dealt with - some repeated each other or cancelled each other out, others were referred to the Ard Chochairie (Central Committee) for reasons of time.

What follows are our notes on the major debates. We cannot hope to be comprehensive, but we feel it important to inform the TOM of developments taking place in the organisations of the republican movement, both as a general education for ourselves, and to enable us to develop our own independent strategy in tune with future likelihoods.

WOMEN'S AFFAIRS

There were two subjects for debate, positive discrimination within the movement and family planning. A third matter, abortion, was not debated but a written report was circulated from the department of women's affairs. As you probably know, it was a policy opposed to abortion but not passing judgement on women who avail of it; the document presented the facts and figures concerning the law on abortion and the numbers of women who travel annually to Britain to have abortions, the availability of contraceptives and the organizations for and against abortion. The line of the document is that women should not abort, or if aborting it must be the consequence of their own choice, not the law. It concludes: 'Any one of these

statistics could be your wife, your sister or your daughter. We believe that those who are 'totally opposed' to abortion and those who see it as a tragedy and an indictment against society must work to improve conditions for and attitudes towards pregnant women."

On positive discrimination. This motion was put by the Ard Chathairle (Central Committee); it was argued that its purpose was not to force women out of the home but to recognize that equality doesn't just happen. SF has to actually enforce its progressive policies and at the moment there are far too few women in leadership positions and far too many trapped in welfare or secretarial roles.

On family planning (contraceptives). There were ~~xx~~ two motions, one that condemned the inadequacies of the Free State's Family Planning Law and called for legislation to replace it, and one amending Sinn Fein policy to make safe contraceptives available to all and education for the young. The motions were overwhelmingly carried but there were strong speeches from the right wing sections condemning 'the permissive society', free sex every night etc and calling on massive population growth as a nationalist ideal. Sections from the floor. And there were two other arguments put which were also themes running throughout the Ard-Feiners: one, that it is not SF's job to be tinkering with Free State laws, SF should have no truck at all with partitionist institutions. The second that it is not the job of SF to be conducting social restriction, it should confine itself to getting the Brits out; it was argued that it is a Stasby (Official SF) line to be taking up issues like family planning, and it was pointed out that the family planning groups had not supported the Hunger Strikes. Against these arguments it was put by what we consider to be the most progressive elements that SF has social and economic policies as well as nationalist policies and that these must be legislated for, they are the basis for national liberation.

A FEDERAL IRELAND

The issue of federalism and the issue of abortion were the two major contentions at this year's Ard Fein; they were the two concrete subjects behind which the various ideological wings of the party rallied. The whole of the Ard was in a state of confusion.

The present policy document was first prepared as a draft of a federal Ireland in which the four provinces - Ulster, Leinster, Connaught and Munster - have their own parliaments. It was this model that was put up for debate. The confusion of the debate was exacerbated by the fact that it had to be carried out with - and against - the spirit of the SF Constitution (in terms of what was then a three-third majority), and once the matter of policy was

only needs a straight majority to change it). The result was that federalism was voted out as a policy, but just failed to win a two-thirds majority to delete it from the SF Constitution. So at the moment there is an anomalous situation and no doubt the matter will be up for debate again.

The arguments against the federal model were put mainly by 6 Cos delegates. They argued that it was a sop to Unionism and loyalism and would preserve loyalist domination. SF should be aiming to unite the Irish people - all religions - whereas federalism represents a capitulation because it gives loyalism a special place. The main protagonists now of federalism are pro-British forces: Fine Gael and the SDLP. Speakers were careful to distinguish loyalism from Protestantism. Even a nine-county Ulster (is the whole province, not divided as it is now under the British settlement) would perpetuate the loyalist vote.

Secondly, they argued that federalism would not give more power to the people, as intended; it would only create extra layers of bureaucracy. Nor would it solve the economic imbalance between East and West but would in fact trap Connaught in its poverty. Finally they argued that federalism is not a republican principle and therefore has no place in SF's Constitution: it only came up in 1971, from the Army Council, and was adopted by SF in 1978 as a 'peace offering' to the Unionists. It has manifestly failed in that purpose.

Those in favour of retaining federalism were mainly fighting a rear-guard action - that you shouldn't vote out a policy without having something to put in its place. They were also arguing for it as a means of decentralisation, giving power back to the people. In the course of the debate a false identification between federalism/decentralisation and socialism got exposed: capitalism too can usually accommodate federalism, it was pointed out.

Ex-blanketman John Connolly spoke fervently against federalism (and a motion from the 4 Blocks called for rejection of federalism as being "counter to the true interests of social democracy in Ireland"): our struggle is for freedom, people are not prepared to die for federalism, it would be a temporary solution like partition necessitating another struggle by another generation: "This must be the final chapter in resistance".

The 1981 election  
This was the second major debate. The position of SF in recent years has been to boycott elections except for local government elections in the 26 Cos. The SF Council of local councillors was to have their seats in order to represent the people's interests, but all other elections were

boycotted on the grounds that they involve British or partitionist institutions. However, during the course of the hunger strikes the immense value of fighting elections in specific circumstances was put to the test: Fermanagh/South Tyrone was won, twice; two prisoners were elected in the 26 Cos General Election and others polled high; and conversely, the earlier boycott by SF of the 6 Cos local elections was a missed opportunity: Gerry Fitt lost his seat and many seats were won by republican independents, SD, IRSP and IIP (Irish Independence Party).

So in the light of these recent events SF's electoral policy was clearly up for reassessment. Three motions were passed, one unanimously and the others with a huge majority: the first called for a "positive approach" to elections with the decision on specific elections left to the Ard Chomhairle in consultation with the membership; another called for contesting local government elections, North and South; a third called for contesting elections with candidates "who subscribe to the SF Constitution" and who are endorsed by SF. Concerning local govt, there was also a motion passed that successful candidates take their seats.

The speakers for these motions pointed out that it was contradictory to boycott British institutions but partake in free State ones - both are inimicable to republicanism. The arguments for taking local government seats - to represent the people's interests and give them leadership - apply both North and South. SF lost its opportunity in the 6 Cos local government elections when SDLP were given a severe blow but the gains went to the IIP, a party which ultimately prolongs the war and shores up partition. It is wrong to allow the likes of SDLP and IIP to cash in on the gains of the hunger strike - SF should not allow the prisoners' sacrifices to be sold out.

These delegates were not arguing that power could be won by the ballot box - that Republicanism could be voted in: Elections are a tactic, and only that, but one that should not be ignored. SF is a political party and needs to build on this; too much so far there has been the thinking that in the six Cos we wage the military struggle, and in the 26 Cos we begin to develop the political agitation, but this polarization is false. In certain conditions rep-reussions develop from the armed struggle and these have been ignored.

The arguments against participation in elections were along the lines that power cannot be won through the ballot box, our first task is to get the British out and then we can turn our attention to political matters. That the local government in the North has no power, that we are on the system

from the outside, not from within, that to fight elections is to give credibility to British and Free State institutions and thereby delude the people.

The motions that were passed point to further political development, based on the lessons learned during the hunger strikes - and also the mistaken criticism was made of the SF leadership for some inadequacies during the elections in the 27 DPs, particularly where there was a possibility of prisoner candidates not taking an abstentionist position. The abstentionist policy was not debated, and still stands as regards elections for Westminster and the Dail (26 DPs Parliament).

#### TRADE UNION REPORT

The Ard Chomhairle is to draw up a trade union policy document in the near future. It was recognised that during the hunger strikes SF failed to win much trade union support and that it needs to be more deeply and sympathetically involved in the trade unions. At the moment SF is far behind the Officials in this area of work.

#### YOUTH REPORT

The immense amount of work done by youth during the hunger strike was applauded. 70% of the Irish population is under 25; most of the activists and prisoners are young. But two weaknesses were pinpointed: the need for political education related to their social needs (unemployment, housing, drug abuse and state repression); and organisationally, there are at present four republican youth coverments and the Youth Dept of SF is not functioning well. These problems were acknowledged and it was agreed to give policy-making powers to the Youth Dept and to recognise in Dublin a youth organisation of the "Republican Movement".

#### RESOLUTIONS PAGE 23

Seamus O'Druid: First he ran through the history of the hunger strikes - the international dimension, the broad campaign in Ireland which was run by the National 12 DPs Campaign Committee in which SF played a major part, the election of Bobby Sands. Seamus's collaboration with the British State last year and the British and Eisenhower's coalition government was mentioned. O'Druid emphasised that it was a mistake of the government to refuse to negotiate with the prisoners when prisoners won elections. They refused to negotiate with the prisoners. At the establishment of the Provisional Government the British government was winning from the prolongation of the hunger strikes, it was in a position to break the strike and the British but understand for the British.

The days of British rule are numbered: the hunger strike was clearly a symptom of the injustice of that rule and the only solution is disengagement. The way ahead is to get the Brits out and dismantle partition. (Several speakers during the 4th-5th referred to victory in the armed struggle on the horizon.) O'Leaigh outlined recent events: the inter-Governmental talks (the Brits tightening their grip on the 26 Cos as they lose their foothold in the 6 Cos), the Anglo-Irish Council, Fitzgerald's crusade to delete Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution (claim to the whole territory of Ireland). None of this is acceptable to SF, nor is any re-partition of an independent "State". The only solution is to disband the two states.

SF calls for complete separation of Church and State, for neutrality and non-alignment, and withdrawal from the E.C.M. Further, SF must head the economic resistance in the 26 Cos, recognizing the main question to be fundamentally the unemployed and better leadership and SF is preparing for the 26 Cos local elections. It is also considering elections in the 6 Cos, using them to wipe out the DUP. Strategy: "To engage in all activities that bring us to the centre of the political stage, consolidate the gains of this year, create and organize... There is no short cut, only a hard trial to success."

PRISONERS REPORT

A short written report was presented outlining the work of the POW officers in Dublin. Belfast was mentioned, and a verbal report bringing this up to date was presented.

Regarding the prisoners in England, SF has clarified its position: there are 71 Irish political prisoners, 51 of whom are republicans and the others are innocent people. It was a hospital, conspiracy etc charges. We will support and work for them all. The republicans prisoners in England now and they want a campaign on their behalf suspended until they hear from the 6 Cos that the situation has been resolved to the prisoners' satisfaction.

At the 4th-5th, a debate, at the end of the 4th-5th the issues of work and resistance were still not clear. The prisoners both in the 6 Cos and 26 Cos will continue their protest and as work only consistent with their position as political prisoners.

It was noted by some that the 6 Cos are still organizing proposals of a strike to support the 26 Cos. It was noted that the 26 Cos are still in the 6 Cos and all the 6 Cos are in the 26 Cos. The 26 Cos are still in the 6 Cos and all the 6 Cos are in the 26 Cos.

Commonly just out of the 'Blocks' and all 'arrangements' (just out of 'arrangements') stressed the need for the 'Block' action groups to remain together and be vigilant. The speakers were concerned first that it is too early to say that the campaign is over, and second that the gains won so far must not be lost - that if any organization must take the prisoners' struggle and their sacrifices to their ultimate conclusion. The masses were mobilized, the 20,000 men were mobilized, but both these could prove to be temporary if we do not take the initiative. The prisoners must not be allowed to have a day's rest.

victory and an end to the war is in sight, but it has to build a revolutionary organization if it is to achieve this goal - the war could still be lost by a sudden change in the balance of opportunity.

The prisoners themselves, those who are members of it, but actions in the 'arrangements'. The best results of all come from the 'Blocks', but they were not debated. In fact the prisoners are called for better political education and more vigorous practice of the national language and culture; the need to address the organization seriously to social and economic issues, the need to deal with every crisis more positively than 'the present inactivity and hollow counter-productive - in our opinion - approach'. This could be taken up as a slogan in a 4 or 5 pages community council in nationalistic terms.

most striking of all was the motion concerning the relationship between the 'arrangements' and other forces in Ireland. The motion that it 'seriously encourages the formation of a Republican socialist political front in Ireland. A front which would be headed by a central representative council. And that it should begin to re-establish and strengthen links with other minority Republican forces in the Republic and the individuals for co-operation on all fronts but with emphasis on contesting future elections through the use of Republican/Nationalist lists.'

On 17th of the month the committee of the 'arrangements', including the 'arrangements', will be in a position to report to the 'arrangements'.

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gains won in Ireland and worldwide - I would just like to describe some of the achievements of the hunger strike in England.

The hunger strike increased the unpopularity of the war that Britain is engaged in against the Irish people, and has increased the sentiment in Britain for withdrawal. Within the labour movement, the minority communities and the youth the hunger strike has generated an increased understanding of the justness of the anti-imperialist struggle. The legitimacy of British rule in the occupied 6 Counties is being seriously questioned by all classes in Britain. Splits have begun to develop within the press, the Labour Party, between the Foreign Office and the Northern Ireland Office on the value of maintaining partition.

The election victories of Bobby Sands and Owen Carron stunned the British people, who had been led to believe that the prisoners and the republican movement had little popular support. British democracy was exposed for the sham that it is, when the Government went on to change the rules and ignore the clear wishes of the Irish people.

The hunger strike brought about a period of immense activity in the TOM and the Hunger Strike Committees. There was intense street activity, lobbying of the press and politicians, marches and occupations. The courage of the hunger strikers won increasing respect and sympathy.

However, such frantic political work often leads to allowing organisational and political developments to slide. This happened with us, but at our recent conference in October we began consolidating our organisation's structure and updating our political analysis in order to build a more principled and stronger movement for political withdrawal.

Specifically, we are preparing to meet the challenge of the phoney neo-colonialist solutions that the British State is considering. A recent opinion poll showed that 64% of the British people favour Britain's withdrawal from the occupied North. Much of this sentiment is probably based on war weariness and a "bring the boys home" attitude - which, though useful, is a passive feeling which cannot be the basis of an effective campaign. For example, because there is not conscription, the war does not affect most people's own lives. We therefore see our role as that of consolidating the active support that has been won by the hunger strike.

This support has come from the left of the Labour party; the Welsh Plaid Cymru party and the Scottish TUC, who both have their own national question to settle. It has come from black people, Asians, Iranians and other national minorities who know what colonialism is all too well - and who are resisting their oppression in Britain. Support has come from the youth and unemployed who have shown their willingness to stand up against oppression. From Irish people living in Britain who since 1974 have been terrorised by the Prevention of Terrorism Act but who this year dared to stand up for their country.

With what might be termed the mainstream white English working class, we recognise that we need to make a much greater effort to win support. They did not support the just struggles of the Kenyans, Adenese, Cypriots, Malaysians or Zimbabweans. The State has been able to buy off the working class, both materially from the profits of imperialism and ideologically, - binding the working class to the British State.

However, the third world liberation struggles - and your struggle in Ireland - are changing all this. It is this fact which makes any solidarity campaign a possibility, where in other liberation struggles there was a deafening silence from our working class. On this point we are confronting the particular problem of the trade unions who are extremely confused and misled about the nature of loyalism.

The forcing of Britain out of its colonies in the post-war period has led it to bring increased exploitation onto the shoulders of the English working class. Resistance to this exploitation and to mass unemployment has led to the gradual introduction of the technology of repression onto the streets of Britain - the technology that has been developed in Ireland. If the English working class fails to understand that the Irish people are their allies against the British State, and fails to learn the lessons of Irish oppression, they will reap a bitter harvest in the future.

We in the TOC salute the struggle of the Irish people and reaffirm our commitment to building support for the demands Troops out now and Self-determination for the Irish people as a whole. We reaffirm our support for Irish republican prisoners in England and the B blocks, Armagh and Portlaoise. We will continue working to expose the brutal methods by which Britain maintains its rule in the occupied North.

The war will be won in Ireland but we believe that a strong and effective campaign in Britain will contribute to the victory which you will undoubtedly achieve.

VICTORY TO THE IRISH PEOPLE!

VICTORY TO THE IRISH PRISONERS!

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REPORT ON THE IRISH REPUBLICAN SOCIALIST PARTY ARD FHEIS, 1981

I attended the IRSP Ard Fheis held this October in Dublin as a TOM delegate. One of the first impressions I got was that the IRSP has to face considerable repression and harrassment both North and South of the border. A hall had been booked but was cancelled by the owners when they found out it was for the IRSC. Consequently delegates had to squeeze into a small room. Several members had been lifted by the Garda the night before (one, I believe was held all weekend) and Special Branch were posted outside the hall, keeping an eye on us.

The mood of the Ard Fheis was very optimistic and energetic. The Chairperson reported that membership had risen and as a result several new Cumann had been formed. She said that it was now feasible for the IRSP to stand in elections (as demonstrated in Belfast) but rejected the parliamentary road to socialism. The most important task was considered to be, however, to build the IRSP at grassroots level. An example was given of a successful housing campaign organised in Turf Lodge by the party.

The Prisoners Report was given by an ex-POW from Portlaoise prison and concentrated on the H-Blocks but a lot of information about Crumlin Road and Portlaoise was given. In Portlaoise, it was reported that the authorities were trying to undermine political status by moving in criminals with republican backgrounds.

National H-Block/Armagh Committee delegates report. This report was very critical both of the committee and Sinn Fein. The committee was said to be in confusion and had no strategy. The cttee. thought the only possible campaigns were around Armagh and/or the POWs in England. Sinn Fein were criticised for narrowing the campaign to the H-Blocks and for relying on emotionalism. People had not been convinced of the wrongness of the very existence of the H-Blocks. The prison protest had started in resistance to attempts to psychologically destroy the prisoners. The original demand had been for political status but the campaign had backtracked all the way - according to the speaker. It was considered that they was no future role for the Cttee. and action groups. However some action groups would probably continue in some other form as the understood (or were coming to understand) the nature of the conflict in Ireland. In a subsequent discussion I was told that if another hunger strike or prison protest developed it would probably lead to demoralisation. Examples were given where Sinn Fein had refused to campaign for INLA prisoners as they were not abstentionist candidates and were due for release.

There was a discussion on publicity and propoganda which centred on the party's weakness in this area. One point that came out was the need for a comprehensive Party programme as well as pamphlets on various issues. A study group was set up to do this work as well as improve education for members.

Women

This was one of the most important discussions. It was obviously contentious but was conducted in a very intelligent and democratic manner. The question of abortion was handled well and it was clear that much education had been done in the party and a resolution supporting a woman's right to choose was carried overwhelmingly. It was decided to take part in and develop women's action groups. A women's commission was set up and the only contentious issue here was that it should be women only. The commission was to produce an analysis on women in Ireland; practical projects and articles for the Starry Plough.

The debate on the International situation concentrated on forming links with other liberation and Republican Socialist groups which supported the right of the Irish people to self-determination. It seemed unclear what links were to be established and what criteria would be used to distinguish between the groups. It was agreed to plan a meeting of these different groups for the future. An observer from the Welsh Republican Socialist Movement suggested a pan-Celtic Republican Socialist conference which was welcomed.

There were no actions on what the BSE's policy was on different international

questions other than solidarity with liberation movements. There was a notion however from London pointing out that ethnic minorities in Britain and other imperialist states were allies of the Irish people. Unfortunately though all agreed with the sentiments the wording was felt to be inadequate. One delegate criticised FEM for not making strong links with black and anti-imperialist groups in Britain.

The other major discussion was on the broad front. Again Sinn Féin was strongly criticised for being sectarian. It was felt that the Hunger Strike action groups around the country should not fall away but it was recognised that a broad front was needed to attract and keep more people in the anti-imperialist struggle. There were no definite proposals but the discussion was very rich in ideas. One issue campaigns were suggested on the one hand with an anti-imperialist front on the other. This discussion was slightly disappointing, in that no clear strategy emerged. Due to lack of time and the importance of the debate a special conference to discuss this was agreed upon, to be held within one month.

All in all the Ard Fhein was very positive in that much had been achieved in terms of support which could be built on and that this was being done. The BSE seems set to progress quite strongly. It was summed up to say that "We've spent 5 years just surviving assassinations, repression and feuding, now we can start growing."