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**POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AND NEWS COVERAGE:  
THE CASE OF SINN FÉIN**

by

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the development of Sinn Féin's communication strategies and considers how news coverage of the party has evolved in recent years, and in particular with the advent of the Irish peace process from the mid-1990s onwards. The aim of the research presented here is to establish the relationship between the development of the party's professional communication apparatus and the evolution of its news coverage and to determine the extent to which the emergence of a sophisticated approach to communication has impacted upon media coverage.

The thesis argues that the development and implementation of the party's professional communication apparatus has been the result of a much wider process of republican reappraisal that took place during the 1980s. This culminated in the 1990s with the transformation of the republican movement into a more constitutional and negotiation-oriented party, while progressively moving away from the armed struggle as a means to achieve Irish re-unification. Moreover, in emphasising that there has been a considerable improvement in the reporting of Sinn Féin; namely that the news media have become progressively more interested in republican predicaments, less biased and more critical of unionism, it also suggests that the improved media coverage must be seen as a result of the political re-alignment of the movement itself.

Ultimately, the main argument of this thesis is that we are now witnessing a new phase of the republican movement and, by proxy, of Northern Irish politics and its coverage in the media. This has meant that Sinn Féin has become more willing to reach a political compromise and to find a peaceful solution to the conflict, and has attempted to affirm itself as a party with political and social interests, other than Irish re-unification. This has also forced the British government to reappraise its own view of the conflict and of Sinn Féin, recognising above all that the party and Northern Irish politics have evolved from a situation of war to one where it is dominated by careful and sensitive diplomacy. The result is that most of the common assumptions held about Sinn Féin including those of some academics, its political communication and its news coverage, must now be reconsidered in light of the radical transformations that have taken place.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

The development and professionalisation of political communication as the systematic communication and publicising of political information has led many to believe that it represents an effective approach to influence the news agenda and media perceptions of political parties. Suggestions have also been made that the relationship between political communication and news coverage is one of cause and effect, whereby communication strategies have an impact in determining the content and shape of the news. From this point of view, it is argued that such acts of communication enable political parties to access the news agenda and influence its framework of coverage.<sup>1</sup>

Although there is an element of relevance in such a premise, it nevertheless fails to acknowledge other issues at stake that are equally important in determining both the success of communication strategies and the content of news. As Miller has suggested, one cannot efficiently nor realistically measure the effectiveness of a communication effort by simply looking at news coverage as 'the success of a particular media strategy may not mean, and in fact tends not to mean, the domination of news agendas or the reproduction of frameworks of analysis' (1994:159). Nor is it possible to measure its level of success without being aware of the pressures which constrain and determine media content, ranging from economic pressures to those imposed by government and legislation in addition to the internal and organisational practices of the media.<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, this means that any study of political communication and news coverage must necessarily examine not only the different acts of communicating politics and the media coverage of the organisation, but also consider its wider political and social genesis and how this has evolved through time. Additionally, rather than solely and simplistically understanding the success of such strategies by reference to the content of news, it is necessary to look at the underlying forms, nuances and representations in coverage.

The aims of this thesis and its underlying research are twofold. Initially, it attempts to explore and illustrate the different complexities in communicating politics by political parties, and in doing so it examines the processes and factors which determine and shape their media coverage. It questions whether, in fact, there is such a clear link between political communication strategies and media coverage, whereby a professional approach to communication has an effect on the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of coverage, or whether this has been somewhat

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<sup>1</sup> This has been mirrored in recent trends in the Sociology of Journalism and its attempts to understand the different factors that condition the production of news. In particular, the emphasis is increasingly placed on the need to also take into consideration the strategies employed by the different sources to influence and shape the content of news, which is now believed to be the combined result of a number of different factors and influences, such as economics and politics, as well as the different strategies employed by sources in accessing the news. See Schlesinger (1990) or Schudson (1989) and (1991).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, McNair (1998) or Schudson (1997).

simplified.<sup>3</sup> Unlike other forms of research, such as Miller (1994), this particular study is not concerned in determining the effect of coverage upon the audience. Instead, if we consider that the process of communication involves three distinct levels and sets of relationships between political actors, news media and public opinion, the emphasis here is placed upon the former two. An important concern is also to examine the ways in which political communication can influence the news, and of course, how the latter can equally influence the former. This is particularly important since although politics and media are two supposedly independent institutions and realms in the public sphere, their complicity and inter-dependence is pronounced.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Focus of the Study***

In order to examine this two-way influence, the research concentrates on the case of the Northern Irish political party Sinn Féin (SF), also known as the political wing of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), aspiring for a united Ireland. The research examines the transformations which have occurred within the party and the wider republican movement, until the reaching of the Good Friday Agreement in April 1998.<sup>5</sup> Of particular relevance are the strategic and political changes it has undergone, from a party which relied mainly on the use of armed struggle to one that has become increasingly more politicised, and has moved into mainstream politics. Paralleling these changes in strategy is a growing awareness of the importance of communicating politics in a professional and sophisticated manner and the usefulness of so-called source strategies.<sup>6</sup> This allows for an examination of the party's approach to political communication and news coverage and its evolution through time. It also permits the re-examination of the common held assumption that it has repeatedly been discriminated against and criminalised in the news. As Miller argues:

the reporting of Northern Ireland varies in relation to political distance from the conflict, the relationship between the particular media system and the state, and the political complexion of the government. Because all three of these criteria can vary over time and in relation to each other, coverage can evolve and change or even be subject to contradictory pressures or struggles that relate to the exigencies of political power or interest. (1994:161)

Undoubtedly, the British government's approach to the conflict and Sinn Féin, has changed considerably in the last decade.<sup>7</sup> It can be suggested that so far there have been three main phases illustrating different governmental attitudes to the Troubles, and indeed to Sinn Féin, although there have been a number of intermediate and transitional periods interspersed. Until

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<sup>3</sup> See Chapter Three.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Curran and Seaton (1997) or Negrine (1989).

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter Four.

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter Five.

<sup>7</sup> See Bean (1994); Cox (1997) or O'Dowd *et al.* (1982).

the rise of the Civil Rights Movement and the subsequent rioting in Northern Ireland (NI) at the end of the 1960s, governmental policy broadly rested on ignoring the problems in the Province, until these were catapulted onto the news in the 1970s (Miller, 1994). A second phase saw a change in governmental attitudes, mirrored in their attempts to control and limit the Troubles, famously described by one government minister as ‘an acceptable level of violence’ (*Sunday Times* Insight Team, 1972 in Miller, 1994:2). This was accompanied by systematic attempts to portray the conflict as a question of law and order, and republicans as mere criminals.

Since the mid-1990s, and in particular following the Labour Party’s victory in the 1997 general election, British government strategy has changed. Increasingly, Sinn Féin is seen as a legitimate political party and the Northern Irish question as a political and historical conflict, based on a lack of equality and co-operation between two opposing communities. This change in strategy, and to some extent in political and social distance between Northern Ireland and Britain, mirrored in the government’s willingness to ‘withdraw’ from the Province if the majority of its population so wishes, has necessarily affected media coverage. For example, already in 1984 Curtis commented that:

as circumstances alter, and the British government’s relationships to liberation movements shift, so the terminology changes: Britain’s departure from its colonies has been punctuated by many a transformation of ‘terrorists’ into ‘statesmen’. And as the authorities’ attitudes alter, the media follow suit. (p.136)

As a political force Sinn Féin was practically non-existent until the rise of the Civil Rights Movement,<sup>8</sup> and it was only in the late 1970s and early 1980s that it began to gain considerable political impetus. Existing research has also shown that the party was largely excluded from the airwaves until the earlier 1990s.<sup>9</sup> This clearly showed a parallel between government strategy and subsequent media coverage, whereby the party’s exclusion from the news was based on the view that it was chiefly a criminal organisation. On the rare occasions that it did feature in the news, this took place in an openly biased and discriminating way, further reinforcing the view that republicans were ‘criminals’. Rita O’Hare, Sinn Féin’s ex-director of publicity argued in 1991 that:

there’s the words that are used like “terrorist”, “murderer”, whereas if it’s a loyalist assassination of a Catholic it’s a “killing” or if it’s a British soldier that shoots somebody dead on the street it’s an “accidental discharge”. The whole language is very carefully chosen to portray a view that it’s something that’s internal. That it’s the fault of the people of the North, that they can’t get on together, but that it’s mainly the fault of the IRA, who are blind mad bombers. (in *Troops Out*, 1991:13)

Also, as Curtis documented:

violence dominates British media coverage of the Six Counties. [ ] The British media not only concentrate on violence to the exclusion of politics, but they also, as critics had long pointed out, report violent incidents without giving any context or explanation for them. [ ] Not only does violence, reported in a non-explanatory manner, dominate the

<sup>8</sup> See Chapter Four.

<sup>9</sup> See Curtis (1984); Henderson *et al.* (1990); Lago (1998) and Miller (1994).

coverage: it is also presented as if it were the almost exclusive preserve of republicans. (1984:105)

It was also during the 1980s that the British government imposed a direct form of censorship upon television coverage of Northern Ireland through the Broadcasting Ban.<sup>10</sup> This draconian piece of legislation prohibited the broadcasting of voices of representatives or supporters of eleven organisations, amongst which were Sinn Féin and the IRA, and was in force from the 19<sup>th</sup> October 1988 until the 16<sup>th</sup> September 1994.<sup>11</sup> Underlying the decision to introduce such a measure was Margaret Thatcher's belief that terrorists survived on the so-called oxygen of publicity, and if removed from the airwaves they would eventually disappear. According to Jonathan Barton of the British Broadcasting Corporation (*BBC*):

the ban made it almost impossible for interviewers to challenge the logic of Sinn Féin's position. On many occasions before the ban was imposed, *BBC* interviewers had exposed the dishonesty of the bullet and ballot position of Sinn Féin. [ ] The ban almost ruled out combative interviews: once an actor's voice was dubbed over, the cut and thrust was lost.<sup>12</sup>

Whilst the ban effectively removed republicans from the airwaves it was less effective in its later stages due to changes in the political environment, such as the start of the peace process.

As one journalist suggested:

the major advantage of the lifting of the broadcasting ban is that we are able to report fairly on matters concerning Sinn Féin and the IRA. When we were unable to carry proper interviews, we could only provide the public with a second-hand account of what Sinn Féin were saying. However good and conscientious the reporting, there is much to be gained from the opportunity to judge at first-hand. [ ] The 'oxygen of publicity argument' remains unproven in our view.<sup>13</sup>

The republican move away from a purely military strategy, coupled with changed British government attitudes, resulted in an increase in television coverage of Sinn Féin from the mid-1990s onwards (Lago, 1998). In addition, some of the deep-seated bias that dominated previous coverage and was evident in the language used had largely disappeared and instead, republican politicians were seen as legitimate political actors. Richard Ayre from the *BBC*, suggested that the removal of the Broadcasting Ban meant that 'audiences can once again judge Sinn Féin and other organisations by the way they answer questions as well as by the words they use'.<sup>14</sup>

Crucially, what any longitudinal examination of news coverage of republicanism shows is that media attitudes have progressively changed since the early 1970s, and these have been documented elsewhere.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, whilst Miller (1994) states that media coverage of Northern Ireland is the result of three factors: the political distance; the relationship between the

<sup>10</sup> The Irish also introduced a similar form of direct censorship, yet most research has tended to concentrate on determining the effects of the British Broadcasting Ban. See Curtis (1996a); Curtis and Jempson (1993) and Purcell (1996).

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Miller (1996a).

<sup>12</sup> In letter, 26<sup>th</sup> February 1996.

<sup>13</sup> Jonathan Rooper, from the *BBC*, in letter, 19<sup>th</sup> January 1996.

<sup>14</sup> In letter, 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1996.

<sup>15</sup> See Curtis (1984); Henderson *et al.* (1990); Lago (1998); Miller (1994) and Rolston and Miller (1996).

media and the government; and the characteristics of the government, equally relevant in determining the parameters of coverage are the political and communicative strategies of the different parties. Thus, whilst Sinn Féin was discriminated against, repudiated and regarded mainly as a mouthpiece for violence, its own changed approach, and move towards mainstream politics also affected its media coverage. As one *BBC* journalist states, ‘we have not changed our editorial approach, however, the issues have moved on since September 1994, as might be expected, and coverage reflects this’.<sup>16</sup>

Although this research concentrates upon the case of Sinn Féin, it also aims to contribute to a much wider area of academic knowledge, and in particular, to the understanding of political communication and media coverage, and the ability of political parties to influence the news media. By focusing on Sinn Féin as a non-mainstream party, it also considers how the use of sophisticated communication practices results in a more ‘beneficial’ coverage, and therefore overrides any underlying media bias against poorer and marginalised groups in society.

### ***Existing Research***

Since the current troubles in Northern Ireland began in 1968, there has been an explosion of research on the area. Hundreds of books and an even larger number of articles have been published. (Whyte, 1991:x)

Although this might be true, and indeed in 1991 there were more than 7000 items on the topic<sup>17</sup> (Whyte, 1991), the problem with the existent research is not so much its sheer volume, but instead its nature and diversity, or lack of it. Whilst Whyte (1991) correctly states that there has been a plethora of research on Northern Ireland that has examined a diversity of issues, little attention has been paid to the political aspect of the Troubles and its actors. For example, the *Register of Research on Northern Ireland* (Ó Maoláin, 1993) lists 41 items of research on agriculture and environment, 63 on economics, and 87 on education, but only 36 on politics and government and 35 on the conflict, under which category falls violence and paramilitary groups. This shows that within the range of research on Northern Ireland there are few studies of its politics, the conflict and possible solutions to it. Thus, rather than embrace the challenges that the Troubles raise, researchers have instead largely eschewed such issues and focused on what are clearly far less contentious areas. As Miller suggests, ‘the most serious point emerging [ ] is that the conflict in Northern Ireland seems not to have made much of an impact on mainstream social science’ (1998:17).

To account for this there are a number of possible explanations, including the geographical proximity and the range of emotions that Northern Ireland raises, and in particular the

<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Rooper, from the *BBC*, in letter, 19<sup>th</sup> January 1996.

<sup>17</sup> The 1993 *Register of Research on Northern Ireland* compiled by Ó Maoláin, includes 605 entries covering the period from 1989 to 1993, although the editors warn that this must not be seen as comprising all the research conducted during this time.

sensitivity of the issues and the obstacles that researchers face. On the one hand, there is a lack of financial support from research institutions that instead prefer to award such assistance to less controversial themes (Miller, 1998). Also important is the range of difficulties that the individual researchers must confront in addressing such delicate and on-going matters. For example, researching a so-called 'terrorist' organisation could be 'rewarded' by the manifest interest of British intelligence or the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), as some authors, such as Miller and Sluka have reported. The simple matter of investigating the Troubles, and in particular those groups such as Sinn Féin, may be seen as indicating the political inclination of the researcher and its deviance as 'when writing about volatile political subjects one is often accused of being partisan, or being an apologist or propagandist rather than an objective social scientist' (Sluka, 1989:13).

There is also another dimension: that of the lack of stability in Northern Ireland and its politics. For example, since this research commenced in the Autumn of 1996, a new republican cease-fire has been established, a peace agreement reached, and a semi-autonomous assembly set up and dissolved in less than a year, to name but a few events. This means that in terms of research, the narrated present can very suddenly become the irrelevant past. Moreover, the complexities of the Northern Irish situation also influence how the different political actors operate in the field and their willingness, or not as in this case, to assist in the research process. For example, for a number of years Sinn Féin and its party members have been targeted both by the security forces and by opposition organisations, and this necessarily infringes upon the openness of the movement. One news story mentioned that a 100lb loyalist bomb was placed outside the party's offices in the Falls Road, Belfast, on the 28<sup>th</sup> April 1997: the fifth attack in five weeks (*An Phoblacht/Republican News [AP/RN]*, 1<sup>st</sup> May 1997). However, since significant and widespread political and social change has only recently occurred, it is quite plausible that the different factors which have so far impeded and constrained research will change, or even disappear in the forthcoming years. This may lead to a further 'explosion' of research, yet this time more concerned with a conflict which has caused the death of approximately 3500 people<sup>18</sup> (Cain, 2000) and a pronounced level of destruction.

### **Researching Sinn Féin**

In terms of the limited body of research into the conflict and its politics, it could be suggested that, similar to the news coverage of the conflict, most academics have largely ignored Sinn Féin and its communicative efforts. Miller (1998) stresses that the majority of research and literature on Northern Ireland has failed to adequately address the relevant issues. In particular, he argues that researchers and their studies are politically and ideologically labelled, an opinion

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<sup>18</sup> These figures cover the period from July 1969 until December 1998.



shared by Sluka (1989). Illustrating this is a body of research on the republican movement that concentrates on the terrorist and violent aspects of the conflict, while largely ignoring the political and social dimensions. Within this category, we could locate the works of Coogan (1995); Drake (1995); Moxon-Browne (1981); Sluka (1989) and Tugwell (1981). A similar body of literature, but one which extends its concerns to encompass social questions includes studies by, for example, Bell (1994); Darby (1997); Davis (1994) and O'Dochartaigh (1997). There is also another substantial body of literature which examines the notions of republicanism and republican ideology, such as Munck (1992); O'Brien (1995) and Patterson (1989).

However, literature on Sinn Féin as a political party is practically non-existent, with the exception of a few items like Smith (1995), that nevertheless also focuses on the IRA. Clearly, there is a shared attraction by researchers in investigating violence, and by the news media in portraying it on television. This further reinforces the idea that Sinn Féin has been left at the margins of not only politics and the media, but also of the academic world. With the exception of one article on the implications of Sinn Féin's participation in the Northern Irish local elections, written by Knox (1990) in *Parliamentary Affairs*, there has been a visible vacuum in the literature. Still, it can also be suggested that this excessive focus upon the IRA and the violent aspects of the republican movement, are a direct reflection of its own strategy which, until the mid-1990s, placed a strong emphasis on military action. Emerging slowly, is a different body of literature that is more concerned with Sinn Féin as a political party and its role in Northern Irish politics, and includes work by Bean (1994); Cox (1997) and Shirlow and McGovern (1998) and the more recent examination of the Good Friday Agreement by Ruane and Todd (1999).

The body of work which is directly related to this project, and which examines either Sinn Féin's presence in the news media or the different communication strategies employed by the party, is still limited to a handful of items. At the same time, whilst these constituted groundbreaking work at time of publication, they are now somewhat outdated, as a result of the developments in Northern Ireland, modifications in media approaches, and changes within the republican movement itself. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that these items of research represent what has so far been conducted in terms of investigating Sinn Féin's media strategies and its presence in the news media, and as such provide an invaluable starting point. Firstly, there is the literature that focused on Sinn Féin's presence in the news media, such as the research by Schlesinger *et al.* (1983) and Henderson *et al.* (1990). What both these studies showed was the extent to which Sinn Féin and the wider republican movement were discriminated against in the news media, and in particular on television.

Whilst Schlesinger *et al.* (1983) were primarily concerned with illustrating the representation of terrorism on television news, Henderson *et al.* (1990) exemplified the widespread impact of the introduction of the Broadcasting Ban in the 1980s, and the implications this had upon the televising of republicans and public understanding. What emerged from both studies was that there was a deep-seated bias in the way the news media represented Sinn Féin on television news, whereby:

the coverage of Northern Irish Affairs in the British media has tended to simplify violent incidents, to avoid historical background, to concentrate on human-interest stories and to rely heavily on official sources. Even during periods of the most intense constitutional activity, such as election campaigns, the story has been pre-eminently one of violence, and of irrational, inexplicable violence at that. (Schlesinger *et al.*, 1983:37)

Both studies also focused on illuminating the different governmental attempts to determine and define the parameters of coverage of Northern Ireland and republicans, and its ultimate aim to eradicate them from the news:

what is at stake in the battle over the Ban (broadcasting) is the official view of the 'troubles' which seeks to portray its enemies in Ireland as 'terrorists', lacking in any political motivation and as being simply criminals and gangsters. Successive governments have tried to limit and preferably eliminate any hearing for their enemies in Ireland by appealing to the 'national interest'. The Broadcasting Ban marks the first attempt in the current phrase of the Troubles to do this by legislative action. (Henderson *et al.*, 1990:48)

What these studies showed was that media coverage of republicanism emerged from very clear and concerted attempts to delineate it within parameters that were acceptable to the British government. It also revealed the level of complicity between the government and the news media, which ultimately showed that 'coverage of Sinn Féin has never allowed them an "easy platform"'. On the contrary, much coverage has been directed at discrediting the party as part of the campaign to defeat "terrorism" (Henderson *et al.*, 1990:50). An analysis of this campaign to discredit Sinn Féin, but also to shape public perceptions of the conflict is what forms the basis of the two other relevant pieces of research by Curtis (1984) and Miller (1994). Whilst both studies are similar in a number of ways, the period in which Curtis (1984) conducted her work was considerably different to the latter. As Curtis states in her introduction 'this book tells a story that is sad, infuriating, and sometimes, in a perverse way, even funny. It is about the propaganda war that has been fought, through the British media, for the hearts and minds of the British people on the question of Ireland' (1984:1).

Primarily, the author was interested in examining the different processes and factors that determined the content of British news, and which led her to draw similar conclusions to those of Schlesinger *et al.* (1983) and later, Henderson *et al.* (1990). Nevertheless, she was also interested in examining the roles played by the government and its agencies, as well as by the different political parties, in determining the news output in what she termed 'the battle for hearts and minds'. It is because of this approach that the work of Curtis pioneers the study of

this subject matter, bridging the gap between communication strategies and news, and from which it emerged that:

the record of the British media coverage of Ireland has been far from heroic. Those in positions of power, both in government and in the media, have proved most reluctant to provide a full picture of events in the North or their government, and have made considerable efforts to prevent journalists, dramatists and film-makers from exploring the situation from any angle other than that favoured by the British establishment. (1984:275)

It was also the work of Curtis that examined for the first time the republican propaganda machine and traced the first ever known history of the republican press office. She also assessed the different practices of the office, its organisation and its officers, whilst considering the opinions of journalists on the republican media machine.<sup>19</sup> One of the essential arguments that Curtis raised was that:

republicans have never prioritised press relations. The improvements they have made – except for the acquisition of the telex machine – have been largely a by-product of other developments. Such publicity as they have won has come less through the publicists' efforts than through the impetus of events: the 1981 hunger strike went virtually disregarded until Bobby Sands' election to Westminster. Once the media became interested, the existence of the press office doubtless helped, but it was not a determining factor. (1984:273)

This demonstrated that during the period in question, the 1970s to mid-1980s, it was clear that communication and publicity efforts were not one of the party's main concerns and instead, political communication was more spontaneous and reactionary.

Ten years later, Miller's (1994) study also concentrated on examining the propaganda war and the battle to influence the coverage of Northern Ireland. Emerging from a similar starting point, Miller analysed governmental attempts to control and shape media coverage and focused in determining the impact upon public opinion. From his research, the idea that the British government was actively engaged in attempts to determine not only the content of news, but also the ways in which it was constructed, was further reinforced and exemplified. It established that the government and its agencies were collaborating in organised forms of overt and covert propaganda and that they tended to dominate and influence journalists and ultimately the news. Even so, Miller suggested that 'alternative sources can and do make an impact, but they tend to be limited by resourcing and credibility problems as well as by official attempts at censorship and intimidation of the media' (1994:159). What this highlighted was the possibility of non-official sources, such as Sinn Féin, to influence the news agenda, and thus challenge official sources' definitions by providing alternative frameworks of understanding.

One such avenue that Sinn Féin explored was the use of its own newspaper, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* which formed the basis of Picard's (1991) study. What Picard was

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<sup>19</sup> See Chapter Five.

interested in identifying was the type of messages that the party communicated to its own supporters. From this, a number of relevant points emerged, such as the fact that 'political justification for IRA activity accounts for one-third of the content of this republican paper, with reports of provocations by security forces and others providing 25 per cent and IRA-initiated violence less than 5 per cent of the total' (1990:90). However, one of the main problems with his research is that it is also considerably outdated. Furthermore, it reflects a period in which Sinn Féin's principle strategies centred on the use of military tactics, while acts of communicating politics were seen as a secondary. Nevertheless, what was perhaps most crucial in Picard's piece was his conclusion, in which he describes his vision of the future as follows:

this study suggests that supporters of IRA terrorism may be willing to separate themselves from terrorism or help end some violence if social and political grievances are ameliorated, as some authors have suggested. The independence of the six counties remains a separate issue, but the messages of the Sinn Féin paper suggest that support for violence might diminish if sectarian and social discrimination are addressed. (1990:102)

The work presented here will not only add to the existing literature by updating it and continuing the examination of Sinn Féin's communication strategies and its media coverage throughout the 1980s and 1990s, but it also addresses new and recent developments. More specifically, it traces the professionalisation of republican communication efforts, namely by examining a variety of communicative practices and the adoption of new platforms of communication, such as the Internet. In addition, it considers how the political transitions which have taken place within the party and Northern Ireland have impacted on its political communication and forced the news media to re-evaluate its posture and coverage of Irish republicanism. Consequentially, whilst this research continues the investigative avenues initiated by the likes of Curtis, Henderson *et al.* and Miller, it also explores new areas of concern in terms of Sinn Féin's communicative efforts and its subsequent reporting in the news.

## Chapter Two: Methodology

Whilst an important component of any research project lies in the theoretical framework which underpins any attempt to address the research question, of equal importance is the methodology adopted. Originating from the word ‘method’,<sup>1</sup> methodology is commonly understood as ‘a system of methods and rules applicable to research work in a given science or art’ (*Chambers Dictionary*, 1993:1053). It has to take into consideration the specific characteristics and aims of the research question and its object of study, and must also adapt to the context in which the process took place. Hence, research methodology should be designed to be the most appropriate means of investigating a particular subject area by a particular researcher.<sup>2</sup> An additional dimension that must be addressed is the different components and rules of engagement of the methodology, and its limitations. Thus, in understanding and interpreting research findings and any proposed conclusions, it is necessary to be familiar with the methodology that facilitated and conditioned their emergence. It is from such a perspective that this chapter outlines the different methodologies which were adopted during the research process, whilst simultaneously examining the personal difficulties which were faced and have necessarily determined this project and its ensuing findings.

As Bruhn Jensen and Jankowski (1991) argue, each research project has four levels of analysis. Firstly, there is the object of analysis<sup>3</sup> as identified in the opening statement. Then there are the theoretical framework(s),<sup>4</sup> here constituted by a theoretical analysis of relevant concepts<sup>5</sup> and an historical and sociological analysis of Irish republicanism.<sup>6</sup> The remaining two levels of analysis constitute what the authors term ‘analytical apparatus’ and the actual methodology, which emerges in the second part and third of this thesis and is the subject matter of this chapter.

In terms of methodological options, it can be suggested that there are two main approaches, (a) quantitative and (a) qualitative, although variations and combinations of these are possible. As the terms themselves suggest, quantitative methods refer primarily to attempts to measure the different elements within a sample, such as the number of times a particular word or camera shot is used during a news bulletin. Alternatively, qualitative methods place their emphasis on

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<sup>1</sup> Defined as ‘the mode or rule used in carrying out a task or accomplishing an aim’ (*Chambers Dictionary*, 1993:1053).

<sup>2</sup> It is important to take into account the particular characteristics of the researcher and how this can have an impact upon the research, namely in terms of interpretation and contextualisation of findings but also in terms of specific methodological options, see Punch (1993). Thus, it is also necessary to acknowledge questions of gender, age, background and how these influence the research.

<sup>3</sup> ‘As identified and characterised through reference to the purpose and context of the inquiry’ (Bruhn Jensen and Jankovski, 1991:6-7).

<sup>4</sup> As ‘the configuration of concepts which specifies the epistemological status of the other levels and which hence assigns explanatory value to the specific rendition of the object of analysis that the methodology produces’ (Bruhn Jensen and Jankovski, 1991:6-7).

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter Three.

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter Four.

evaluating the different sample components, thus holding a critical interpretative function absent in quantitative approaches. Moreover, qualitative analysis also examines ‘the relationships between the internal dynamics of the written texts and the social organisation in which such texts achieve circulation’ (Deacon *et al.*, 1999:115).

Whilst there has been a tendency for research methodologies to concentrate exclusively on qualitative methods of analysis such as ethnographic studies,<sup>7</sup> and others on purely quantitative approaches like traditional content analysis,<sup>8</sup> increasingly, research has explored their complementarity.<sup>9</sup> Consequentially, the research methodology becomes inherently more complete in observing both the qualitative and quantitative dimension of the object of study. Furthermore, as Ackroyd and Hughes have suggested:

it is the nature of the research problem that should dictate the appropriate research method; sometimes quantification is required, sometimes not. There is no intrinsic virtue in either style of method. What we have been asked to choose between are promissory notes, not achievements. There is a great deal wrong with quantitative methods just as there is a great deal wrong with qualitative ones. [ ] This is not to say that a preference for one style or the other is inappropriate; it is to recognise that both are still in their infancy and *neither one is markedly superior to the other in all respects.* (1981:30)

An appropriate way forward, and one which this research has adopted, is to acknowledge their differences and assume the most suitable approach for each particular section of the research. Such an approach permits that their individual negative aspects are limited, whilst their positive contributions enhanced. Thus, the methodology adopted in this research arises from a combination of different forms of quantitative and qualitative analysis. As Stacey has suggested, a ‘multi-method approach [ ] provides an additional option; the possibility of employing not just one type of method per study but instead a strategically selected set of methods’ (1969 in Burgess, 1984:145).

### **Sources of Information and Methods of Analysis**

For the examination of Sinn Féin’s communication strategies and its media coverage, a variety of sources of information and methods of analysis were used, ranging from more traditional sources and methods, such as written texts and content analysis, to alternative sources of information such as the internet and appropriate analysis.<sup>10</sup> The overall aim of this approach was to collect and analyse an extensive range of information and data, ultimately contributing

<sup>7</sup> Defined as ‘a term usually applied to the acts both of observing directly the behaviour of a social group and producing a written description thereof’ (Marshall, 1998:202).

<sup>8</sup> ‘A term mainly used to describe the *quantitative* analysis of content. Quantitative content analysis mainly focuses on manifest features of texts, and requires the development of a coding frame that identifies which aspects should be quantified and in what way’ (Deacon *et al.*, 1999:389).

<sup>9</sup> This is a predominant feature of one of the most recent communications and culture research manuals by Deacon *et al.* (1999).

<sup>10</sup> For example, any analysis of the Internet must take into account that it combines many of the characteristics of print and broadcasting, and thus the analysis must examine both the quality of its text as a still and as a moving form. See Chapter Seven for a more in-depth discussion of the medium and appropriate methods of analysis.

towards a more complete and accurate understanding of the subject matter. The research also examined the use of new technologies in communicating politics as an additional source of information, as well as an aspect to be studied. The use of a variety of methods of analysis was adapted to suit the range of data examined and the difficulties that were encountered during the process, namely the loss of a significant proportion of original news media data due to changes in the provision of databases<sup>11</sup> and the inability to gain extensive access to Sinn Féin.

The starting point of this project lay in collecting relevant information from different sources in order to obtain the necessary in-depth background to form the basis of the theoretical and historical analysis.<sup>12</sup> Not only were these sources used to identify existent research but also to provide the required theoretical and historical knowledge which would permeate the entire research process. To locate and obtain the pertinent academic and non-academic works, a number of libraries were used, such as the local Stirling University Library, the Glasgow University Library and the Linenhall Library in Belfast. Additionally, catalogue searches, for example the British Library Catalogue, and on-line databases such as BIDS (Bibliographical Services for the United Kingdom Higher Education Community) were also used. The *Register of Research on Northern Ireland* (Ó'Maoláin, 1993) also proved to be a valuable, if somewhat outdated source. Overall, the most useful source of information on the Northern Irish Troubles, was the Political Collection of the Linenhall Library in Belfast.

In regard to non-academic sources of data, the range of these was extensive and included print, visual and oral material. One relevant source was the documents produced by Sinn Féin itself, both contemporary and historical, such as books, pamphlets, newspapers and internal memos. These were obtained either from the Linenhall Library Political Collection, the party itself, its bookshop, or from its Internet site. Another significant source of data was the media, in particular British newspapers such as the *Times*, the *Independent* and the *Guardian*, but also Irish and Northern Irish papers, including the *Irish Times* and the *Belfast Telegraph*, both in print format as well as on their Internet sites. Television also provided a rich source of material namely news programmes on *BBC*, *Independent Television News (ITN)* on *Independent Television (ITV)* and *Channel 4*. In essence, the media provided up-to-date details on the latest developments in Northern Ireland, as well as mirroring the political and communicative activities that were taking place. One particularly informative source, which is becoming increasingly more useful for academic and non-academic research, is the Internet, since it

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<sup>11</sup> This refers to the data on party mentions that formed the basis of Chapter Eight and Nine. The original data was obtained in June 1999 from a database called *Profound*, to which the University of Stirling library subscribed. However, when the same database was accessed in January 2000, it was found that the university library had replaced this with a new system called *FT Profile*. Yet, since the results obtained from the *Profound* database and from the *FT* database were dramatically different, this meant that all the data had to be retrieved once again, this time on the new system.

<sup>12</sup> See Chapters Three and Four.

facilitates access to data which otherwise could not be obtained, as in the case of material held in archives in the United States of America (USA).

An additional category of information was derived from three differing sets of informants: the party, journalists and what have been termed 'others'.<sup>13</sup> In regard to the first category, four interviews were conducted with three Sinn Féin party workers in the Prisoners of War department and the Public Relations (PR) department of the Falls Road, Belfast. It was not possible to conduct more interviews with party representatives due to their unwillingness to cooperate and to respond to faxes and e-mails. Information was also obtained via e-mail from Fergus O'Dea, responsible for the *AP/RN* web site and its Republican Mailing List (*RM\_D*). Journalists participation was established through direct interviews and the completion of a written survey. Out of 20 potential survey participants, representing both print and television news from Britain, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, 12 replied. Whilst out of 15 requested in-depth interviews, three were conducted.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, eight letters received from journalists and news producers for a previous research project, were also used. The third category of informants included a number of other formal and informal interviews with republican activists, local community workers.

Regarding the original material used, this was varied and obtained from a number of different sources. Two main types of data were analysed, media and party, although a number of sub-variants exist within these. The media sources included, newspaper and television texts, as well as responses from interviews and the survey, and from the Internet and e-mail. The analysis of this information concentrated on using both quantitative and qualitative techniques, such as textual and content analysis. The overriding aim in using these resources was to establish, both in quantitative and qualitative terms, Sinn Féin's presence in the news media, as well as identify how the news media perceived and treated Sinn Féin. Furthermore, the survey sent to journalists provided valuable details, which were analysed through qualitative methods. The party data included the following: party publications, such as leaflets, pamphlets, manifestos, press releases, press packs and diaries; a second sub-category of visual data, for instance postcards, badges, car stickers, posters and fliers; and finally, a third category of new media data, such as Internet sites and e-mail discussion lists. Textual analysis and some quantification were used with the aim of establishing the party's communication techniques, their successes and failures. Due to the limited number of interviews conducted with party representatives, and in order to gain insight into party positions on the relevant matters, alternative sources of information were used, such as commentary written by party members.

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<sup>13</sup> See Appendix One (p.278) for a list of all informants.

<sup>14</sup> Of all 12 respondents, one requested that all information was kept confidential and two journalists returned the survey without any form of identification as to who they were or to which organisation they belonged.



The original party data was obtained from the Linenhall Library's Political Collection, lent by David Miller from the University of Stirling, obtained from the party itself, purchased in the republican bookshop, found on the party's World Wide Web (WWW) site or through the subscription to e-mail services. The media references were derived from the collection of newspapers and the recording of television programmes by the author, and from the television archive of the Stirling Media Research Institute, and from Internet databases such as the *Belfast Telegraph* archive, the *Irish Times* Internet site, and the *Global News Service* from *Profound*.<sup>15</sup>

### **Problems and Limitations**

In terms of this particular research project, the main difficulties encountered were obstacles arising from the subject of study. These relate to Sinn Féin itself but also to more general problems faced in researching Northern Ireland and conflict situations<sup>16, 17</sup> Bell notes that:

the Troubles kill few and involve only a small minority in the politics or the armed struggles. Much of the island, even much of Northern Ireland, is mostly peaceful at least on the surface. Few, if too many, live on the dangerous edge. The rest have adjusted. There has been atrocity, killing, but no general slaughter. Belfast, centre of the Troubles, is not Beirut, and Ireland is not a combat zone. (1994:xii)

Nevertheless, there are still inherent difficulties in researching in Northern Ireland, and in particular Belfast. On the one hand, Belfast is still a divided and oppressed city of communities that have separated themselves along Protestant/loyalist, Catholic/nationalist lines, and some of which are physically separated by 'peace' lines.<sup>18</sup> For the inexperienced and unfamiliar researcher this can prove problematic, as it was in my case, more so since this research focused on one such community. Sluka revealed from his experience of researching a republican/Catholic community that although he did make a number of good friends whilst researching and living in the Divis Flats complex in Belfast, he never quite adapted to the environment and 'the subjective experience of doing research in Belfast was one of living in an oppressive and dangerous environment, of the unpleasant experience of political violence, and of gradual politicisation of the ethnographer' (1989:36).

### **A personal experience**

Personally, I found it very challenging to visit and research in Belfast, even for very brief periods of time. As an outsider, the city seemed to me a violent and uninviting place, with its strong security fortifications and the frequent sightings of armed forces on the streets.<sup>19</sup> Although I visited Belfast for the first time in 1992, and subsequently returned in 1996 and

<sup>15</sup> An Internet service which provided access to an archive of over 200 world-wide, based newspapers, situated at <http://www.profound.co.uk/> accessed from the University of Stirling library.

<sup>16</sup> For example the Official Secrets Act and the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) also affect research carried out in Northern Ireland. Namely, the PTA gives the security forces the right to seize material and question researchers. See, for example, Robertson and Nicol (1992).

<sup>17</sup> See Miller (1998).

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Quinn (1994).

<sup>19</sup> Note that there have been some changes in the level of policing since the reaching of the Good Friday Agreement in April 1998.

1997, little seemed to have changed. It was only in 1998 that I noticed for the first time some transformations, namely a reduction in police presence on the streets. Nonetheless, it continued to be as intimidating as it had been before. Furthermore, such association of conflict and violence were clearly apparent within Sinn Féin, and in particular in its fortified offices in the Falls Road, or more recently in the nearby Old Conway Mill offices in West Belfast, with their extensive security checks, security cameras and reinforced doors.

Equally, I was also unhappy with some of the arrangements I was forced to make in order to conduct my research, in particular to undertake interviews. On one specific occasion I had arranged, with the help of an assistant of a West Belfast Catholic Priest, to interview a republican commentator of the current Sinn Féin leadership, whom I was told would be very valuable for my research. My instructions were to go to the community centre in one of West Belfast nationalist neighbourhoods where I would meet my interviewee. When I arrived at the meeting point, I was told that I would be taken to another house a few blocks away, and was escorted there by one of the centre's volunteers. I was then directed to a house and sent there on my own where I found myself left alone with my interviewee, whom I had not previously met and whose identity I did not know, in a place I was unfamiliar with. Although he was very friendly and helpful, in retrospect I realised the naiveté of my actions, but at the time I was so keen to get on with my interviews that I simply did not consider my own safety, until later. Although this might seem relatively inconsequential for some, the fact is that as a researcher I found this problematic, and on one occasion I was warned by Sinn Féin officers not to carry Sinn Féin publicity material on the streets without concealing it for fear of retaliation.

With the exception of a few of its workers, I found Sinn Féin itself a secretive and largely unhelpful organisation, that seemed unwilling to respond to my numerous requests for information. One of my interviewees suggested that I keep our two-hour conversation secret until the very last stages of my research, in case it became public that I had spoken to him as Sinn Féin would no longer be willing to talk to me. Even so, despite countless letters, phone calls, faxes and e-mails, the silence from the party continued and where access was established, this could not be recorded and generally consisted of propagandistic republican information. For example, during one opportunity I had to interview a Sinn Féin press officer, regardless of my efforts, the officer very blatantly managed to evade my carefully crafted questions, and instead all I ended up with was pro-republican publicity and commentary on the British government's own propaganda machine. My interviewee also extensively communicated the party's line on punishment beatings, that this should not be criticised without a detailed understanding of the republican ethos, although this was not in any way the intended focus of the interview. Those party workers I managed to access, with the exception of the Prisoners of War department,

refused to let me record their interviews, and were also reluctant to let me take notes.

Problems of access were also faced in interviewing journalists, although to a lesser extent and perhaps fuelled by growing pressures upon journalists and producers to deliver news within stricter deadlines and budgets. In some instances the lack of superior authorisation, namely from newspaper editors was also problematic, while a number of journalists who were allowed and were willing to participate in the study emphasised that this would have to be done on a totally confidential basis. Two journalists even went as far as erasing a small identification number that I had inscribed on the back page of the survey, and returned the form to me in an unidentifiable envelope without any accompanying note.

Other aspects that seemed to account for some of the difficulties faced during the research process were age and gender: I found that I was repeatedly dismissed because of the former and that I was treated in a patronising or dismissive manner. More importantly was the latter: in a society where, it can be argued, the male gender predominates, I was often dismissed because of my gender. Morgan has eloquently suggested that:

qualitative methodology and ethnography after all has its own brand of machismo with its image of the male sociologist bringing back news from the fringes of society, the lower depths, the mean streets, areas traditionally 'off limits' to women investigators. (1981 in Lawrinson and Harris, 1994:65)

Instead of being seen as a researcher engaged in valuable study, I was treated as a young, naïve woman who could easily be manipulated and patronised.

### **Objective research?**

Still, the problems faced during this research project were not just confined to feelings of insecurity and difficulties in gaining access. Another question surrounded the challenge of conducting objective research. Fuelled by a feeling of not being comfortable and safe in Belfast, and aggravated by some of the experiences of dealing with informants, meant that throughout the research I found myself wondering whether or not I could be objective about the project. For example, Kevin Toolis who wrote *Rebel Heart's – Journeys within the IRA's soul* (1995), failed to sustain an objective view of his research when he allowed his personal feelings to interfere. As part of the background study for his book, he interviewed a woman called Joan Dorris, the sister of a young IRA volunteer from the East Tyrone Brigade, shot dead by the RUC. Following one of Toolis' interviews with her, in which he hoped to find out why her brother had joined the IRA, he wrote:

the same night I phoned the Dorris home and asked Joan Dorris out on a date. I was not really sure why I wanted to do it; perhaps it was because I wanted her, perhaps it was because I wanted to be with this special sexual prize, an I-R-A M-A-A-N's sister, and perhaps I wanted to identify myself as an I-R-A M-A-A-N's sister boyfriend. (1995:43)

In this instance, Toolis demonstrated that there is a very thin line between being and remaining an objective researcher and becoming emotionally or personally involved with the study. Also, this shows that the aspiration to conduct objective research is idealistic, particularly since it is not possible to be truly objective when ultimately, as human beings, researchers are culturally, socially and politically loaded with creeds and opinions. It is this aspect of the researcher, as a partial and constructed individual, which will determine how he or she chooses to act in the field. As suggested by Punch, 'ineluctably, the researcher is drawn into some participation and must decide himself (or herself) where the border of legitimacy lies' (1993:186). In this sense, I have tried as far as possible to remain outside the conflict and not to take any stance: it is not my aim here to defend or to criticise the Northern Irish conflict nor Sinn Féin's role in it.

### ***Re-evaluating the Research Question***

In order to minimise potential consequences arising from the different problems faced during the research process, it was decided to broaden the range of the study methods used as well as the different sources of information, and to increase the variety of data. Becker (1970 in Lee, 1992), argues that when studying non-mainstream groups,<sup>20</sup> researchers can and should use alternative sources of information. Rather than solely relying on direct sources of information, that proved to be so difficult to access, complementary sources were used, such as surveys and party document analysis, and alternative forms of communication, like e-mail discussion and news lists. The simple fact that access to the party was difficult to obtain and in some cases absolutely impossible, also provided valuable information on the structure and organisation of Sinn Féin's communication apparatus and their strategies, namely in dealing with requests for information.<sup>21</sup> Ultimately, although Sanders has argued that 'one cannot "learn the ropes" of being a researcher without suffering from "rope burns"' (1980 in Lee, 1992:138), it is important to note that research methodologies must suit the research question and the subject of study.

Equally important is that such approaches must also suit the researcher, as Sluka comments:

the fact remains that despite the obvious difficulties and dangers involved, much successful research has been done in Northern Ireland. But anyone who has done such research did not ignore or belittle the dangers involved – rather, they took them fully into account and made conscious efforts to minimise or ameliorate them. (1989:22)

Thus, both the research question and the methodology that had been initially devised had to be changed during the course of the research. What began as an observation and evaluation of Sinn Féin's internal practices and strategies became an evaluation of its *modus operandi* and its presence in the news from an external point of view.

### ***Organisation of Thesis***

The work that follows is divided into three main parts. The first of these, entitled Theoretical

<sup>20</sup> Becker (1970) terms these groups as 'deviant'.

<sup>21</sup> See Chapter Five.

and Historical Framework, provides the necessary background to the understanding of the subsequently presented work and is divided into two chapters. Chapter Three - Theoretical Conceptualisation explores the most relevant theoretical themes and existent premises that explain the use and importance of political communication, and its impact upon media coverage. This is followed by Chapter Four, entitled Historical and Sociological Perspectives of Irish republicanism, which examines the notions of Irish republicanism and nationalism and how these have evolved, whilst also looking at the historical development of Sinn Féin.

The second and third part of the thesis contains the original research, and is organised in terms of the different objects of study. Part II focuses on republican communication efforts. Chapter Five - Communication Apparatus and Strategies looks at the party's communicative organisation, whilst Chapter Six - Practices of Political Communication examines Sinn Féin's overall communicative strategies, such as print, display advertising and press releases. Chapter Seven, entitled Surfing the Net for Sinn Féin, concentrates on the party's use of new methods of communication: the Internet and e-mail. In Part III, the party's presence in the news media is considered and Chapter Eight - Three Years in the News, is both a quantitative and a qualitative examination of print news coverage of republicanism. As a case study simultaneously considering the party's communicative efforts and its presence in the news media, the original research component of this thesis culminates with Chapter Nine - The Good Friday Agreement. The thesis ends with a review of the main arguments and findings in Chapter Ten.

## ***Part I: Theoretical and Historical Framework***

## Chapter Three: Theoretical Conceptualisations

Whilst politics exists within what is commonly termed a public arena or public sphere, it is mainly through the use of communication strategies that politicians are able to reach out to the public or electorate. Occupying a transitional and intermediate position and acting as mediators between the public and politicians are the news media. Whilst there is no direct link between these different institutions and organisations, it is necessary to consider the manner in which they interact with one another. This implies examining the role of the media as mediators between the ruling elite and the much vaster public, but also between different political actors. Thus, it is necessary to understand the rules of engagement between politics and the news, and in particular, how politics and political action have developed and adapted to influence the news. Since this study is centred on Sinn Féin, it is also pertinent that a number of theoretical concepts which either characterise the party or are used when referring to it, are explored. Of particular relevance is the party's perceived marginalisation from mainstream society and politics as well as its continuous association with violence through the IRA. Whilst it is necessary to examine Sinn Féin's political communication and its presence in the news media, it is also essential to consider the much wider theoretical debates which underpin such evaluation.

Hence, it is important to explore the notions of public sphere, political communication, public relations and media strategies, poor-resourced and terrorism. At the same time, how these concepts contribute to the analysis of Sinn Féin's communication efforts and its presence in the news media must be determined. Finally, the chapter concludes with a brief summary clarifying the links between the concepts discussed here and the subsequently presented original work. Moreover, it also explores the relevance of these theoretical notions in the light of Sinn Féin's reviewed positioning, while considering how the technological transformations that have occurred in the last few years challenge traditional definitions of political communication and communication strategies. The overriding aim of this chapter is to provide a theoretical starting point for what is a complex and multi-faceted exercise: the examination of Sinn Féin's political communication and its news coverage.

### ***The Public Sphere***

The foundations of a democratic system lie in an 'informed, knowledgeable electorate' (McNair, 1995:18). For such an electorate to exist, information must be freely available and circulate amongst all members of society, while citizens must be allowed to interact and exchange ideas. It is also necessary that an arena is created, which facilitates debate and the circulation of information, and where the exchange of ideas is not hindered or inhibited by repressive or dominant control. As Keane has suggested, 'democratic government [ ] rests on a

posited link between the people and the state via the public sphere: the state opens itself up via publicity, and the people respond with public opinion' (1989 in Peters, 1993:549). As the author infers, the term 'public sphere' is commonly understood as describing the space where citizens can exchange and formulate ideas on matters relevant to the public domain. Despite this common understanding of the public sphere, and as the widely available literature illustrates, there is no single definition of what precisely constitutes this forum and indeed, this has proved to be an area of significant contention.

From the analysis of some of the literature addressing the notion of a public sphere, it is possible to expose some of its more generally agreed characteristics. As Verstraten (1996) notes, the concept of a public sphere has become an integral part of contemporary political discourse, and it is within it that alternative conceptions, views and opinions are expressed and assessed through rational debate. In fact, Keane maintains that:

a public sphere is brought into being whenever two or more individuals, who previously acted singularly assemble to interrogate both their own interactions and the wider relations of social and political power with which they are always and already embedded. Through its autonomous association, members of the public sphere consider what they are doing, settle how they will live together and determine, within the estimated limits of the means available to them, how they might collectively act within the foreseeable future. (1984 in Verstraten, 1996:353).

Following this line of thought, Ernst (1988 in McNair, 1995:19) has argued that the public sphere must be seen as 'a distinctive discursive space' where individuals can converge and transform themselves into a powerful force in the political arena. Alternatively, Dahlgren proposes that:

the political public sphere constitutes a space – a discursive, institutional, topographical space – where people in their roles as citizens have access to what can be metaphorically called societal dialogues, which deal with questions of common concern: in other words, with politics in the broadest sense. (1995:9)

Ultimately, what is important to retain from the multitude of definitions of the public sphere is that it has become a crucial, underpinning notion of democracy, operating as a 'mode of societal integration' (Calhoun, 1992:6). It is also relevant to understand this sphere as an idealised arena, which Verstraten (1996) claims has never been realised. The reason he gives for this is that there has never been a single forum to which all citizens were guaranteed free access, nor where the discussion and exchange of ideas occurred. For example, as the case of Northern Ireland illustrates, arguably it was the absence of such an arena that is partly responsible for the onset of the Troubles. Whilst some form of a public sphere did exist this was reserved for the Protestant and unionist majority, while Catholics and nationalists found themselves being repeatedly discriminated against and excluded from the main political and social process. Moreover, it can be argued that it was the difference between the rights and privileges of the two communities which, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, led to the Civil Rights Movement against the deep-



seated division and discrimination imposed by the unionist regime.<sup>1</sup>

In terms of the research already conducted into the definition and existence of a public sphere, of particular relevance has been the work of Jurgen Habermas entitled *Habilitationsschrift Strukturwandel der Offentlichkeit* (1962), and translated in 1989 as *Structural Transformation of Public Sphere*. In this study, Habermas defines the public sphere as ‘the realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. [ ] Access is guaranteed to all citizens’ (1989:198). Nonetheless, it is James Curran’s interpretation of the Habermasian concept that gives us a greater insight whereby the public sphere is defined as ‘the space between government and society in which private individuals exercise formal and informal control over the state: formal control through the election of government and informal control through the pressure of public opinion’ (1991:29).

### **Criticising the Habermasian Public Sphere**

Based on this understanding, Habermas locates the public sphere’s initial appearance in 18<sup>th</sup> Century bourgeois Britain, where the first newspapers adopted the crucial role of guaranteeing that information was made available to society (Curran, 1991 and McNair, 1995). However, it is important to note that during this period there was still widespread illiteracy and newspapers were not available to all, therefore access to information was consequentially restricted to an elite minority.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Habermas himself refers to the public sphere as a bourgeois manifestation, further demonstrating the restrictive nature of the forum he wrongly claimed to be accessible to all. As Gouldner has suggested, ‘in both bourgeois society and in classical antiquity, public rationality was grounded in class privilege and in unchallenged male domination of the family’ (1976 in Peters, 1993:553). One of the main criticisms of Habermas’ work relates to the fact that although he argued for the right of participation in what was supposedly an accessible forum, this was nevertheless restricted on the basis of class and gender (Garnham, 1990). Habermas’ conceptualisation also assumes that all members of society have equal access to information and are active participants in debate, to which McLaughlin notes:

feminist scholars cite Habermas’s liberal model as both an idealisation of a historical period of Northern European society and as an exclusionary historical account that fails to place importance on activity in spheres associated with women and other marginalized discursive communities. (1993:599)

As mentioned earlier, whilst there is no single definition of what constitutes a public sphere, there are two main strands of analysis. Firstly, there is the Classical Liberal Theory,<sup>3</sup> in which Habermas premised his liberal model of the public sphere, and which is defined as the area

<sup>1</sup> See O’Dochartaigh (1997) and Chapter Three.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Curran and Seaton (1997) or Williams (1997).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Curran and Seaton (1997) or Negrine (1989).

between the government and society where the media has some degree of influence (Curran, 1991). From this strand of analysis, the media has a crucial role to play in facilitating information and acting as the fourth estate (Curran, 1991; Habermas, 1989 and McNair, 1995).

However, such a view is also characterised by some pitfalls as:

it fails to take adequate account of the way in which power is exercised through capitalist and patriarchal structures, and consequently does not consider how the media relate to wider social cleavages in society. It also ignores the way in which interests have become organised and collectivised, and so does not address the questions of how the media function in relation to modern systems or representation. (Curran, 1991:29)

In direct contrast are the radical conceptualisations of the public sphere based on a more up-to-date view of the modern world and society: that of the welfare state and mass democracy. From this perspective, the public sphere can be seen as a space where organised interests of individuals are promoted, and thus it becomes a battleground for competing private interests seeking success. In this case, the media are no longer the fourth estate, nor do they hold a watchdog role but are exploited in the battle for political and social power. The media are then used as tool to sell and publicise information and images of power, and it is primarily within this perspective of the public sphere and the role of the media from which modern politics emerges and in which it operates. Within a radical understanding of the public sphere, promotional information and techniques are used to control the forum and the opinions that emanate from it. However, whilst the classical liberal idea of the public sphere and the role of the media as the fourth estate watchdog is, to some extent, outdated, some of its premises are still valuable. Thus, it is vital to acknowledge that the media has increasingly become a forum of debate where private interests are pursued, although it is one where scrutiny of the elite can still occur. For the purposes of this research, the term public sphere is used to refer to more than one forum, including:

the communicative institutions of a society, through which facts and opinions circulate, and by means of which a common stock of knowledge is built up as the basis for collective political action: in other words, the mass media, which since the 18<sup>th</sup> century have evolved into the main source and focus of a society's shared experience. (McNair, 1995:20)

Underpinning the existence and maintenance of an effective public sphere is the availability and ease of access to information, in particular to political information by its citizens. This availability of politically-related material is also of uttermost importance in striving for political success and the persuasion of the electorate and public opinion. Hence, acts of communicating politics, or political communication, are crucial activities in which every serious-minded political organisation must engage.

### ***Communicating Politics***

Whilst political communication has been defined as ‘purposeful communication about politics’ (McNair, 1995:4), the term is commonly used in reference to communicating any information considered relevant to the political process. As Trent and Friedenbergl contend this is ‘at the heart of the modern political campaign’ (1991:60). Not only there is no single working definition of what constitutes political communication, the concept has even assumed an aspect of vulgarity and disdain. For example, suggested definitions are absent from certain literature such as the *Handbook of Political Communication* (Nimmo and Sanders, 1989), whose authors argue that a definition of the term is not necessary for an informed debate. What Nimmo and Sanders fail to see is that at the basis of any debate must necessarily lie a concept, and this is why it is increasingly important to define the notion of political communication.

Although some authors propose definitions for the practice, in most instances these tend to be broad and simplistic in nature, as illustrated by Peres Maicas, who describes it as ‘any communication message which keeps a more or less direct relationship with the political dynamics of the social system, irrespective of the political actors and whether they behave as communicators or receivers’ (1995:478). On the other hand, Blumler and Gurevitch assert that political communication, which they refer to as ‘mediated political messages’, ‘are a composite product, reflecting the contributions and interaction of two different types of communication: advocates and journalists’ (1995:103). Communicating politics is then an interactive and bi-directional process between politicians and journalists, where information is exchanged and both sets of actors contribute to the output.

It is also important to note that other authors’ perceptions of the practice are substantially different. This is evident not just in relation to the terminology used, but more importantly, in the actual meaning awarded to the terms, reflecting the lack of agreement on the concept. This is demonstrated in the following example where political communication is seen as:

the public discussion about the allocation of public resources (revenues), official authority (who is given the power to make legal, legislative and executive decisions), and official sanctions (what the state rewards or punishes). (Denton and Woodward, 1990:14)

In this instance, the authors argue that political communication refers to acts of publicly communicating and debating very specific information disseminated by the government. This excludes the overriding majority of more general types of political communication, which emanate from sources other than the government itself, as well as relating to much wider concerns than those identified by the authors. Since the academic understanding of political communication is diverse and at times misleading, it is then necessary to establish a working definition of the concept which can be applied to this specific research. Still, it is also important to note that this does not imply a manipulation of the concept and its understanding to suit this

particular research. Instead, it attempts to reflect what political communication means in practice for journalists and politicians in relation to contemporary politics.

Taking these two broad understandings, as well as the focus of the research upon political communication by political parties, it then becomes significant to examine in greater detail the actual practices, techniques and impacts of communicating politics. As Denton and Woodward have argued:

democratic politics is concerned with the power to decide. Everyday political acts function to influence decisions or to defend them. The public communication that accompanies most forms of political activity serves to alter, justify, or clarify the range of choices that are in dispute in the public arena. (1990:14)

### **The Functions of Political Communication**

The overriding suggestion is that political communication has two principal functions. It is the act of disseminating relevant information required for the formation and maintenance of an informed electorate, but it also allows for the creation of an operative public sphere or spheres, open to all. As suggested underpinning any effective public sphere or spheres is the facilitation of a flow of information, including political information, as its absence can either limit or even induce the failure of this forum of discussion. However, it is important to note that Denton and Woodward's (1990) statement of political communication as the discussion of the allocation of public funds refers to public communication. The reason for this choice of terminology is justified by Nimmo and Swanson (1990) as exemplary<sup>1</sup> of the fact that the majority of research has tended to focus on the voter persuasion paradigm. According to this model, political communication or public communication refers to the communication of information only relevant to, or which occurs during the electoral period. In doing so, other acts of communicating politics are overlooked, and thus a significant and important body of political communication is ignored.

In terms of the definitions found in the literature, two of these emerge as the most comprehensive, flexible and relevant. Furthermore, McNair (1995) suggests that conceptualisations of political communication should be sufficiently flexible to encompass any acts of communication by the media, political actors and other elements of society, such as voters, or matters of politics and related subjects. Alternatively, Nimmo and Sanders propose that any understanding of political communication should 'agree that there is some body of activity which is (communication); another body of activity called "politics"; and then when the former activity influences the latter, there is political communication' (1989:27).

Political communication should then be considered as encompassing all acts of communicating politics, regardless of whether these take place during or with reference to the electoral process.

As McQuail advocates, 'the more political communication that is genuinely available, thus really accessible to people, the more chances there are for audience members to make relevant choices or to recognise, and connect with, some strand of political belief' (1986:137). Likewise, the need to broaden our understanding of political communication is further evident in the noticeable transformation of political communication. In particular, its professionalisation and dependence on expert contributions from a variety of activities, such as marketing, public relations, advertising and communication. Changes in the way information is communicated have also been noted, increasingly moving away from the 'traditional' practices of public speaking to the employment of mass communication, such as radio, newspapers and television.

Consequently, this has resulted in a transformation of politics and political information, whereby 'politicians and policies have become packaged for media presentation and public consumption' (Franklin, 1994:4). Some commentators have even suggested this represents the vulgarisation and commodification of politics, whereby politicians are now assessed in terms of the quality of their delivery, and the sophistication of their image, rather than their policies. McQuail, for example, has argued that there has been a transformation of politics into 'show business and media commerce, an empty ritual, a tool of manipulation, or a means of controlling politics itself' (1986:135). Thus, if politics is increasingly becoming a trivialised and commercial practice, the information conveyed to the public arena or sphere might also have decreased in quality and depth. The implications of this are that the notion of an informed public sphere and electorate might be undermined by the same attempts that aimed to create a more informed and accessible forum.

However, there is also an opposing view to this argument which states that the 'packaging of politics' has further facilitated access to information that was previously the sole domain of the ruling elite. This widening of the political process has resulted in a fairer and more balanced public sphere since, 'the new methods (of campaigning) enable politicians to communicate with millions of voters via television or direct mail, rather than hundreds of voters face to face' (Kavanagh, 1995:9). Despite the apparent increase in the availability of information and the implicit accessibility of the public sphere or spheres, the commodification of political communication and consequently of politics is not without criticism. The main fears arise from the potentially negative impacts that political spin doctors and media strategies can have on the quality and diversity of information communicated.

### ***Public Relations and Media Strategies***

The use of public relations and media strategies has now become a widespread and integral feature of modern politics. As demonstrated, it is no longer possible to comprehend politics

without also understanding the relevance of communication in the political process. Even if the common term used to refer to this wider process of communication in which politicians and their strategists engage themselves, is political communication, there is more than one facet to this organised process, namely public relations and media strategies. Whilst these are at times described as one and the same, it is important to note that the main distinction between them is one of target audience, although there can be an element of overlap. Public relations, as the name implies, refers to the development of techniques employed to improve public perception, while the techniques used in media strategies are aimed at improving the relationship between the organisations and the media, as well as media coverage of the organisations.

The review of the literature on public relations and media strategies reveals a two-tier problem. Whilst there is a significant lack of theoretical literature on the subject of public relations, and particularly on political public relations, the existent research is primarily characterised by an excessive practicality. In other words, there is a considerable body of literature on the actual day-to-day practice of public relations<sup>4</sup> rather than on its theoretical premises. One possible justification for this emerges from the fact that the teaching and research of public relations as an academic field is itself relatively recent. Cutlip *et al.* argue that this imbalance also reflects 'the struggle of an emerging profession seeking its unique identity' (1994:2). Furthermore, Kitchen contends that 'the diverse range of activities that fall within the remit of public relations practice have militated against attempts to classify' the behaviour of practitioners in any meaningful way' (1997:8). Similarly:

the increasing professionalisation of public relations has led to it being taken more seriously at the highest levels in organisations, where a public relations strategy is discussed and developed at board level alongside such issues as product development, acquisitions and personnel policy. (Harrison, 1995:3)

This so-called 'struggle of the emerging profession' permeates the different definitions and understandings of public relations available throughout the literature and, as Harrison (1995) stresses, there is no universally accepted definition. In an attempt to conceptualise the practice of public relations, she also suggests that it 'means exactly what the word suggests - relations with the public' (1995:1). However, for the purpose of this discussion it seems important to move beyond this somewhat simplistic understanding. Namely, it has been suggested by Cutlip *et al.* that one of the leading definers of public relations has been *Public Relations News*, whereby public relations is seen as 'the management function which evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual or an organisation with the public interest, and plans and executes a program of action to earn public understanding and acceptance' (1994:3). A similar definition emerged from the *World Assembly of Public Relations*

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<sup>4</sup> See Dunn (1993).

*Associations* held in Mexico in 1978, in which public relations was understood as ‘the art and social science of analysing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organisation leaders and implementing planned programmes of action, which will serve both the organisations and the public interest’ (in Harrison, 1995:2).

According to the *Institute of Public Relations*, the term refers to the ‘planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and understanding between an organisation and its public’ (in Harrison, 1995: 2). Still, such a definition fails to acknowledge that one of the aims of public relations is to influence the public, and this does not necessarily imply such positive actions as those suggested by goodwill or understanding. Thus, the majority of definitions of public relations found in the literature reinforce this managerial function of the activity, as seen in Harlow’s definition of public relations as:

the distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, acceptance and co-operation between an organisation and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasises the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilise change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends, and uses research and sound and ethical communication techniques as its principal tools. (1976 in Harrison, 1995:3)

On the other hand, the *Public Relations Society* envisages public relations activities in a different way, primarily shifting the emphasis away from the management function to one of creation of consent, whereby:

public relations helps our complex, pluralistic society to reach decisions and function more effectively by contributing to mutual understanding among groups and institutions. It serves to bring private and public spheres into harmony. (in Cutlip *et al.*, 1994:4)

Similarly, Sauerhaft and Atkins argue that public relations is the ‘art and science of informing, influencing, changing or neutralising public opinion’ (1989 in Moss *et al.*, 1997:3).

Two broad perspectives emerge from the literature: one placing the emphasis of public relations upon management functions, and the other emphasising efforts to change perceptions and attitudes and ultimately, create consent. In an attempt to clarify this confusion, Kitchen (1997), in his study entitled *Public Relations: Principles and Practices*, reviewed the common themes permeating the different definitions of public relations and highlighted four main plots. He suggests that public relations acts as a vehicle enabling the construction and achievement of what is referred to as ‘socially acceptable goals’ (1997:8). In order to achieve these, the external environment of the individual or organisation must be monitored, whilst also accounting for the effects arising from changes within it. Additionally, the author argues that another common denominator is the understanding and co-operation between organisations, the individual and its different publics. Public relations must be seen as a bi-directional communicative process, such as political communication is.

Approaching the understanding of public relations from a different perspective, Wilcox *et al.* (1988) opted to identify the key terms within the practice, whereby public relations is seen as a deliberate and planned activity in which strategies and techniques are organised and intentional. Also, public relations exercises are acts of performance and management which aim to serve the interest of the public within a two-way process of communication. However, such an understanding of public relations raises a number of pertinent questions, primarily because it is being perceived as a communication activity through which an organisation or individual attempts to convey their interests. Moreover, these interests might not always be 'socially acceptable goals', as Kitchen (1997) and Wilcox *et al.* (1988) have, perhaps somewhat naively, suggested. Instead all investments made in public relations techniques must be seen as attempts to further their particular interests, and whilst these might coincide with those of the public, more often than not they merely reflect more selfish concerns, as shown by the case of politics and the struggle for political domination. In fact, if we consider that 'most organisations have a need to communicate, simply because they are part of the world around them and do not operate in a vacuum', public relations is also an act of communication. The only difference is the intent, as 'it is often a case of defending and justifying a course of action' (Wragg, 1992:5). Ultimately, as Moss *et al.* have argued:

although public relations can also contribute to changing social reality of social organisations structurally, it will contribute more frequently to effecting a changed perception of the organisations by different segments of the public outside these organisations. (1997:90)

Undoubtedly, it is in the arena of political public relations that attempts to influence public opinion and perceptions have proved to be more contentious, while the need to shape and change perceptions has become crucial. Still, 'for some, public relations is a wholly legitimate, indeed essential input to modern politics. For others, the development of political public relations has signalled the sinister corruption of democracy' (McNair, 1996:35). Nevertheless, 'public relations is like electricity and the atomic bomb. Having been invented, it cannot be uninvented. The public relations function is a necessary dimension of the modern political process' (McNair, 1996: 53). Even if it is an essential feature of the modern political process, this does not imply that it has a beneficial contribution. For example, whilst information is crucial for the existence of an effective form of public forum, the usefulness of the information communicated could be questioned, since it is primarily concerned with actively changing public perception.

### **Practising Public Relations**

Alongside the various understandings of public relations, equally contentious is what actually constitutes the practice. This has been further fuelled by the confusion surrounding the



distinction between public relations practice and public relations techniques. While 'practices' are here seen as the different aspects which constitute the public relations strategy, 'techniques' refers to the specific means used as part of the wider strategy. Based on this distinction, Wragg (1992) has argued that there are nine types of public relations practices: media relations; employee communications; investor relations; political relations; corporate identity; sponsorship; community relations; and finally, customer relations. Alternatively, Harrison (1995) contends that public relations practices can be divided into only four different categories: media relations; publicity and publications; corporate public relations; and lastly, information. Similarly, in discussing the practices of political public relations, McNair (1995) has also argued in favour of four categories, namely: media management; image management; internal communications; and information management. However, it is important to note that these descriptions are largely identical, with the only significant difference being that some authors distinguish a greater number of practices than others. Additionally, some of the names given to the same categories vary, as illustrated by McNair's (1995) media management and Harrison's (1995) media relations.

In terms of the different techniques employed by public relations officers, the literature overemphasises those of dealing with the media, including providing oral information to the media, composing press releases and establishing fruitful contact with journalists. In fact, Wragg argues that:

one of the most important aspects of PR is media relations [ ] there are those who feel that the role of media relations is sometimes overemphasised, and that this even reflects the presence in PR of many former journalists, but one has to face the fact that in most instances the media is the initial audience for the message, and it is through the media that the message is channelled to the ultimate target audiences. (1992:43)

When discussing political public relations, it is crucial to acknowledge that for political parties and the political process, the media are a priority. This emphasis is further highlighted by the numerous techniques of dealing with the media listed by Wragg (1992), in his *Public Relations Handbook*. He identifies 16 public relations techniques as follows: press releases; case histories or studies; feature articles; advertorials; editorial interviews; event press support; analysts briefings; financial reports; political lobbying; newsletters and publications; video and film; conferences and seminars; product launches; special events; promotional items; corporate image. Of these techniques, no fewer than 14 are directly or indirectly related to media relations.

In an attempt to establish and assess the relationship between public relations practices and public relations techniques, the typologies provided by McNair (1995) and Wragg (1992) of each of these respectively, were integrated. Hence, the model illustrated in Table 1,<sup>5</sup> is an

<sup>5</sup> See p.38.

attempt to clarify the relationship by identifying which techniques are commonly used in different public relations efforts, and suggesting which specific techniques are employed for each of the wider practices.

	Media Management	Image Management	Internal Communication	Information Management
press releases	√			√
event press support		√		√
newsletters and publications	√		√	√
case histories and studies	√		√	√
analyst briefings	√		√	√
video and film	√	√	√	√
features articles	√			√
financial reports	√		√	√
conferences & seminars	√	√	√	√
advertorials		√		
political lobbying	√	√		√
special events	√	√	√	√
editorial interviews	√	√		√
product launches	√	√		
promotional items		√	√	
corporate image	√	√		

**Table 1: Public Relations Practices and Techniques**

As can be seen above, in terms of the techniques used there is a significant overlap between media management and information management, since the use of a particular strategy, such as the issuing of press releases, can simultaneously serve more than one function. The suggestion is that media management is an effective way to manage information and the media as well, as seen in the case of the British Lobby System.<sup>6</sup> However, in order to access the media and ultimately the public, politicians and indeed any individual or group with such inspirations have to develop and employ what are known as media strategies. As Lang and Lang suggest:

political posturing for the media has one major purpose, the mobilisation of the public to be used as an ally when one side lacks the political resources to push through its viewpoint or policy or, conversely, when the other seeks to retain its advantage over potential challengers. (1983 in Blumler, 1990:105)

Ultimately, the aim of such strategies and posturing is to influence the news agenda and the quality of coverage, whereby 'political marketing is a new approach to and concept within politics. The importance of propaganda campaigns and the use of advertising strategies during elections confirms this' (Peres Maicas, 1995:482). In terms of the different strategies employed, Denton and Woodward (1990) argue that these encompass a combination of advertising, strategy developments, polling and fund-raising activities. Maerek suggests, more generally, that they refer to 'the elaboration of a policy of political communication, so to speak: a global strategy of design, rationalisation and conveyance of modern political communication'

<sup>6</sup> See Cockerell (1988) and Cockerell *et al.* (1984).

(1995:2). Other authors, such as Seymour-Ure (1989 in Blumler, 1990), advocate only two areas within the practice of media strategies: publicity matters and source professionalisation. However, in common with McNair (1995), the first category encompasses activities of managing the news media and politicians' images. Whilst source professionalisation encompasses 'the deeper, more extensive and persuasive involvement in political message-making of publicity advisers, public relations experts, campaign management consultants and the like' (Blumler, 1990:104).

In a more specific attempt to identify what constitutes media strategies, Franklin (1994) has proposed the existence of four distinct areas, categorised as: attempts to influence the news agenda; structuring contacts with broadcasters, the need to train politicians in the area of performance and the search for ways to control the coverage of politics by the media. This indicates that media strategies are composed of a set of diverse manoeuvres that aim to shape the portrayal of political actors in the most favourable way possible. Nonetheless, one major problem with Franklin's suggestion is that it focuses excessively upon the media activities of broadcasting, and in the process fails to acknowledge other equally pertinent areas, such as print. Alternatively, McNair (1995) suggests that it is through 'political public relations' that individual or group politicians can influence the news agenda and subsequently public opinion.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, the author has also argued that:

political public relations, like other branches of the profession, has proactive and reactive dimensions. On the one hand, it seeks to initiate change in such variables such as public opinion, voting behaviour and journalistic agendas. On the other hand, it reacts to events with potentially negative consequences for the organisation, limiting the potential damage which may occur. It may also be involved in the effort to prevent certain information from reaching the public domain. (1996: 36)

In addition, as Tiffen (1989) argues it is also necessary to consider the interactions between political strategists and the news media themselves and how this determines and influences news coverage. The author suggests two crucial elements: the 'who and what the news media want to cover'; and 'who wants news coverage of that information' (1989:74). He also argues that these two questions do not necessarily have compatible answers, thus the vast majority of political public relations efforts are made in vain, and secondly, a significant proportion of news is influenced by political public relations.

Subsequently, media strategies and political communication play a vital role in structuring what appears in the news, the way in which these are portrayed and ultimately the issues at the heart of public concern.<sup>8</sup> Yet, this increased professionalisation of media strategies and political

<sup>7</sup> Note that McNair (1995) also proposes a second activity, that of advertising, yet this refers to the placement of paid adverts and its main aim is to directly affect public opinion.

<sup>8</sup> Note that this is premised on the view that the media do not dictate what the public thinks, but instead the media are an influencing factor in determining what the public thinks about, thus moving away from a perspective of strong media effects. Also see Blood (1982) or McCombs *et al.* (1981).

communication activities has meant that political parties need far greater resources and access to professional expertise than ever before. When these resources are not readily available, the ability of these groups to appear on or even attempt to structure the news is said to be limited.

### ***Resource Poor Groups and the Case of Terrorism***

As the term implies, resource poor was first coined by Goldenberg in 1976, to describe those organisations which had limited resources. The concept has been understood by McNair as referring to those 'marginal political actors, operating outside of the established institutions' (1995:137), while Schlesinger and Tumbler highlight the differences between resource rich and resource poor whereby 'some occupy a central "respectable" locus whereas others comprise a more peripheral "radical" fringe' (1994:64). It could also be suggested that the term resource poor encompasses a much wider range of groups which do not necessarily find themselves at the margins of the political process. Fundamentally, the difference between these two groups lies above all in the quantity, quality and variety of resources that are available to them.

More specifically, Goldenberg (1976) outlines three different, yet interrelated, types of resources. Firstly, there are financial resources or the amount of disposable income and the ability to raise further income. Then there are resources of an organisational nature, referring to the facilities available to an organisation, such as phones, fax and photocopying machines and staff levels. Finally, there is a more complex set of resources, known as cultural resources, which encompass the advantages or disadvantages emanating from the background and position that the organisation and its members occupy in society. Still, it is important to note that for an organisation to be classified as 'resource poor', it does not necessarily have to lack in all three categories of resources. For example, Sinn Féin's overwhelming problem has been one of a lack of cultural resources, in particular resulting from its associations with violence and the IRA and the marginal position the republican movement has occupied in society.

Although limited resources are problematic *per se*, constraining the activities of organisations and their members, the situation is further aggravated by the fact that these restrictions also impinge upon their ability to gain news coverage. This is particularly important since, 'governments, businesses and pressure groups actively compete for media space and definitional advantage. However, in the competition for access there are marked inequalities between organisations' (Miller, 1996:5). For example, a study carried out by Anderson into attempts by environmental groups to get onto the news agenda revealed that, 'the degree to which [ ] (they) gain access to the media and to governments hinges to a large extent upon resources, whether they be income, organisational factors, skills or knowledge' (1993:56). In another similar study, this time on the voluntary sector, Deacon established that there is 'a close

link between media prominence and economic power. The richer, professionalised voluntary organisations had the most media contact and appeared in a more diverse range of contexts' (1996:191).

Thus, the successful communication of politics is directly linked with the quality, diversity and the degree of professionalisation of the different communication efforts. Hence, if a particular organisation is financially limited, their ability to produce a diverse range of posters and press releases, for example, is constrained. At a distinct level the lack of organisational resources, such as staffing, can impede the development of effective and extensive contacts with the media. Regardless of this, it is the third level of difficulties, which is more problematic. Since the ability of an organisation to influence journalists is linked with the respect and power it is able to command, a lack of material resources can greatly impinge upon its success and even survival, but ultimately, and because of the technological revolution, these limitations can now be more easily and affordably overcome.<sup>9</sup>

### **The 'Terrorist' Syndrome**

One aspect which can have devastating implications for political communication strategies and media coverage is the association with violence and violent activities, more commonly termed as 'terrorist' links. Acts of violence and negative events are perceived by Western news media as extremely newsworthy,<sup>10</sup> and it is commonly said that 'good news is no news'. By default, violent actions committed by so-called 'terrorist' groups tend to feature prominently in the news. Moreover, their appearances in the news concentrate excessively upon the acts of violence themselves, and coverage tends to be simplistic, emotive and lacking in contextualisation.<sup>11</sup> In particular, it is the violence perpetrated by so-called insurgent groups, those opposed to the *status quo*, that features more predominantly. This allows the news media to classify them as, despicable crimes, regardless of their motives. Nevertheless, as Wardlaw explains:

because terrorism engenders such extreme emotions, partly as a reaction to the horrors associated with it and partly because of its ideological context, the search for a definition which is both precise enough to provide a meaningful analytical device yet general enough to obtain agreement from all participants in the debate is fraught with difficulties. (1989:3)

Acknowledging a multitude of definitions, Chomsky (1991) has suggested that any analysis of terrorism falls within one of two perspectives, and 'one may adopt a literal approach, taking the topic seriously, or a propagandistic approach, constructing the concept of terrorism as a weapon to be exploited in the service of some system of power' (p.12).

<sup>9</sup> See Chapters Six and Seven.

<sup>10</sup> See Galtung and Ruge (1973) or Gans (1979).

<sup>11</sup> See Henderson *et al.* (1990) or Schlesinger and Tumber (1994).

Conversely, Paletz and Schmid (1992) also propose a two-fold analysis of terrorism as insurgent and state terrorism. As suggested by Paletz and Schmid's (1992) terminology, insurgent terrorism is perpetrated by any non-state body whilst state terrorism emanates from the state itself. Furthermore, 'insurgent terrorism may not be as deadly as state terrorism, nor its victims as numerous. It has however achieved far more visibility and provoked an extensive often passionate and polemical literature' (Paletz and Schmid, 1992:1). It is this added emphasis on one form of 'terrorism' which shows the media's tendency to be biased, favouring and excusing those in power.

Miller (1994), on the other hand, suggests that the differences in labelling some groups as 'terrorist' and not others, result from pre-conceptions of perceived power and control. Whilst any violence perpetrated by so-called 'acceptable' organisations maintaining the *status quo*, such as the army or the police, are less likely to be classified as 'terrorist', those marginalised groups who also use similar forms violence are repeatedly described as such. Thus:

the attempt to label an opponent as 'terrorist' is not a question of more and more exactly separating the actions which qualify as terrorists from those which don't. Defining opponents as 'terrorist' represents an active pursuit of legitimacy. Such legitimisation strategies are central to the operations of all governments, whether they are dictatorships or liberal-democracies. (Miller, 1994:7)

Clearly, the media play a crucial role in determining how the public perceives certain groups and organisations, and this is achieved through the different labels used to describe them and their activities. The underlying aim is to create imaginary differences evoking disparate emotions between the same types of violent acts committed by two different groups. The fundamental dichotomy is that those in government cannot be seen to use extreme force, whilst for others it is the only way to classify their endeavours. For example, in reporting the Northern Irish Troubles, republican violence has been repeatedly described as 'terrorist', but similar violence perpetrated by forces loyal to the British Crown is not.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, 'the western media have diverging interpretations of what constitutes terrorism. There is however, a strong tendency to do it rather vaguely with predominantly left-wing political violence directed against governments' (Paletz and Schmid, 1992:97).<sup>13</sup> More generally, some authors, such as Miller (1994), criticise the lack of non-propagandistic definitions of terrorism in the literature, whilst others merely point out that 'most definitions do not spell out clearly that terrorism may be used by both insurgents and incumbent group regimes' (Wardlaw, 1989:16). On the other hand, McNair suggests that 'the word "terrorism" is a loaded term, used to describe organisations whose members may prefer to think of themselves as "freedom fighters", "guerrilla soldiers" or "revolutionaries"' (1995:152).

<sup>12</sup> See Curtis (1996) or Elliott *et al.* (1996).

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Gearty (1991); Herman and O'Sullivan (1991) and Wilkinson (1989).

Crelisten (1987) has also criticised the existing research into terrorism as failing to accurately define and conceptualise the concept on five counts. One of the problems is what he calls 'a truncated object of study', in particular the inability to recognise that acts of terrorism are committed both by those in power and by those who oppose such power, whereby simply using the term 'terrorist' for insurgent political violence, reinforces the legitimisation of state violence.

In addition, he maintained that:

perhaps most importantly, by limiting the object of study to one specific form of terrorism, we lose sight of the fact that terrorism is a specific tool of persuasion in a wide variety of power relationships, not just that of the insurgent who contests the power of the state. (1987:4)

The second criticism raised by the author is that researchers have conducted their work within the constraints of what is acceptable to the ruling elites which fund them, and have thus failed to consider any non-insurgent forms of terrorism. The result is a selective examination of terrorism in what is seen as a 'skewed research focus' which 'obscures the fact that terrorism is used in a wide variety of contexts and that its form varies according to where in the power structure it is organised' (Crelisten, 1987:4). Related to this is the idea that research into terrorism has not been devised to further the understanding of the phenomenon. Instead, it is focused on developing and advancing manufactured systems of knowledge and understanding. In turn, these are passed on to the ruling elite who use them in their efforts to contain terrorism, a practice which the author refers to as 'policy-oriented research'. Finally, and perhaps the most pertinent of all of Crelisten's (1987) criticisms, is the failure to recognise and understand terrorism as a form of political communication. The inability to do this has meant that research into terrorism is but a narrow examination of the phenomenon, and fails to acknowledge the historical and the contextual dimensions which are necessarily associated with it.

Thus, he proposes an understanding of terrorism as a form of communication, rather than simply seeing it as a de-contextualised and irrational use of random violence. This means that any attempts to decipher acts of terrorism, their motivation and objectives, must occur beyond the traditional problematic and propagandistic understanding of motiveless and insurgent violence, and instead recognise and accommodate their communicative dimension. Terrorism is thus described as 'the deliberate use of violence and threat of violence to evoke a state of fear (of terror) in a particular victim or audience. The terror evoked is the vehicle by which allegiance or compliance is maintained or weakened' (Crelisten, 1987:6). It is also seen as 'a tactic involving the use and threat of violence for communicative purposes. How and why it is used varies according to the particular context' (Crelisten, 1987:7).

Schmid and de Graff have also suggested that political violence is an important form of communication. More specifically, they argue that:

in our view *terrorism can best be understood as a violent communication strategy*. There is the sender, the terrorist, a message generator, the victim and a receiver, the enemy and/or the public. The nature of the terrorist act, its atrocity, its location and the identity of its victims serve as generators for the power of the message. (1982:15)

However, it is still necessary to acknowledge that such acts of terrorism are also complex acts of communication. According to Schlesinger *et al.* these 'are not *just* linguistic statements using a particularly brutal form of expression' (1983:1570), but instead are the expression of a far more complex and motivated set of messages, which need to be addressed. In addition to the publicity they command, acts of terrorism must be seen as holding a variety of communicative dimensions in their own right. It is 'a tactic of communication which combines the use of violence to compel allegiance and compliance in a variety of target groups' (Crelisten, 1987:8). Rather than perceiving terrorism as the outcome of simplistic and destructive attitudes in a de-contextualised manner, it is necessary to acknowledge its deep-seated complexity whilst also analyse it within the situation and background in which it is used.

### **Overview**

Overall, the main suggestions emerging from the review of the relevant theoretical literature that provides a framework for this research is that political parties, such as Sinn Féin, necessarily operate within a specific public sphere or spheres. In the case of Northern Ireland this has evolved through time from a narrower forum to one that is becoming progressively open to all sections of society.<sup>14</sup> In order to successfully exist within these spheres, political parties must communicate their politics to a wide audience and to the news media, for which it is crucial that they develop a range of effective communication strategies, and these, as shown, are ultimately shaped by the resources available to the organisation. To fully understand the relationship between political communication and news coverage, it is not sufficient to simply analyse communicative strategies and assess media coverage. Nor can an insight be gained without examining the context in which the organisation operates and the nature of its characteristics.

Furthermore, in theoretical terms, the relationship between communicative strategies and media coverage is often simplistically described, whereby it is naively suggested that if political parties communicate successfully to the media, their ensuing coverage will be positive and favourable. It is also argued that the so-called limitations which result from the lack of resources can be minimised, or that by using communication strategies, marginalised and resource poor groups are able to move into mainstream politics and news. However, it must be recognised that such deductions are excessively oversimplified and generalised. In some circumstances, it is not feasible to fully overcome such obstacles, in particular a lack of cultural resources, nor is it possible to state with confidence that successful communication results in a 'successful'

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<sup>14</sup> See Chapter Four.



coverage. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that acts of political communication are important components of the political process as these are deemed to have some impact upon public opinion which in turn can affect government decision making. This means that political communication provides an important avenue for organisations, 'terrorist' or otherwise, to influence governmental policy by firstly gaining the support of public opinion.

On the other hand, it is also increasingly necessary to re-address such notions as public sphere, political communication and resource poor, especially in the light of the recent technological revolution. It has been argued that such innovations have facilitated the widening of the public sphere, particularly since so-called marginalised political groups can now access public opinion through alternative means of communication, such as the Internet, and in the process by-pass the traditional media. In fact, this transition from communication efforts centred and regulated by the media and government to a largely un-regulated platform of communication is one of the key aspects which is being examined in this thesis.<sup>15</sup> More specifically, the focus lies in evaluating the impact of a uncensored platform of communication, such as the Internet, upon the content of republican messages and its wider communication strategy.

It can also be suggested that the traditional notion of public sphere and politics no longer exists and has instead been replaced by a more complex interplay of forums. Whilst this technological facilitation to platforms of communication to organisations traditionally overlooked by mainstream media is a positive contribution, thus creating a more democratic and functional public sphere, it is also ridden with some problems. Of particular importance is that until now the news media have largely provide a particular interpretation and framework of understanding. In the case of unmediated platforms of communication although participation in the public sphere has increased, the rise of disinformation is also a potential problem. The ensuing result is the need to reassess the relationship between political communication and news coverage, re-examining specific changes within the sphere of non-mainstream politics where, increasingly, the boundaries between mainstream and marginalised politics and their respective communicative efforts are becoming blurred. Equally in need of re-consideration is the relationship between previously marginalised political groups, that have now moved towards mainstream politics, such as Sinn Féin, and the impact this has had upon their communicative strategies and their presence in the news, which is, in essence, the focus of this thesis.

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<sup>15</sup> See Chapter Seven.

## Chapter Four: Historical and Sociological Perspectives on Irish Republicanism

As an historical and sociological perspective on Irish republicanism, this chapter provides the specific theoretical and historical background required for the understanding of Sinn Féin's communication strategies and apparatus, as well as facilitating an analysis of its presence in the news media. The first part of the chapter examines and assesses different conceptualisations of nationalism, and focuses on the evaluation of Irish nationalism and the notion of Irish republicanism as the particular form of nationalism which characterises Sinn Féin. Equally, it explores how Sinn Féin's conceptualisation of republicanism has changed through time in line with the party's own political and ideological development. Whilst examining the historical roots and the development of the party, the second part of the chapter explores in detail the more recent phases in its development, focusing on the period from the 1970s to the end of the 1990s.

Moreover, it will consider how Sinn Féin's political strategies have evolved, in particular examining how its positioning in Northern Irish politics and its view of the conflict have changed. An understanding of the party's development and the impact this has had upon its strategies also provides the necessary contextualisation needed for an analysis of its communicative apparatus and strategies, which is the focus of Chapter Five. However, it should be noted that it is not the intention here to provide an exhaustive historical and sociological analysis. Instead, the work here presented should be seen as part of the wider Theoretical and Historical Framework which contextualises the subsequently presented work. Furthermore, in addition to this historical analysis, Chapters Eight and Nine also have relevant historical sections and a Chronology of the main events from 1905 to 1998 has been compiled.<sup>1</sup>

### ***Irish Nationalism and Republicanism***

Defined in the dictionary as the noun of a 'person who favours or strives after unity, independence and interests or domination of a nation' (*Chambers Dictionary*, 1993:1462), the debate over the concept of nationalism has been a complex and contentious one. This is reflected in the diversity and abundance of definitions and understandings of what the term constitutes, illustrating the lack of an academic consensus.<sup>2</sup> In an attempt to explain this phenomenon, Snyder suggests that the justification lies in the different backgrounds of the those who have defined the concept. More specifically, he states that the experience of each author is inherently reflected in his or her attempts to define nationalism,<sup>3</sup> whereby:

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix Two, p.279.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Gellner (1983); Marshall (1998); Riff (1987) and Smith (1983) and (1991).

<sup>3</sup> Note that Miller (1998) also made similar suggestions in relation to the research conducted on Northern Ireland. As argued in Chapter One, he emphasised that research was conditioned by the different backgrounds of those who conducted it. The author also suggested that this was reflected in the findings which emerged from such research.

scholars of nationalism approach the matter of definition from varying points of view. The study of this elusive subject has taken on an interdisciplinary complexion: specialists in many disciplines have devoted themselves to interpreting nationalism. They include anthropologists, political scientists, sociologists, psychologists, psychiatrists, and psychoanalysts. Each approaches the matter of definition from the point of view of its special interests. (1990:245)

As the author suggests, the process of defining nationalism emerges from and is influenced by a particular set of ideas, knowledge and approaches to the world, which characterises and separates each academic field and its respective researchers.<sup>4</sup> It could also be argued that since nationalism is intimately connected with an individual sense of belonging to a particular community, wherein common elements are shared by and with the individuals of that community, it is a concept that is difficult to rationalise (Ruane and Todd, 1998). Some authors, such as Alter, have also contended that ‘nationalism does not exist as such, but a multitude of nationalism’s do’ (1989:2). Nevertheless, for the purposes of this work it is not particularly relevant to conduct an exhaustive analysis of all the definitions available, and in fact, this can be found elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> Instead, what is relevant is to be aware of the complexities surrounding the debate over nationalism and that there is no single accepted definition of what the term means.

Whilst the notion of nationalism emerged from the transition of an agrarian society to an industrial one, and from the widening of the democratic process, it reached its apotheosis during the French Revolution ‘which bridged the gap between [ ] cultural patriotism [ ] and nineteenth century nationalism’ (Riff, 1987:155). As Anderson suggests, although ‘historically it has taken on a wide variety of forms and functions’,<sup>6</sup> nationalism has always implied that ‘humanity is *naturally* divided into nations and that the *only* legitimate type of government is national self-determination’ (1983:12). It was from this 19<sup>th</sup> century conceptualisation of nationalism that the notion of self-determination<sup>7</sup> first emerged, whereby communities that had a sense of shared identity were encouraged to unite and seek a nation of their own (Ruane and Todd, 1996).

The debate over nationalism has been a deeply divisive one. For example, Greenfeld (1992 in Marshall, 1998) has proposed a civic and an ethnic form of nationalism,<sup>8</sup> also suggested by McGarry and O’Leary (1995), who state that nationalism is the expression of the right to self-determination, whereby ‘the nation should be collectively and freely institutionally expressed

<sup>4</sup> Equally, as was argued in Chapter Two, similar forces are at play and influence the choice of methodology and the positioning of the researcher in the world. Again, both the particular method used to investigate a research question and the positions that the researcher adopts in the process are a reflection of his or her background and academic field of knowledge.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Snyder (1990).

<sup>6</sup> For more details, see Snyder, who identifies five phases in modern nationalism. These are: 1815-1871 ‘nationalism as a unifying force’; 1871-1900 rebellious nationalism in the search for independence; 1900-1918 nationalism as an aggressive force from stronger nations against weaker ones; 1918 – 1939 nationalism as the recognition of self-determination; and the new nationalism which originated at the end of World War II (1990:243-244).

<sup>7</sup> As the right of communities to aspire, form and rule their own independent nation.

<sup>8</sup> According to Marshall (1998), the term ‘civic nationalism’ refers to a political and legal aspiration, thus implying the notion of citizenship, whilst in direct contrast, ‘ethnic nationalism’ explores the biological and hereditary aspects.

and ruled by its co-nationals' (p.13-14). Alternatively, Boyce has argued for a more general understanding of nationalism, as 'the assertion by members of a group of autonomy and self-government for the group (often, but not invariably, in a sovereign state), of its solidarity and fraternity in the homeland, and of its distinctive history and culture' (1995:19).

Even with this definition problems arise, firstly, as what might form the basis of the nation can vary greatly; and secondly, it fails to acknowledge different forms of nationalism. Nevertheless, the argument of the nation as a community formed by individuals who agree on their common shared elements is relevant, even if theorists themselves do not agree on what those elements are. Whilst Grandison (1994) argues that the shared elements relevant to the formation of a common identity are descent, language, culture and historical traditions, Finlayson (1996) suggests that nationalism is actually based on a shared sense of belonging to the same nation. Furthermore, it is possible that the characteristics proposed by Grandison (1994) form part of the concept of belonging to the same nation. It is also plausible that individuals feel that they belong to a particular nation although do not share these common features.

Alternatively, Gellner proposes that 'nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent' (1983:1), and thus the state and the nation (territory) should be one and the same. The case of Irish nationalism is a good example of Gellner's suggestion as the political and the national units are not the same. Moreover, the nationalist aspiration was illustrated by claims in articles two<sup>9</sup> and three<sup>10</sup> of the *Bunreacht na hÉireann*, the Irish Constitution. However, the Irish Referendum of 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1998, resulted in the removal of these articles from the constitution. This has now meant that the constitutional state has since become congruent with the constitutionally defined nation, as claims to the six Northern Irish counties have now been removed, making the Irish nation the same as the Irish state. Therefore, it can be suggested that the removal of these articles from the Irish constitution has now led to a loss in the potency of Irish nationalism.<sup>11</sup> By default, this has implied a need to re-evaluate the notion of Irish nationalism and to determine its new priorities in the face of constitutional change.

Still, it is important to note that not all nationalist aspirations are enshrined in a constitutional claim, as was the case with the Republic of Ireland. Hence, rather than nationalism being

<sup>9</sup> 'The national territory consists of the whole island of Ireland' (<http://www.maths.tcd.ie/pub/Constitution/index.html>, accessed on the 18th October at 13.16).

<sup>10</sup> 'Pending the re-integration of the national territory, and without prejudice to the right of the Parliament and Government established by this Constitution to exercise jurisdiction over the whole of that territory, the laws enacted by that Parliament shall have the like area and extent of application as the laws of *Saorstát Éireann* and the like extra-territorial effect' (<http://www.maths.tcd.ie/pub/Constitution/index.html>, accessed 18<sup>th</sup> October 1999 at 13.16).

<sup>11</sup> This is an aspect that future research into Irish nationalism should address. Namely by examining how Irish nationalism has adapted to the changes in the Irish Constitution which formed the basis for their demands of a united Ireland.

understood solely as a political principle implying a direct relationship between the nation and the state, it should instead be seen as the expression and mobilisation of a community to form or maintain a nation, where the state's territory is identical to that of the nation. Thus, a shared sense of belonging to a particular community, also known as national identity, is developed, whilst a series of actions are put into place which seek to form or maintain such a nation (Alter, 1989; Ruane and Todd, 1998). Nationalism is then 'a democratic doctrine of political legitimacy. [ ] (it) entails identification with a community and the belief that the national community requires political institutions for its defence or expression' (McGarry and O'Leary, 1995:14).

### **Irish Nationalism**

In effect, Irish nationalism is then a specific form of nationalism based on an Irish national identity, aspiring for the consistency between the Irish state and the Irish nation. Nevertheless, there are also a number of varying definitions of Irish nationalism, although on the whole: it has aspired to make the Irish nation on the island congruent with the boundaries of an Irish state, and to ensure that Irish people exercise self-determination and self-government. There have been and there are many varieties of nationalism, indeed a luxuriant number, though there is nothing uniquely Irish about this. (McGarry and O'Leary, 1995:14)

Originating from the long-standing antagonism between the Irish and English dating back to 1172, when Henry II invaded Ireland, Irish nationalism has been dominated by aspirations for independence and attempts to resist political, religious and economic oppression (Snyder, 1990). Although Boyce (1995) has highlighted the difficulties in locating the origins of Irish nationalism, it has been grounded in anti-imperialistic doctrines and an anti-English positioning which characterised the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century of the defeated Gaelic Irish and Catholics. The origins of modern Irish nationalism are commonly related to the rise of the United Irish Men and Theobald Wolf Tone in the 1790s under the motto of uniting Ireland with 'Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter'. As Cronin contends this:

created the ideology of the Irish nation-state as 'a cordial union' among its people to establish their individual and national freedom 'and extension of our commerce'. The Irish people would owe allegiance to neither King nor pope, but to their country. (1980:23)

Like other nationalist expressions, it was influenced by the European nationalist movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the notion of reconciliation and 'the concept of a single, inclusive Irish nation' (Ruane and Todd, 1996:87).<sup>12</sup> More recent Irish nationalistic expressions have been located in the disaffected working-class Catholic communities of Derry and West Belfast.<sup>13</sup>

Regarding the different understandings of Irish nationalism, McGarry and O'Leary (1995) have

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Curtis (1994).

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Bell (1994); O'Dochartaigh (1997) and Ruane and Todd (1996).

suggested that there are mainly four, and these arise from the combination of two elements: the methods used, militant or constitutional; and the basis of the aspirations, civic or ethnic. Thus militant nationalism can be either civic or ethnic as can constitutional nationalism. The distinctions between constitutional and militant nationalism lie in the means used to achieve the desired aims. Whilst constitutionalists employ non-violent means, militant nationalists will, on the other hand, resort to violence and military action. The distinction between civic and ethnic Irish nationalism emerges from the different ideas of what should constitute a nation and hence a form of nationalism. Ethnic Irish nationalism argues in favour of a separate nation on the basis of descent, whilst civic nationalists locate their grounding in historical institutions and the once free Ireland. Alternatively, Cronin (1980) has proposed a different model which identifies five strands of Irish nationalism, as being traditionalist nationalism; constitutional nationalism; psychological force republicanism, radical republicanism; and cultural nationalism. Nevertheless, as can be discerned from this typology, there are a number of overlapping categories of Irish nationalism in relation to those proposed by McGarry and O'Leary (1995), namely the physical force and the militant nationalism.

As illustrated, there are also many forms of Irish nationalism, although modern Northern Irish nationalist politics, or at least its discussion, has tended to divide itself along two predominant camps, the constitutional versus the militant nationalism. In political terms, this has meant that Northern Irish political parties aspiring for a united Ireland distinguish themselves as constitutional nationalists, represented by the likes of the SDLP (Social Democratic and Labour Party) and the militant faction, also known as republican, such as Sinn Féin.

### Irish Republicanism as a Form of Nationalism

Although 'an Irish nationalist is one who wants Ireland ruled by the Irish people through a representative parliament,' (Cronin, 1980:23), Irish nationalism 'has been more directly concerned with securing the power of the nation to direct its own destiny than with achieving prosperity or social progress as such' (Rumpf and Hepburn, 1977:219). The focus of the different forms of Irish nationalism concentrates in the first instance on achieving an independent, united Ireland, after which social issues are addressed and the system of society designed. Two questions then arise. Firstly, why has Irish republicanism<sup>14</sup> been repeatedly described as the particular form of militant nationalism to which Sinn Féin adheres?; and secondly, what does it entail to be an Irish republican? For example, Walsh has somewhat simplistically claimed that 'republicanism represented the militant wing of the Catholic Nationalist movement' (1994:45) thereby ignoring the more complex ideologies at play and

<sup>14</sup> Republicanism advocates that the supreme power in a country is held either by its people or by its democratically elected representatives.

Sinn Féin's aspiration for an Ireland for all the Irish, 'Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter'. Although nationalism for Sinn Féin and the republican movement is an important strand and one that forms part of their broader ideological base, as the party has repeatedly claimed,<sup>15</sup> it is neither the only nor the dominant one. As Gerry Adams puts it:

Irish republicanism is, almost by definition, an ideology of the dispossessed seeking equality. Of course, if you seek rights of which you have been deprived, those who have deprived you of those rights and those who have appropriated those rights and to themselves will appreciate that your equality can only be achieved by depriving them of their position of privilege. (1995:110)

One explanation for the use of the term republicanism in reference to Sinn Féin's form of nationalism is that it has come to embody a sense of rebellion, a notion rooted in the historical succession of rebellions against monarchical regimes and against the English rule of Ireland. Furthermore, Sinn Féin itself is partly responsible for the misconceptions surrounding the notion of Irish republicanism in that they have insisted on using the term republicanism. The reason for this strategy lies in its perceived effectiveness as a way to distinguish themselves from the constitutional nationalists, such as the SDLP. Thus, 'crucially, republican [ ] discourse attempts to constitute itself as embodying the very identity of the movement of the mass itself, of the community whose interests it represents' (Shirlow and McGovern, 1998:173).

Alternatively, as Adams (1995) has suggested, since nationalism has been one of the dominant aspects within the republican movement and language, this may have resulted in a false or fantasised conception of what Irish republicanism embodies. Indeed, the Sinn Féin president argued in his book, *Free Ireland: Towards a Lasting Peace*, that nationalism is but one of five characteristics of the republican movement,<sup>16</sup> and he suggests that in order to be a 'true' republican, it is necessary to take on board all five mentioned 'isms' (1995:133). Hence, what is commonly described as Irish republicanism has traditionally embodied a particular form of nationalism, which, according to some authors such as Cronin (1980), or McGarry and O'Leary (1995), is a civic militant form advocating non-sectarianism, secularism, separatism and the radical social dimension. Adams own definition of Irish republicanism is:

a philosophy in which the national and the radical social dimensions are the two sides of the one coin. While the national dimension has, for historical reasons, been the most dominant tendency within the republican movement, Irish republicanism has consistently been a radical political philosophy. Republicans have persistently, against great odds and often alone, struggled against imperialism. (1995:132)

In common with the origins of Irish nationalism, the roots of Irish republicanism have been traced back to the United Irishmen of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Developing throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century

<sup>15</sup> See the Internet document 'Introduction to Sinn Féin and Irish Republicanism' (<http://www.sinnfein.ie/>, accessed 20<sup>th</sup> October 1999 at 18:25).

<sup>16</sup> The other four he outlined are non-sectarianism, secularism, separatism and the radical social dimension.

and manifesting in the Rising of Robert Emmett (1803), the Young Ireland Movement (1840s) and the Fenians (1860s), it reached its *epitome* in the 1918-21 Revolution.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, 'republicanism in its modern form emerged as the ideology of the more radical elements of the Irish middle-classes' (Ryan, 1994:46). Irish republicanism has come to represent the political force opposing, in the first instance, British rule and sovereignty of Northern Ireland and aspiring for a united Ireland. As such, for the time being at least, it is far less concerned with the decentralisation of powers, unlike traditional republicanism, but it has increasingly become more concerned with an agenda of consensus and egalitarianism.

Fundamentally, whilst there has been a tendency to conceptualise different forms of Irish nationalism as a simplistic binary opposite of force versus peaceful expression,<sup>18</sup> as well as equating militant types of nationalism with Irish republicanism, this is no longer a useful approach. From the early and mid-1990s onwards, there have been a series of shifts away from a militant form of nationalism, and there have been concerted attempts to bridge the previously existent gaps between the nationalism of the SDLP and of the Irish government and that of Sinn Féin. This resulted in the emergence of Irish pan-nationalism, bridging the gaps between the different variations of Irish nationalism. Thus, those divisions which distinguished the nationalism of the SDLP and of Sinn Féin are increasingly becoming less pronounced, and instead a new more global form of Irish nationalism is emanating.

Moreover, the labelling of Irish republicanism as a violent form of nationalism has been heavily criticised both by academics such as Munck (1986), and by Irish republicans themselves, more so since Sinn Féin strategies have moved away from armed tactics and embraced more constitutional forms of politics. Munck (1986) has argued that Irish republicanism must be seen in the first instance as a way of life, an ideology and a form of struggle that encompasses a number of aspects including nationalism, Catholicism, socialism and republicanism proper.

Although correctly perceiving Irish republicanism as more than just a particular form of nationalism, there are still some problems with Munck's (1986) suggestion. In particular since, even if primarily a Catholic movement, Sinn Féin claims it does not aspire to a sectarian society. In fact, as mentioned they argue in favour of the unity of 'Catholic, Protestant and dissenter'. The second problem with Munck's (1986) concept is the emphasis placed upon socialism, as the Sinn Féin leader is very sceptical about referring to Sinn Féin's nationalism as 'socialist-republican'. Gerry Adams argues that:

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<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Curtis (1994).

<sup>18</sup> Even if in practical terms, one of the main elements that distinguishes the SDLP and Sinn Féin is that the latter has resorted to the use of violence, there are more deep-seated differences between these two parties and their forms of nationalism which must also be acknowledged. For example, the extent of the socialist aspirations of both parties is substantially different.



the advance from today's situation into national independence as defined by Irish republicanism places socialism on the agenda, but Irish republicanism is not a term which defines a system of society in the way that socialism does. In our case it refers to the aim of securing national independence in its broadest sense. Despite the best efforts of the Fianna Fáil,<sup>19</sup> SDLP<sup>20</sup> and Fine Gael<sup>21</sup> leaderships to distort its meaning, republicanism is a concept easily understood by the majority of Irish people to mean national independence, unity, sovereignty and an end to foreign interference in our affairs. (1995:130)

Still, Munck's contentions reflect an examination of Sinn Féin's republicanism in the period from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, when in fact socialism was an essential element in republicanism. Accordingly, Bean comments that '(Danny) Morrison's call to "take power in Ireland" at the 1981 *Árd Fheis*<sup>22</sup> was a call for struggle to achieve the thirty-two county democratic *socialist* republic' (1994:4). In the 1980s, Gerry Adams commented that, 'if you want to talk about socialism in the Irish context you cannot divorce the socialist aspiration from the aspiration of national independence' (1995:128) and:

because I am a socialist I continue to be a republican. Republicanism is a philosophy in which the national and the radical social dimensions are the two sides of the same coin. While the national dimension has, for historical reasons, been the most dominant tendency within the republican movement, Irish republicanism has consistently been a radical political philosophy. [ ] The advance from today's situation into national independence as defined by Irish republicanism places socialism on the agenda but Irish republicanism is not a term which defines a system of society in the way that socialism does. (1995:131)

Subsequently Adams argued that although some republicans might be socialists, it cannot be assumed that all republicans are socialists, nor that Sinn Féin is essentially socialist.<sup>23</sup> In the glossary of Adams' 1997 book, *An Irish Voice*, republicanism is defined as the 'political ideology born out of the French and American revolution. Believes in the right of Irish people as a whole to determine the future of Ireland. Seeks a democratic, non-sectarian, pluralist society – a thirty-two county Irish Republic' (p.275), and is no longer described as socialist. Thus, in order to understand what Sinn Féin's republicanism means and how it has evolved through time, it is also necessary to consider this in relation to the party's much wider political strategy and positioning. Ultimately, 'Irish republicanism is not and never has been a static concept, it is a living and developing ideology' (Adams, 1986:133).

### ***A History of the Republican Movement***

The basis for Sinn Féin's philosophy is contained in the 1916 Proclamation, which puts forward such basic tenets as that the ownership of Ireland belongs to the people of Ireland, that all children of the nation are to be cherished equally, and universal

<sup>19</sup> Originally founded by Eamon De Valera in 1926, it is now the largest party in the Republic of Ireland with 39.3% of vote in the last Irish general elections on the 6<sup>th</sup> June 1997.

<sup>20</sup> Founded in 1970, it is a nationalist and the second largest party in Northern Ireland, with 24% of the Northern Irish vote at the 1997 general election.

<sup>21</sup> Formed in 1933, it is the second largest party in the Republic of Ireland having polled in the 1997 elections 27.9%.

<sup>22</sup> Refers to Sinn Féin's Annual Convention, (AF).

<sup>23</sup> For example, one of the reasons given for the 1969 split in the republican movement and the creation of Provisional Sinn Féin was 'extreme socialism'.

suffrage. Essentially what we want to see is a non-sexist, economic, social and political democracy in Ireland, and either a secular society or certainly one in which no religious persuasion would have any special constitutional place in the state. We argue for the necessity of a new constitution and for a charter of human rights based on international conventions. (Adams, 1995:149)

Although founded as Provisional Sinn Féin in December 1969,<sup>24</sup> the development of the wider Irish republican movement has been as deeply complex as Irish history.<sup>25</sup> Underlying its difficult development has been the long-standing yet mostly unsuccessful struggle for a united Ireland. As Smith has suggested:

the continuity of revolt is important heritage as a source of inspiration. For many republicans, the significant fact has not been that the rebellions did not succeed, but in the words of Pearse, that the 'chain of the separatist tradition has never once snapped during centuries'. (1995:12)

### The Origins of Sinn Féin

Tracing its origins back to 1905,<sup>26</sup> the party was initially focused on 'county council elections' (Hughes, 1994: 23). Although Sinn Féin has changed considerably over the years, it has also repeatedly been the centre of numerous internal disputes, which have occasionally culminated in party splits. Founded in Dublin, by Arthur Griffith and Bulmer Hobson (Curtis, 1994 and Walsh, 1994), and formed initially from the alliance of a number of groups, such as those who defended the Irish language, cultural revivalists, economic nationalists and those involved in physical or militant forms of nationalism (Patterson, 1989), at the time it was characterised by anti-socialist ideas.<sup>27</sup>

As an ardent defender of Irish independence and opposed to any form of socialism, Griffith was deeply troubled by what he saw as its threat in the form of British imperialism. He argued that since socialism was an English phenomenon, only Irish nationalism could cure the 'ills' of Ireland and 'against the red flag of communism [ ] we raise the flag of an Irish nation. Under that flag there will be protection, safety and freedom for all' (30<sup>th</sup> August 1911 in Walsh, 1994:12). There is, nevertheless, a more controversial side to Griffith's thinking: one that has been largely ignored by the party, and more crucially, by academics themselves. Highlighted by Walsh (1994), Griffith's anti-Semitism led him to write:

I have in former years often declared that the three evil influences of the century were the Pirate, the Freemason and the Jew [ ] United they stand in Europe against France. [ ] Some thirty thousand Jews and Jewesses, mostly of phenomenal ugliness and dirt, had

<sup>24</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, the term Sinn Féin is used in reference to Provisional Sinn Féin.

<sup>25</sup> For an historical account of the development of Ireland and Northern Ireland see, for example, Arthur (1996); Boyce (1988); Foster (1989); Hughes (1994); Keagh (1994); Morrow (1996) and Patterson (1996). For different explanations for the conflict see, for example, Darby (1997); McGarry and O'Leary (1995) and Ruane and Todd (1996). Also of relevance is Walker's (1996) essay on historical perspectives of Northern Ireland, and the republican account in Adams (1986) or (1995). See also Appendix Two, p.279.

<sup>26</sup> Note that some authors, such as Smith (1995), suggest that Sinn Féin was founded in 1907.

<sup>27</sup> This is an important aspect since, as discussed in the first section of this chapter, modern Sinn Féin is characterised by some socialist aspirations. Furthermore, it is also relevant to note that although contemporary Sinn Féin argues that Arthur Griffith was the founding father of modern Irish republicanism, they nevertheless fail to acknowledge an important ideological difference between modern Sinn Féin and Griffith's thinking, that of Griffith's opposition to socialism.

come out of their East End dens at the summons of their Rabbis. [ ] Wild savage, filthy forms from the Yiddish ghetto of Whitechapel. (*United Irishmen* of 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1899, in p.12)

Whilst the literature reveals some agreement amongst different authors who see Griffith as the founding father of Sinn Féin, different opinions have been expressed regarding his ulterior motives for forming the party. For example, Walsh (1994) suggests that Sinn Féin was established in direct opposition to the Home Rule Party,<sup>28</sup> whilst Liz Curtis (1994) argues it emerged as a tool to promote Griffith's personal ideas. However, both authors agree that from a very early stage it became the political party representing the Irish republican movement in search of a united Ireland.

Aspiring for an 'independent capitalist country' (Curtis, 1994:187), with representatives sitting on an Irish Council instead of attending the English Parliament at Westminster, the party was 'committed to the establishment of a dual British-Irish monarchy along the lines of the Austro-Hungarian empire' (Ryan, 1994:84). Despite the party's establishment in 1905, it was 11 years later, with the Easter Rising of 1916,<sup>29</sup> that the first real opportunity for a mass revolution and the unification of republicans with nationalists occurred. Notwithstanding the opportunities that the insurrection offered, Sinn Féin opted not to actively participate in it, as it believed that there was not enough public support for the rebellion. Thus 'Sinn Féin's involvement had mainly taken place in the imagination of the police' (Folley, 1992:11), although the party still benefited from the events of 1916. Since the rebellion's failed attempt to overturn the British rule of Ireland resulted in the execution of the leading insurgents, it instigated the emergence of a mass of popular anti-British feelings (Ryan, 1994) and an increased interest in supporting Sinn Féin (Walsh, 1994).

### An Electoral Start

By 1917, Sinn Féin had reorganised itself 'into a broad nationalist front capable of displacing the Irish Parliamentary Party' (Patterson, 1989:8). As Walsh also comments:

despite the failure of Republicans to attract any support from Ulster Unionists, Sinn Féin became the focus of a spectacular political development during 1917-1918. From being an elite circle of individuals, it was transformed into a mass movement of nationalist Ireland, taking the Southern Unionist Ascendancy class into its sway. (1994:18)

For the party, 1917 and 1918 were to become crucial years of transformation, namely with the election to Parliament of Count Plunkett, marking the start of Sinn Féin's participation in the electoral process. As a result, the party introduced its policy of abstentionism, whereby elected

<sup>28</sup> Not demanding a complete separation from Britain, the party was more interested in a devolved form of government, aspiring for land and educational reform, than in self-government. See, for example, Boyce (1988).

<sup>29</sup> When a small group of republican rebels took control of the centre of Dublin and declared an Irish republic. For more details see, for example, Boyce (1988); Curtis (1994); Foster (1989) or Keagh (1994).

candidates would not take up their seats in parliament thus refusing to recognise the institution. On July 10<sup>th</sup> 1917, Eamon De Valera, one of the few leaders of the Easter Rising who had not been executed, was elected as Sinn Féin's candidate in the by-election for East Clare. Only a few months later, at the party's Árd Fheis, De Valera was also elected as the party's president. As Curtis has emphasised, 'the new Sinn Féin was, in effect, a coalition embracing nationalists with widely differing views, especially on whether or not the new Ireland should be a republic' (1994:297).

By December 1918 Sinn Féin had fulfilled its electoral aspirations with a substantial victory, securing 73 of the 105 Irish seats in Westminster Parliament. It was this same success, coupled with the previously introduced policy of abstentionism, that enabled Sinn Féin to form an alternative parliament, the Dáil,<sup>30</sup> on January 21<sup>st</sup> 1919. Underlying this move was the rationale that since the party controlled the majority of Irish seats at Westminster, which their policy of abstentionism prevented them from taking, the creation of an Irish parliament was a legitimate and necessary action. Furthermore, taking its inspiration from the Proclamation of the Easter Rising of 1916, the Democratic Programme of the Dáil Éireann of 1919 provided the basis for a modern conception of Irish republicanism whereby:

we declare in the words of the Irish Republican proclamations the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland and to the unfettered control of the Irish destinies to the sovereign and indefensible [ ] we declare that the nation's sovereignty extends not only to all men and women of the nation, but to all its material possessions we reaffirm that all rights to private property must be subordinated to public right and welfare. (in Folley, 1992:12)

At the same time, changes were also occurring within the social basis of Irish republicanism. The failure of the 1916 revolution meant that those who had fought in it and had been captured by the British troops were interned at the Frongoch prison camp in North Wales, where there they began to refer themselves as the Volunteers - the first ever mention of the Irish Volunteers Army.<sup>31</sup> It was these same volunteers who were later known as the IRA, and this episode revealed an important characteristic of the republican movement: its ability to organise and develop strategies under difficult conditions of imprisonment.<sup>32</sup>

It was not until 1919 that the Oglaiġ na hÉireann (IRA) formally began its struggle for Irish

<sup>30</sup> Refers to Irish Parliament.

<sup>31</sup> Note that Hughes (1994) refers to the creation of the Irish Volunteer Force in November 1913. Moreover, there is also some contention regarding the date for the creation of the IRA. Thus, it is important to note the lack of consensus in tracing the origins of both the IRA and Sinn Féin, and that there are a number of authors who will not agree with the chronology of events which is here presented. For example, White (1993:19) argues that the IRA participated in the Easter Rising, whilst Smith (1995) argues that the IRA only emerged in 1920, suggesting instead that what existed previously were the Irish Volunteers. On the other hand Hughes (1994) comments that the seven leaders who signed the proclamation of the Irish Republic during the Easter Rising 'called themselves the commanders of the Irish Republican Army' (p.40).

<sup>32</sup> This is further illustrated by the process of ideological modernisation and political education of the republican movement, which took place in the internment camps in Northern Ireland of the 1970s. See, for example, Bell (1994); O'Brien (1995) and Smith (1995).

independence (Kelley, 1982). Led by Michael Collins, its first victims were 14 members of the Royal Irish Constabulary. Kelley suggests that ‘these opening volleys in the war for the republic were in some ways the initial shots to be fired in a type of irregular warfare that would become more and more common as the century progressed’ (1982:36).

### The Partition of Ireland

Whilst, republican separatist moves were of limited success, in particular since the British had no intention of accepting its claim for independence, a military strategy known as the War of Independence was implemented.<sup>33</sup> It was during this war, in 1920, that attempts to find a solution for the conflict saw the British Parliament pass the Home Rule Bill, which created two separate parliaments: one for the six counties of the Province of Ulster and one for the remainder of Ireland, thereby signalling the forthcoming partition of the island. Although a truce was reached on July 10<sup>th</sup> 1921 through the Anglo-Irish treaty,<sup>34</sup> it was only on December 6<sup>th</sup> 1921, that the war finally ended.<sup>35</sup>

Inevitably, there were those within Sinn Féin who opposed the Treaty and the partitioning of Ireland while others saw it as an acceptable compromise. Such contrasting differences ultimately culminated in conflict.<sup>36</sup> Underlining this disaffection was the offer of a semi-devolved Ireland and the retention of the six Northern counties- Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry and Tyrone, under British rule. Kelley comments that:

Michael Collins and the other Irish negotiators were not delighted by this offer, [ ] neither did they regard it as insulting. Collins described the proposed Treaty as a ‘stepping-stone to the republic’, for that seemed the best way of selling the package back in Ireland. [ ] After reluctantly initialling the pact, Collins confessed that he had in effect signed his own death warrant. Despite such fears and misgivings, the *Sinn Féin* representatives capitulated and tentatively approved the Free State agreement at 2.30 am on 6 December 1921. (1982:44)

Ratified on the 7<sup>th</sup> January 1922, by the Dáil, the treaty initially led to an internal dispute between the pro-treaty faction, led by Michael Collins, and the anti-treaty faction, led by De Valera. This culminated with the resignation of De Valera and the appointment of Arthur Griffith as Sinn Féin’s president. Led by Eamon de Valera, those opposed to the treaty refused to accept the partition of Ireland, and with the support of the anti-treaty faction of the IRA, initiated a military campaign with the aim of destabilising the Free State government. Unable to contain the ensuing revolt, the Free State government resorted to a widespread use of force that escalated into the Irish Civil War.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup> See Curtis (1994); Foster (1989) or Keagh (1994).

<sup>34</sup> The Anglo-Irish Treaty stated that Ireland would be given Home Rule and with it some degree of independence, whilst a separate state/government in Northern Ireland would be maintained under direct British Rule.

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Boyce (1988); Curtis (1994) or Hughes (1994).

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, Curtis (1994); Smith (1995) or Walsh (1994).

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Foster (1989); Hughes (1994) and Keagh (1994).

It was not long after the end of the Irish Civil War in 1923, from which a run-down and demoralised IRA<sup>38</sup> emerged, that the long-standing contention on abstentionism re-surfaced once again. With the election of 44 Sinn Féin representatives in the general election on the 27<sup>th</sup> April 1923, the first since the formation of the Irish Free State, the party again found itself in a dilemma over whether or not to take up seats in parliament. If the parliamentary seats were occupied, that would signal the recognition of the Free State and the partition of Ireland, and 'at the IRA convention of 1925, the merest hint that De Valera and his colleagues were thinking about the possibility of entering the Irish Parliament was enough to prompt the IRA to sever its links with Sinn Féin' (Smith, 1995:60). With such problems growing beyond the remit of the IRA, and after De Valera's failed attempt to persuade his party to reconsider the policy of abstentionism, De Valera left Sinn Féin to form Fianna Fail in April 1926 (Kelley, 1982). The confusion which emerged from this split affected more than just the party; it also extended itself to the lower ranks of the movement and republican communities. Ultimately, this resulted in a loss of faith in the leadership and the party, and a drastic reduction in the number of supporters. (O'Brien, 1995).

Having taken up the seats in the Dáil, Eamon de Valera was elected President of the Executive of the Irish Free State on March 9<sup>th</sup> 1932, and over the subsequent years introduced a series of legislative measures<sup>39</sup> that would sever the ties between the Free State and Great Britain.<sup>40</sup> Although he had parted from the republican movement in 1926, it was only in June 1935 that De Valera finally ended his political ties with the IRA. Following this, he ordered the imprisonment of many of its members and in 1936 declared the IRA an illegal organisation. Subsequently, in 1937, a new constitution was established which applied to the whole of Ireland, although it was to be implemented only in the territory of the republic until re-unification of the whole island. However, the introduction of the 1936 Irish External Relations Act, which determined relations with Britain and claimed sovereignty to Ulster, caused considerable revulsion within the IRA, which had, until then, largely remained outside the political debate. This was because the act gave the British crown authority over the international affairs of the newly formed Ireland (Boyce, 1988). What followed was an intense IRA military campaign in Great Britain, which began in January 1939 and lasted about a year (Smith, 1995).

### Looking North of the Border

On the political side, Sinn Féin, which had remained considerably dormant until then, increasingly began to concentrate its efforts in Northern Ireland:

<sup>38</sup> This was the anti-faction IRA, which opposed the partition of Ireland. The faction, which supported partition, had renamed itself as the Irish Free State Army.

<sup>39</sup> Such as the abrogation of the oath of allegiance to the British crown.

<sup>40</sup> See Hughes (1994).

by 1955, the original republican party had resurrected itself to the point where it was able to run candidates for all 12 Northern Ireland seats at Westminster. The outcome of the voting probably astonished Sinn Féin itself as much as it bewildered the Unionists. (Kelley, 1982:72)

Having polled 152,310 votes, representing 56% of the Catholic vote at the time, it elected two of its candidates to the Westminster parliament, although these seats were once again not occupied. Even so, this wave of euphoria was not to last long. The despair fuelled by the destruction caused by the Border Campaign,<sup>41</sup> the 1959 Westminster elections were a crushing blow for republicans with votes falling dramatically to 73,415; almost half of those polled in 1955. In the aftermath of such disappointing results, the republican movement was left with no option other than to end the Border Campaign on the 26<sup>th</sup> February 1962 and:

the ideological elite's prism through which the IRA viewed the world was displayed in its final campaign communiqué [ ]. It blamed the movement's defeat on the 'attitude of the general public whose minds have been deliberately distracted from the supreme issues facing the Irish people – the unity and freedom of Ireland' and, in renewing its pledge of 'eternal hostility to the British forces of occupation', it called on the Irish people to show greater support in its preparations for the 'final and victorious phase of the struggle for the full freedom of Ireland'. (Smith, 1995:72)

The failure of the border campaign also highlighted the republican movement's inability to gain and sustain popular support for a prolonged military strategy, a problem that was to haunt republicans in decades to come.<sup>42</sup> As Sinn Féin explains, it was forced to adopt 'a more radical stance on social and economic affairs campaigning politically to gain support on issues other than partition'.<sup>43</sup> However, as Cathal Goulding, then the chief of staff of the IRA, suggested in an interview in *This Week*:

by 1967, the Movement had become dormant. It wasn't active in any political sense or even in any revolutionary sense. Membership was falling off. People had gone away. Units of the IRA and the Cumman of Sinn Féin had become almost non-existent. (in Smith, 1995:80)

### Emerging Differences Within Sinn Féin

More problematic was its inability to exploit the Civil Rights demonstrations in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s,<sup>44</sup> which led to considerable discontent amongst its Northern faction; in particular, because the IRA was unable to protect its communities from attacks perpetrated by loyalist mobs and the RUC. As Gerry Adams suggests:

the republican movement of the 1960's had proved incapable of responding adequately to events as they evolved in the Six Counties. The spontaneous popular uprising of August 1969 – unco-ordinated, locally organised, lacking any general plan – and the subsequent effects in the Twenty-six Counties found the movement ill-prepared and unable to cope with the needs and potential of that period. (1995:46)

The problem was not a question of lack of will of the Northern command, but the impoverished state of its army compounded with the refusal of the Southern leadership to provide the badly

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Smith (1995).

<sup>42</sup> Parallels can also be drawn with Sinn Féin's decision not to participate in the Easter Rising because of the lack of popular support.

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.sinnfein.ie/documents/intro.html>, accessed 4<sup>th</sup> November 1999 at 12:11.

<sup>44</sup> See O'Dochartaigh (1997).

needed equipment. Thus, the Northern organisation saw no option other than to renounce the Southern leadership. Such was the extent of the grievances between the Northern and Southern ranks of the movement that in the later part of 1969, the Northern leadership of the IRA entered into direct talks with the Fianna Fáil. The main aim of these meetings was to request the provision of guns and ammunition so that the IRA could embark on the much-needed defence campaign of the Catholic communities. The result was as follows:

these talks entered a new phase in early September at a meeting in Donegal between *Fianna Fáil* financiers and Northern IRA men who were now completely fed up with Goulding [ ]. The money-men from the South offered to provide some £200,000 to the disgruntled IRA faction in the Six Counties if it would agree to establish a separate Northern Command that had no connections to Goulding's headquarters in Dublin. The Southern pay off was also made conditional upon the Northerners agreement not to engage in any political activities in Éire. (Kelley, 1982:125)

Although the lack of support from the Southern IRA leadership played a crucial role in the break-up of the movement, there were also other questions at stake. As Gerry Adams has indicated:

the failure and inadequacy (of the republican movement) did not relate solely to the questions of defence for beleaguered nationalist areas. Indeed, lack of guns was not a primary problem as it was made up quite rapidly. The primary problem was lack of politics, a shortcoming which was to remain even after guns had become plentiful. (1986:35)

The political problems were also witnessed in the continuous dispute over the issue of abstentionism, which had caused the split of the republican movement in the 1920s. As Smith has suggested:

while abstention was certainly the immediate cause for contention, the roots of the division went deeper and concerned the whole course of the 1920s reassessment, the nature of the IRA leadership's policy towards developments in the North and the movement's non-performance in the riots of August 1969. (1995:85)

It was in December 1969, that at an extraordinary Convention of the IRA Army Council, with 12 votes in favour and 8 against (Kelley, 1982), the council voted in favour of dropping abstentionism from the politics of the movement.<sup>45</sup> As expected, and with the agreement of Fianna Fáil, the republican movement was once again split, since 'one section of Sinn Féin was in the process of abandoning the Republican demand for British withdrawal from Ireland'.<sup>46</sup> The following month, saw the formalisation of the split in Sinn Féin when, at the party's *Árd Fheis* on the 11<sup>th</sup> of January, those who opposed the constitutional changes abandoned the hall and resumed their assembly<sup>47</sup> elsewhere in Dublin. In retrospect Gerry Adams argued that:

understandably in the circumstances, their failure was seen simply in terms of military preparedness, and this view, allied to a suspicion amongst the older republicans of the politicisation process in which the movement was engaged, led to the split in 1970, a major set-back for the republican cause. It also ensured that the reinvigorated republican struggle which emerged was an inadequate one because the only republican organisation which arose from the ashes was a military one: it had little or no proper

<sup>45</sup> See Presbyterian Church of Ireland (1984).

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.sinnfein.ie/documents/intro.html>, accessed 4<sup>th</sup> November 1999 at 12:11.

<sup>47</sup> According to Kelley (1982), this represented around 100 delegates.



educational process, no formal politicisation courses and there was scant regard paid by the leadership to such needs. (1986:35)

### The Emergence of Provisional Sinn Féin

What emerged were the Provisional IRA (PIRA) and Provisional Sinn Féin,<sup>48</sup> leaving behind the Official IRA and Official Sinn Féin, also known as the ‘stickies’.<sup>49</sup> In a subsequent statement explaining the causes for the split, the Provisionals outlined five main areas of contention:

1. Recognition of Westminster, Stormont and Leinster House;
2. Extreme socialism leading to dictatorship;
3. Dictatorial internal methods being used in the movement;
4. Failure to give maximum possible defence in Belfast and other Northern areas in August 1969; and
5. The Campaign to retain Stormont, instead of seeking its abolition. (Freedom Struggle no. 10<sup>50</sup> in Walsh, 1994:102)

According to Smith, the newly emerged Sinn Féin and its military wing, the IRA:

pledged ‘allegiance to the 32-county Irish Republic proclaimed at Easter 1916, established by the first *Dáil Éireann* in 1919, overthrown by force of arms in 1922 and suppressed to this day by the existing British imposed Six-county and 26-county partition states’. (Irish Republican Publicity Bureau statement of 28<sup>th</sup> December 1969, re-printed in *An Phoblacht*, February 1970 in Smith, 1995:83)

Moreover, Walsh suggests that the Provisionals adopted some of the ideas of earlier forms of republicanism, such as ‘the socialism of James Connolly, the idealism of Patrick Pearse and the unrepentant Republicanism of Tom Clarke’ (*An Phoblacht*, June 1970 in 1994:103). Despite the absence of an organised movement (Bishop and Mallie, 1987), what permitted the newly-formed Sinn Féin to attract a new wave of community support and volunteers was the re-invention of their discourse. This was seen in a fresh emphasis placed on the role of republicans in the Easter Rising as well as past victories and successes. Also playing a key role were:

the victims of loyalist violence and British mismanagement of the situation – the Falls Curfew, internment, Bloody Sunday – (who) turned to the Provisional IRA for defence, and a new generation of young Irish people, organised around the old guard of the Provisionals, responded to the Republican message. (White, 1993:58)

Although the structure for the emergent movement had to be developed and was limited to a small number of supporters in Derry and Belfast (Ryan, 1994), it took the IRA less than a year to begin what was the start of the longest armed campaign against Britain, in October 1970. Fuelled by the short-term aim of removing Britain from Northern Ireland (Bishop and Mallie, 1987), it was underpinned by a more complex strategy. The campaign was constituted of three strands: military activities were to be confined to Northern Ireland, they were to be used as part of a wider attempt to secure and retain ground within the Catholic communities; and they were to take advantage of the crisis embracing unionism (Smith, 1995). As Cox has suggested, the newly found Provisional Sinn Féin also embarked in rebuilding the republican movement which had become excessively influenced by left politics and involved in so-called ‘normal’ politics

<sup>48</sup> Here, simply referred to as Sinn Féin and IRA.

<sup>49</sup> A Provisional Sinn Féin/IRA slang term used to refer to the Officials.

<sup>50</sup> The date is not indicated in the original source.

(1997). Designed to deal with the increased British militarisation of the Province, and to destroy the economic infrastructure, republicans hoped these actions would force a British withdrawal.

While this initially resulted in a military campaign, over the years some attempts to develop a political strategy began to emerge. Behind this approach was the awareness of the inherent difficulties associated with purely military tactics, namely the complexities of securing and maintaining the support of the grassroots and the wider community. For example, one policy which, in 1971, emerged from this process was the political and economic programme, *Éire Nua*, foreseeing the creation of an Ulster parliament based on the original nine counties of the Province (Smith, 1995). However, a leading republican, Danny Morrison, later dismissed this as a 'sop to the loyalists' (1985:86) and essentially inconsequential as it would not lead to united Ireland. Moreover, as Adams put it:

until 1974 Sinn Féin was banned under British law in the 6 counties and although the late Marie Drumm and others provided a public leadership during this period, Sinn Féin lacked the organisation for active political interventions and was primarily underground and thus functioning in a restricted way. (1986:149)

In fact, the restricted way in which the movement operated, whereby 'Sinn Féin was by and large perceived as, and was in reality, a poor second cousin to the IRA' (Adams, 1995:152), was also witnessed in its sense of insularity. This resulted in repeated attempts to distance itself from other revolutionary groups with the conviction that that there were no benefits, nor indeed any real need for republicans to learn from the experiences of others, as Cox argues:

at a time when national liberation movements around the world were exciting the sympathy and the support of student radicals in western Europe and the United States, the Provisional leadership almost seemed to go out of its way to distance itself and the new IRA from these other movements. (1997:678-9)

During this initial period of the 1970s, republicans were mainly an isolated and insular guerrilla group (Bean, 1994), unable to consider much wider issues at stake. Focusing on 'working class, urban and rural' communities, its political discourse reflected a harder and northern tone (Bean, 1994). Moreover, republicans also believed that it was their duty to ensure the continuance of the historical republican tradition and its principles, and the best way to do so was by focusing upon themselves. As Cox (1997) puts it, this implied a literal understanding of the concept of Sinn Féin (ourselves alone) even if in 1985 Danny Morrison claimed: 'I certainly don't think the republican movement has ever been insular: our thinking has always involved studying the lessons of other countries' (1985:89). As Ruairi O'Brádaigh, the President of Sinn Féin at the time stated 'in Ireland we have no need of your Che Guevaras and your Ho Chi Minhs. We have Wolfe Tone, Robert Emmett, O'Donovan Rossa, Cathal Brugha and many others' (in Halliday, 1996 in Cox, 1997:679).

Bean comments in 'developing during a guerrilla war and rooted in the ghetto sense of

alienation, it was frequently both more ruthless and more pragmatic in its ideology and strategy than the southern leadership' (1994:3). Although, in 1972 it believed that British occupation of Northern Ireland was coming to an end (Morrison, 1985), it soon became clear that unlike the IRA had foreseen, the war would not be a swift one. Further aggravating the failure of the IRA to force a British retreat was the impact of Ulsterisation,<sup>51</sup> the rise in sectarian killings, and the failure of the 1975 Provisional cease-fire, when republicans claimed that the British were preparing to withdraw. The combination of these elements, coupled with widespread discontent amongst the nationalist community, and the failure to ensure support for the military campaign, proved catastrophic for the leadership. The short-term strategy of the early 1970s was replaced by the Long War<sup>52</sup>, which reflected a greater awareness of the realities of the conflict and the situation in Northern Ireland.

### A New Republican Perspective

In effect, this new republican perspective represented the start of a 'twin track approach', which saw the combination of an intensive military struggle, combined with a new emphasis on politics and the need to create a mass struggle (Bean, 1994). Shifting from an insular position, Sinn Féin increasingly became more attune with the wider questions at stake and tried to cater for and reflect the needs of its own communities. As Adams puts it:

the struggle moved from being one about civil rights to a struggle for national rights. Slowly, there was a realisation that there was no way a statelet unable to encompass the aspirations of all its citizens could ever be strong or durable enough to act as the basis upon which an 'internal settlement' could be made. (1985:6)

Furthermore, there was also a growing awareness of the need to ensure continued popular support for the movement's activities and one particular group of young republicans, including the likes of Gerry Adams; Martin McGuinness; Tom Hartley and Danny Morrison, most of whom had been interned,<sup>53</sup> began to question the validity of a mainly military strategy.

O'Brádaigh, who was at the time the leader of Sinn Féin, has remarked that:

a lot of them were together during the internment at Long Kesh and they had their discussions, and I suppose they came to certain conclusions. When they came out, there was a natural attrition in the movement and gradually they moved into positions of power, and the first one I would say was the control of the *Republican News* newspaper in Belfast. And when Gerry Adams was released in '77 he seemed to become their natural leader and after that they got into positions of power and influence in the Movement. (in O'Brien, 1995:111)

<sup>51</sup> A policy introduced by the British in the mid 1970's that was aimed at shifting the emphasis of the conflict from a national to a localised law and order one. This was achieved mainly through modifications in policing, which saw the RUC and the Ulster Defence Regiment take responsibility for the region, but also in the Justice and Penal systems. See, for example, Bell (1994) and Coogan (1995).

<sup>52</sup> For a detailed account of the Long War, see, for example, Bell (1994); Coogan (1995); O'Brien (1995); Smith (1995); Walsh (1989) and (1994). It should also be noted that there is a substantial lack of agreement between the different academics who have examined the development of republican strategies, in particular the lack of concordance in terms of the number and types of phases in the republican movement since 1970.

<sup>53</sup> A policy introduced by the Stormont government under the Special Powers Act on 9<sup>th</sup> August 1971, and which ended with the release of the last prisoners on the 5<sup>th</sup> December 1975. It was described by Bell as 'a means to humiliate the minority' (1994:201).

This new generation of ‘young’ Northerners believed that a military strategy could only be maintained if supported by the nationalist community, with whom ‘few and thus durable links were forged’ (Adams, 1986:150). They also vigorously argued in favour of political action. One particular cause of concern was the lack of political awareness of Sinn Féin members, which resulted in their inability to develop a coherent strategy for the future (Adams, 1986). Thus, throughout most of the late 1970s, this new group of individuals patiently started to infiltrate key positions within the political and the armed wings of republicanism. As Cox suggests, ‘the collapse of the IRA’s original scenario of quick victory by the middle of the 1970s precipitated a major crisis in the organisation, one result of which was to bring about a relocation of power in the movement from Southern traditionalists to Northern radicals’ (1997:279). What followed was a significant change in republican strategy, initially witnessed by the take-over of the two key republican publications,<sup>54</sup> *An Phoblacht* and *Republican News*, by Danny Morrisson and Tom Hartley.<sup>55</sup>

What was particularly innovative about these rising groups was their belief in the advantages of constitutional politics and social agitation, supported in conjunction with military action. Whilst ‘the Northern radicals were determined that PIRA’s campaign would not be allowed to drift into history as just another republican stand which burned itself out through unthinking military zeal’ (Smith, 1995:114), they also acknowledged the need to reform the movement and maximise its potential.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, this gradual politicisation meant that its remit expanded from a mainly military organisation to one also addressing social and economic issues, for example housing and unemployment, while consolidating its republican base of support (Bean, 1994). Also, as Adams comments:

much of the change in this situation has come about because of the length of the struggle, for the struggle itself has politicised republicans. [ ] New members, especially young people who have lived their entire lives in the struggle, are of a developed political calibre. They have been politicised because the political situation has been continuously developing and because the crisis has been going on for so long. (1986:150)

Appealing to a generation of young republicans, the new leadership was aware of the benefits of an increased political and social role in according them legitimacy. As Bean stressed ‘although the armed struggle was still a central issue, [ ] it was the new emphasis on politics and mass struggle that represented a radical break with traditional republicanism and proved to be a direct precursor to the current phase of “unarmed struggle” (1994:3-4). The Northern leadership became less conservative and was turning to left-wing politics, in particular to the ideologies of

<sup>54</sup> Note that *An Phoblacht*, a Southern paper, was merged with the Northern *Republican News* in 1979 (Smith, 1995).

<sup>55</sup> See Chapter Six.

<sup>56</sup> An example of the reforms introduced were the changes in the IRA combat format from battalions into cells, in an attempt to overcome the security breaches and maximise safety against British intelligence. For more details see, for example, O’Brien (1995) and Smith (1995).

Third World national liberation movements (Bean, 1994). Thus, republicans saw themselves as part of the wider international revolutionary project, contributing to the war against colonialism (Adams, 1986). The conflict in Northern Ireland was, from a republican perspective, a legacy of British colonialism and imperialism, which had to be overthrown. The British government was considered a colonial aggressor which had economic and defence interests in Northern Ireland. Sinn Féin was increasingly becoming more radical, moving away from its simplistic and conservative positioning of the early 1970s and:

the thirty two county democratic socialist republic necessitated mass mobilisation and a political campaign throughout Ireland; its emphasis on a mass political movement was a clear reversal of the conspiratorial elite's anti-politics of force republicanism and of the guerrilla militarism of the early 1970s. Instead of being a poorly regarded junior partner to the IRA, Sinn Féin was to develop a clear identity and role as a mass revolutionary political movement. (Bean, 1994:4)

This witnessed moves towards re-embracing socialism (Bean, 1984) and saw a number of new policies introduced, such as those countering discrimination against women, and the reinforcing of anti-sectarianism. Furthermore, this idea of anti-sectarianism extended itself to the republican need to understand the so-called 'loyalist/Protestant phenomenon' in order for the struggle to succeed (Sinn Féin, 1984a:1). Sinn Féin's policy, as outlined in a party policy document for 1972-1984, stated that:

the principle of republicanism, the reconquest of Ireland, forms the basis of our policies and the objectives forwards which our strategies are directed. While policies are insufficient in themselves, they are nonetheless, important, not only in attaining the society Sinn Féin envisages for the future but also in mobilising, on a daily basis, maximum support for the republican position and in building alternatives to, or resistance against, the social, economic, political and cultural policies of the British and Dublin governments. (Sinn Féin, 1985<sup>57</sup>)

Despite some initial scepticism amongst hard-core militarists, the politicisation and, in a sense, the radicalisation of the movement did not limit its military activities. As Smith has pointed out, 'one of the main features [ ] was that it enabled the military instrument to be governed by calculations of its efficacy rather than ideological tradition' (1995:157). Additionally, the Hunger Strikes in the early 1980s,<sup>58</sup> confirmed for the first time the efficacy of the dual strategy. This was particularly evident when Bobby Sands (a republican prisoner), to the horror of both the British and the unionists and to euphoria of republicans, was elected as Member of Parliament (MP) for Fermanagh/South Tyrone on April 9<sup>th</sup> 1981. With this event, 'the Republican movement (gained) world wide support and cash not gained since the early 1970s' (O'Brien, 1995:123). Also, as Danny Morrison has argued 'the pressure of politicisation was an added ingredient in the normal political competition taking place within the organisation under the umbrella of the republican movement and came to a head during the hunger strike struggle'

<sup>57</sup> Page number omitted in the original document.

<sup>58</sup> See Campbell *et al.* (1994).

(1985:87).

**The Rise and Stalemate of the 1980s**

Shortly after the contentious decision to participate in elections both North and South of the border in June 1981, republicans elected two further IRA prisoners, Kieran Docherty and Paddy Agnew, this time to the Irish Parliament as seen in Table 2 (see p.66). Although this represented a double triumph that provided some reassurance to the movement in particular its armed wing, there was, nevertheless, some concern regarding the transfer of money from military to political activities. As Gerry Adams pointed out in a 1983 party document, quoted here at length:

another problem facing republicans, arising out of their electoral successes in the year of the Hunger Strike, 1981, is whether or not it is possible to fight a war (which absorbs one’s resources, financial and human) and successfully engage in elections to strengthen the public basis for the struggle and further destabilise the British occupation. Some republicans would argue (correctly) that even if every elected representative in the North was a Sinn Féin person, that would still not remove the British – only through physical force, that created by the IRA, can the British be politically embarrassed to withdraw, so why waste money on elections. But, runs the other side of the argument, to establish oneself politically now (and through elections) or, at least to contest even if the outcome is bitterly disappointing is worth the short-term risk of some demoralisation and the long-term benefit of valuable political experience. All are agreed upon the primacy of the armed struggle, that electoral contests are only one tactic not a valid alternative or replacement. (Sinn Féin, p.53)

Even so, the dual strategy was beginning to show some dividends and:

the IRA knew that a principal objective of the British and Irish governments was to isolate them from their support base and defeat them. This objective was made virtually impossible so long as the Republican Movement could show it had a mandate, that it was representative of the people. (O’Brien, 1995:126)

	By-Election	Local Election	British General	Irish General	European	Regional N.I.
1981	Bobby Sands and Owen Carron MP's			Kieran Docherty and Paddy Agnew TD		
1982						10% (5 seats) Assembly
1983			13% (1MP)			
1985		12% (59 cllrs)				
1986	6.6%					
1987			11% (1 MP)	1.9%	13%	
1989		11% (43 cllrs)			9%	
1992			10%			
1993		12% (51 cllrs)				
1994					9%	
1996						15% (17 seats) Forum
1997		17% (74 cllrs)	16% (2 MP's)	2.5%		
1998						18% (18 seats) Assembly
1999					17%	

**Table 2: Sinn Féin's Electoral Results**

From the early 1980s onwards, with the realisation that a solution for the conflict would take time, republicans began to strategically implement the Armalite and Ballot Box strategy.<sup>59</sup> This allowed Sinn Féin to develop the notion that there was more to republicanism than simply an armed struggle: that it also represented a legitimate social and political force. In 1984, the party stated that:

both the IRA and Sinn Féin play different but convergent roles in the war for national liberation the Irish Republican Army wages an armed campaign in the occupied 6 counties, whilst its elements in the 26 counties play a supportive role. Sinn Féin maintains the propaganda war and is the public and political voice of the movement. [ ] Whilst Sinn Féin must support the war effort by rationalising the struggle in political terms, the organisation has a responsibility to advance the movement's social aims. (Sinn Féin, p.1)

However, the reliance on this dual strategy proved to be problematic at times. Although, participation in elections was generally widely accepted by the party, 'providing of course that it is not seen as being the first step towards reformism or a dilution of an armed struggle' (Morrison, 1985:88), there was a growing alienation amongst the nationalist/republican communities in the face of the continuing bombing and killings. Munck (1992) suggests that the inability of the movement to advance its cause ultimately forced Sinn Féin to re-think its strategy.

Cox (1997) has also argued that since the mid-1970s, the republican movement had decided to explore a more internationalist dimension to its struggle, becoming part of the much wider revolutionary process. The collapse of the international revolutionary movement in the late 1980s forced Sinn Féin to re-examine itself. In effect, this introspection was a result of both internal and external factors, the collapse of the Eastern block, the Soviet Union and communism.<sup>60</sup> This meant that Sinn Féin's justifications for the British presence in Northern Ireland, the Republic's stance of neutrality and the need to protect Western capitalist interests from communism, no longer made sense. The growing financial expenses that the Province was demanding, aggravated by the decline of the manufacturing industry in Northern Ireland and compounded by the rising costs of policing, demonstrated that Britain was not in Northern Ireland for economic reasons either.<sup>61</sup> Thus, the change in republican strategy resulted from an 'important convergence of political circumstances' (Mitchell McLaughlin in Cox, 1997:686).

### The New Republican Departure

To fully understand what has been termed the republican 'new departure' (Bean, 1994) or the

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<sup>59</sup> There is substantial disagreement within the currently available literature in regard to the start of the Armalite and Ballot Box strategy. For example, whereas Bean (1994) suggests this was in place between 1977 and 1987, Shirlow and McGovern (1998) argue that this was only adopted after the Hunger Strikes of 1981. Alternatively, O'Brien (1995) maintains that having started in 1971, the broader Long War strategy was extended until 1994. For the purposes of this research, it has been determined that the Armalite and Ballot Box strategy was in place between 1981-1987, and was part of the Long War strategy.

<sup>60</sup> See Cox (1997).

<sup>61</sup> See Cox (1997).

move away from the radicalisation which took place between the late 1970s and the mid-1980s, it is important to consider Sinn Féin at a national level, but also within a much wider international context. The rise of radical, socialist and internationalist ideas in the mid-1970s emerged both from the failure of the movement to advance its aims, and from the political vacuum in which Sinn Féin appeared. Signposting the need to change in 1988, Gerry Adams, stated that:

what will make a movement like ours revolutionary is not whether it is committed to any particular means of achieving revolutions, for example street agitation or physical force, but whether all the means it uses – political work, propaganda and mass education, armed struggle, projects of economic resistance – are conducive to achieving a revolutionary end, which in our case is the achievement of real national unity and independence, the reconquest of Ireland. The test of a real revolutionary is his or her consistent, determined and intelligent work for real national independence, whatever the area of the struggle that might be in. (p.130)

The result was the development of a new political discourse and strategy in the latter part of the 1980s, which would take the movement into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, counteract the negative effects of a military strategy and move away from the radical rhetoric. Hence, ‘to understand the significance of this recent development within Sinn Féin one must understand it comes after many decades of stagnation’ (Adams, 1986:160). However, ‘the difficulty in adopting a new political strategy was centred around the avoidance of political fragmentation and the development of inter-republican feuding which had had a devastating effect upon the cohesiveness of republicanism in the 1970s’ (Shirlow and McGovern, 1998:176). As Adams put it in 1986:

in order to realise our potential, we have to develop our organisation very considerably and we have to move into the mainstream of political relevance. A problem we experience is that many republicans have long had a compartmentalised attitude to their republican activities whereby they pursue republican ‘politics’ in isolation from their involvement in community groups, trade unions, co-operative or tenant organisations. We are seeking to change that, to break down self-isolation and to develop policy and strategy which will encourage our members to work in their trade unions and other organisations. (p.153)

First outlined in 1987 in the *Scenario for Peace* document<sup>62</sup> the first public manifestation of a changed political strategy - it illustrated a move away from the Long War and the Armalite and Ballot Box approach. For the first time, republicans indicated that they were prepared to consider a lasting and peaceful solution to the Troubles, through dialogue and constitutional avenues. Equally important was its willingness to accept an interim solution. Discussed also in Adams’ book, *A Scenario for Peace* (1989), one crucial aspect was the perceived need to include a new wider national and international dimension to the resolution of the conflict. In Adams’ third edition of *Free Ireland: Towards a Lasting Peace*, he states:

we called for an end to British rule, and argued that an enduring peace would only come

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<sup>62</sup> Note that there are two items entitled *A Scenario for Peace*, one if the original Sinn Féin document dated of 1987 and the second is a book written by Gerry Adams with the same title but dated of 1989.



about as a result of a process which won the support of a wide representation of Irish, British and international opinion. Such a Peace Process would have to contain the necessary mechanisms for a settlement; the framework; time-scale; and the dynamic necessary to bring about an inclusive, negotiated and democratic settlement. (1995:197)

As Shirlow and McGovern have suggested, changes in the republican movement meant that it tried to forge new links with 'a much wider pro-Irish unification community', for which the party was forced to moderate some of the radicalisation of the 1970s, early 1980s (1997:177). Although Sinn Féin and the wider republican movement as a whole were changing and becoming more pluralistic and inclusive, their objectives were not:

the republican objective remains as it always was, but there has been an evolution of policy and strategy for some time. Sinn Féin were never simply a 'Brits out' party at any time in our history. But we have adopted a different approach which is more in keeping with the reality of Ireland in 1993 than perhaps harking back to Ireland in 1918. (Adams, 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> October 1993 in 1997:30)

An immediate reward was the start of a new series of dialogue between the republican and the SDLP leaders, which took place between January and September 1988. This was also the first concerted effort towards the formation of a pan-nationalist front, as Adams describes, 'in these meetings Sinn Féin sought a consensus between all Irish nationalist parties on the right of the Irish people to self-determination, and argued that the Dublin government needed to launch a diplomatic offensive to secure this aim' (1995:197-8).

This new approach to the SDLP and the Irish government led to a series of attempts to foment links between the different nationalist movements, and to seek a way in which they could collaborate in search of 'a united people, not merely a single geographical unit' (Adams, 1986:168). Furthermore as Shirlow and McGovern explain:

a changing discourse thus emerged reflecting different tactical approaches. This strategic shift has centred on the imperatives of alternative avenues of political pressure and a re-orientation of Sinn Féin ideology as a form of 'mobilised social consciousness' within Northern Ireland. The process also saw the reformation of a broad nationalist agenda and the symbolic re-integration of the ideological ghettoised republican communities of Northern Ireland into the wider Irish 'nation'. (1998:178)

Adding a further dimension to a changed republican strategy were the secret talks between republicans and the British government, which resumed in 1991.<sup>63</sup> As Joe Austen commented to Shirlow and McGovern, in an interview in November 1995:

they (the British government) said that they could convince us (SF) that British policy in Ireland had changed dramatically, that they wished to disengage. The problem for them was that they could not be seen to disengage because of IRA activity and that they needed a breathing space to convince those sceptics within the Tory party that disengagement was obviously the way forward. (1998:177)

<sup>63</sup> Gerry Adams argues in his book that contact between Sinn Féin and the British government 'had existed [ ] for over twenty years, although it had not been in constant use' (1995:199).

Although republicans' newly developed strategy was publicised for the first time in 1987, it was only at the 1992 Árd Fheis that the party formally launched its new peace initiative entitled *Towards a Lasting Peace*,<sup>64</sup> as Adams himself explained: '*Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland* clearly placed the onus on the two governments, but particularly on the British government, to work to secure change' (1995:219). He also said that:

Mr Hume and I have made it clear in our joint statements that an agreement which emerges from our initiative must win the allegiance of all sections of our people. [ ] There is only one initiative at present with the potential to move us towards a negotiated settlement. That is the one in which John Hume and I are engaged. (6<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> October 1993 in 1997:28-29)

Responding to the changed political environment in Northern Ireland the British and Irish governments put forward the *Downing Street Declaration*, on the 15<sup>th</sup> December 1993.<sup>65</sup> In essence, this was a joint proposal on Northern Ireland which, to a considerable extent, reflected the earlier talks between Gerry Adams and John Hume of the SDLP.<sup>66</sup> However as Adams noted:

we also need to consider the commentary that runs alongside the Declaration. Nationalists disappointment is not only because heightened expectations in the build-up to Wednesday's announcement were swamped in ambiguity, but also because we listened keenly to what the players were saying. (22<sup>nd</sup> December 1993 - 4<sup>th</sup> January 1994 in 1997:39)<sup>67</sup>

Such were the perceived opportunities for the republican movement that on the 31<sup>st</sup> August 1994, the IRA announced the first of two long-standing cease-fires,<sup>68</sup> allowing Sinn Féin to join the peace process on the 16<sup>th</sup> September 1994. Only a few months later, in February 1995, the two governments issued the *Frameworks for the Future*<sup>69</sup> document, which outlined their view on how progress could be achieved, and described some of the areas<sup>70</sup> which were subsequently to form the basis for the Good Friday Agreement.<sup>71</sup> However, this was a deeply complex and painstakingly slow process of negotiation between the two governments which led to some discontent and suspicion amongst some ranks of the IRA and indeed Sinn Féin.<sup>72</sup> Already in March 1994, Gerry Adams had commented that:

Sinn Féin is willing to set aside all that has occurred up to now. I ask John Major to do

<sup>64</sup> See Bean (1994).

<sup>65</sup> The republican view of the development of the peace process is well document in the compilation of Gerry Adams' columns for the American newspaper *Irish Voice* (1997).

<sup>66</sup> For a chronology of the peace process between 1993 and 1996, see Bew and Gillespie (1996). Also, see Mallie and McKittrick (1996).

<sup>67</sup> Gerry Adams is here referring to a statement made by John Major in the House of Commons after the announcement, where he said 'the declaration does not assert the legitimacy of a United Ireland in the absence of majority consent. It does not either [ ] commit the British government to joining the ranks of the persuaders for a united Ireland. That is not the job of the British Government' (in Adams, 1997:39).

<sup>68</sup> This was rewarded almost immediately with the lifting of the British Broadcasting Ban.

<sup>69</sup> Gerry Adams described this document in his *Irish Voice* column of the 22<sup>nd</sup>–28<sup>th</sup> November 1995 as follows: 'as a postscript you may be pleased to know that the Plain Language Commission awarded the British Prime Minister, John Major, its foremost anti-gobbledygook prize when it gave him its Golden Rhubarb trophy for the most baffling document of 1995, *Frameworks for the Future*, which the British released about the Peace Process. The commission described the document as "rambling, repetitive, jargon-filled and incomprehensible to its target audience"' (1997:190).

<sup>70</sup> Such as the creation of a Northern Ireland Assembly, the increased co-operation between Ireland and Northern Ireland through the creation of a North-South body, and the removal/amendment of articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution.

<sup>71</sup> See Darby (1997); *The Irish Times* Internet site 'The Path to Peace' or Chapters Eight and Nine.

<sup>72</sup> See Mallie and McKittrick (1996).

likewise. I have frequently said that a new beginning is needed. I call upon all who are connected to end conflict, to redouble their efforts to move this situation on in a manner which takes account not only of all the sensitivities and difficulties involved, but more importantly, of the prize of peace which must be the basis for our commitment. (1997:49)

Nevertheless, for the republican movement the British did not respond as quickly as the Irish to the IRA cease-fire and this raised even further doubts that a solution could be found. Creating further problems were the constant increased demands placed on republicans by the British government in an attempt to satisfy unionist quarters. Partly as an attempt to overcome the stalemate, Bill Clinton visited the province in November 1995 and an international commission on decommissioning was set up, headed by Senator George Mitchell.<sup>73</sup>

Even so to the astonishment of some, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of February 1996, the IRA detonated a massive bomb in Canary Wharf in London. Justifying the decision Sinn Féin explained:

unfortunately, the British government failed to engage in this process and in doing so encouraged the Unionists to adopt the same negative attitude. It was this attitude and the fact they prevaricated and postured at every stage in the process, unwilling to respond “imaginatively and generously” as promised, that made the cessation breakdown inevitable.<sup>74</sup>

Adams later commenting in his column in the American newspaper, *Irish Voice*, said:

we have learned the hard way that no war does not mean peace, and that cessation’s cannot be taken for granted. Peace means dialogue, inclusive and in good faith. A new process must be rooted in clear, unambiguous public assurances that all-party talks will begin by a specified date, and that they will proceed with urgency, upon an inclusive agenda and without any preconditions whatsoever. (28<sup>th</sup> February - 5<sup>th</sup> March 1996 in 1997:206)

In an attempt to defuse the situation and salvage the peace process, the two governments launched a further joint communiqué at the end of February 1996, proposing the start of a period of multi-lateral consultations between the different parties and governments.<sup>75</sup> This included a first phase of consultations which took place between March 4<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> 1996, and the start of the ‘all-party negotiations’ which commenced on the 10<sup>th</sup> June under the auspices of Senator George Mitchell. However, those parties, that were not seen as fully committed to the peace process, such as Sinn Féin would be excluded from the talks process unless a cessation of violence was declared.

### A New Opportunity for Peace

Contrary to what was expected and despite the end of the republican cease-fire, Sinn Féin

<sup>73</sup> A report was issued on the 25<sup>th</sup> January 1996, outlining a set of principles, known as the Mitchell Principles. According to these, all participants in party negotiations should commit to democratic and peaceful means and the disarmament of paramilitaries should occur under the auspices of an independent commission. Furthermore, parties were required to renounce the use of force as a means of negotiation or the imposition of demands upon the process; that once an agreement is reached, this should be respected by all who participated in it and that punishment beatings and killings should stop.

<sup>74</sup> Sinn Féin at <http://www.sinnfein.ie/documents/intro.html> accessed on 4<sup>th</sup> November 1999 at 12:11.

<sup>75</sup> For an account of this period see also Chapter Eight.

gained increased support at elections to the Northern Ireland Forum in July 1996.<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, this was still deemed insufficient to put an end to the armed campaign, thus a 1.5 tonne IRA bomb was detonated in the heart of the city of Manchester on June 15<sup>th</sup>, followed in October by two explosions at the British Army's (BA) Northern Ireland Headquarters in Lisburn. Undoubtedly, it was the 1997 British general elections which brought a new impetus to the peace process, with the election of two of its candidates, Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, to Westminster.<sup>77</sup> The 1997 elections also marked a change of government from Conservative to Labour, under the leadership of Tony Blair and with Dr. Mo Mowlam as the new Northern Ireland Secretary.

Noticeably, despite the absence of an IRA cease-fire, during the new British Prime Minister's (PM) visit to Northern Ireland on May 16<sup>th</sup> 1997 a 30 day period of contact between civil servants and Sinn Féin was authorised.<sup>78</sup> Acknowledging Tony Blair's efforts, and further reflecting a different republican view of the British government,<sup>79</sup> Adams wrote:

I welcome the efforts being made by Tony Blair to address the issues which have blocked the reconstruction of the Peace Process. I accept that he is not responsible for the legacy of distrust and suspicion among Republicans which was created by the behaviour of the previous government. Nor indeed is he responsible for the difficulties currently facing everyone concerned to find a way of off-loading this legacy. However, he is responsible for implementing a policy to overcome the problem. More than anything else this is a question of political will. The way to peace follows the will to achieve it. The will is derived from a desire to end the strife. (2<sup>nd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> July 1997 in 1997:250)

Yet, it was not until a request was made by Gerry Adams that the IRA declared another cease-fire, on the 20<sup>th</sup> July 1997. This indicated for the first time that the party leadership was no longer prepared to pursue the armed struggle in the face of electoral success and the inclusion of Sinn Féin at the negotiating table. It also illustrated Sinn Féin's belief in the so-called twin-track approach, a combination of negotiations and a parallel process examining the issue of decommissioning (Adams, 1997). One month later, Sinn Féin found itself for the first time at the negotiating table, where, apart from a brief expulsion between February 20<sup>th</sup> and March 23<sup>rd</sup> 1998, it remained until the Good Friday Agreement was reached. Whilst Sinn Féin had formally joined the peace process, it took several months for Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness to meet and shake hands with the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, on the 13<sup>th</sup> October 1997. This culminated with a scheduled meeting at No.10 Downing Street, London, between the Prime Minister and the republican delegation, an event unseen for 75 years.

Under the chairmanship of Senator George Mitchell, the peace talks resumed in January 1998,

<sup>76</sup> See Table 2, p.66.

<sup>77</sup> See Table 2, p.66.

<sup>78</sup> This ended with the shooting of two RUC officers by the IRA on 16<sup>th</sup> June, 1997.

<sup>79</sup> See also Chapter Eight.

in what was to be a long, deeply complex and frustrating period.<sup>80</sup> At centre stage were still the same issues that had hampered the peace process the two previous years, in particular the unionists' refusal to negotiate directly with republicans, and the issue of decommissioning. To complicate matters further the document *The Propositions on Heads of Agreement*, issued in early January and leaked to the *Daily Telegraph*, caused a considerable amount of revulsion within Sinn Féin, who rejected the proposals on January 17<sup>th</sup> 1998. This document resulted from a joint governmental attempt to ensure that unionists would remain in the negotiation process, although republicans saw it as excessively favouring the other side. Only two days after Sinn Féin's formal rejection, Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness raced to Downing Street for an urgent and crucial meeting with the Prime Minister. This was to no avail as on the 21<sup>st</sup> of January, the IRA also rejected the document. The main difficulty emerging from these exchanges was that both unionist and republican demands had to be carefully balanced, and neither could be seen to be favoured. In an attempt to move the process forward, the talks were moved to London on the 26<sup>th</sup> of January, and a few weeks later, on the 16<sup>th</sup> February, were shifted once again, this time to Dublin.

Although Sinn Féin was actively involved in the negotiating process, its armed wing was suspected of engaging in military actions and so, as mentioned, Sinn Féin was briefly expelled from the talks.<sup>81</sup> Negotiations resumed on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March at Stormont Castle, with Sinn Féin once again on board and with increasing pressure upon all participants to deliver an agreement by the 9<sup>th</sup> April. Even so, unionists continued to refuse to negotiate directly with Sinn Féin, opposing also what they saw as the 'greening'<sup>82</sup> of the agreement, while republicans continued to state they also had difficulties with the agreement. For Sinn Féin, the main problems resulted from unionist intransigence, a theme that Adams touched upon regularly in his *Irish Voice* column, as the following extract shows:

the Unionist leaders need to decommission their negative mindsets. Sinn Féin is engaged in a long-term project with Unionists. Those who we are in touch with want dialogue. Their leaders should declare cease-fires in their minds. They need to find new language, a new vision. They need to have the courage of their convictions. I could find lots of reasons for not talking to the British or the Unionists. But I want a democratic peace settlement. And talking is the only way to achieve this. (23<sup>rd</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> July 1997 in 1997:263)

Time was running out and Senator Mitchell's proposed draft of the agreement, issued in the beginning of April, was still being rejected by the different parties only days before the final deadline.<sup>83</sup> In a desperate attempt to meet the April deadline, both Bertie Ahern - the Irish

<sup>80</sup> See Chapters Eight and Nine.

<sup>81</sup> This did not see the end of republican violence, and a number of attacks were perpetrated by dissident IRA groups, such as the Continuity IRA in February and March 1998.

<sup>82</sup> A term used to describe the perceived pro-republican tone of the Peace Agreement, at unionist expense.

<sup>83</sup> For an account of this time period, see also Chapter Nine.

Taoiseach, and Tony Blair - the British Prime Minister joined the talks in Belfast. The crisis was further deepened by the unionist rejection of the document only 72 hours before the deadline. Republicans were also having problems with the draft and on the final morning, Adams stated that a deal was not possible unless a change in the unionist position occurred. In spite of all the difficulties and the late night negotiating and last minute shuffling of proposals between the parties and governments, an agreement was finally reached, albeit beyond the deadline, on the 10<sup>th</sup> April 1998: an historical day for Northern Ireland, Ireland and Britain.

### **Overview**

Since its inception in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Sinn Féin and the wider republican movement have changed significantly as witnessed in terms of their strategies, constitution and rhetoric. Having originally emerged in its modern form in 1970 as a purely military movement, engaging in guerrilla warfare, drawing its support from the hard-core nationalist communities, Sinn Féin has developed to become a fully fledged revolutionary radical movement as evident in its rhetoric, politics and strategies. Nevertheless, the radicalisation of republican *modus operandi* of the late 1970s and early 1980s was neither able to achieve the expulsion of the British from Northern Ireland, nor was it able to secure the support of its people. Since republican vision of the conflict was one based on the colonial occupation by the British, only a withdrawal from Ireland would solve the conflict. In a way, the radicalisation of the 1970s was not sufficient, and a more 'radical' approach was necessary. This resulted not only in the strengthening of Sinn Féin's political and electoral role, but perhaps more importantly in a re-examination of its place in Northern Irish politics and society.

What emerged from this was a party, that, although still aiming for a united Ireland, was now prepared to accept some form of interim arrangement on the basis of plurality and equality, democracy, justice and the end of discrimination and oppression (Adams, 1997). Furthermore, as Ruane and Todd have highlighted, 'sometimes Irish unity was presented as the overriding aim [ ]. At other times it was subsumed in vaguer references to constitutional and institutional change' (1999:57). It was this period, during the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, that witnessed perhaps the greatest shift so far in republican strategy and policy. This has been reflected in changed attitudes towards not only the SDLP and the Irish but also the British and the unionists.

Equally significant is a change in rhetoric whereby Sinn Féin has become increasingly more plural, and open-minded in the search of a pan-nationalist consensus which it believes will deliver an Ireland for all the Irish. Although pan-nationalism seems to be at the forefront of Irish nationalism and republicanism, there are, nevertheless, some remaining differences between the different forms of nationalism which constitutes this pan-nationalist front. Whilst Sinn Féin has

become more plural in its rhetoric, it nevertheless has remained more radical than the SDLP and the Irish government. Committed to the search of a solution to the Troubles through peaceful means, it demands that the causes of the conflict are removed. Moreover, whilst accepting that it is only through the joint collaboration of the different forces in Northern Ireland that a long lasting peaceful solution can be found, it insists that it is the right of all the people of Ireland to decide its future, thus opposing a unionist veto.

In a sense, the development of Irish republicanism and Sinn Féin is similar to that of many other movements. It indicates the evolutionary process of its politics and organisation whilst at the same time revealing an understanding of the changed circumstances and times and the ensuing consequences. Although ultimately aspiring to end partition, republicans have acknowledged that this is only possible through the inclusion, rather than the exclusion of other political aspirations, such as unionism, and that it might not even be an immediately attainable goal. This has meant that the party has had to accept that to pursue its goal it has to participate in a peaceful and democratic process. Ultimately, accepting that any drastic changes to the status of Northern Ireland will only occur as result of the will and consent of its people.

## ***Part II: Communicating Politics***



## Chapter Five: Communication Apparatus and Strategy

Political communication has become an inseparable and critical part of the strategy of any seriously-minded party. It is through the communication of politics that parties are able to publicise their policies and communicate with the electorate and wider public. In this sense, political communication and political relevance go hand in hand, particularly since an organisation's inability to communicate seriously limits its capacity to showcase itself. Although the republican movement has throughout its modern existence<sup>1</sup> engaged in different forms of communication, such as the issuing of statements or the production and circulation of pamphlets, these efforts were largely simplistic and disorganised (Curtis, 1984). The notion of a structured approach to political communication was absent from early party politics and instead, communication was seen as a series of unrelated and sporadic efforts.

However, the overall politicisation and redirectioning of the movement during the 1980s and early 1990s<sup>2</sup> resulted in the reformulation of the party's strategies and its communicative efforts. From this, a recognition of the importance of having an organised communication strategy began to emerge. It is this transformation, from a basic communicative enterprise placing its emphasis on the military activities of the IRA, to a position where Sinn Féin's communication apparatus is now described as a 'Rolls Royce PR machine'<sup>3</sup> that this chapter focuses on. Whilst tracing its overall changed approach to communication and the evolution of its press office, the roles awarded to the communication of politics are also explored.

In examining these different, yet crucial facets of the party's communicative apparatus and strategy, this chapter provides the necessary background for understanding the methods and techniques used in republican communication. These are analysed in detail in the subsequent two chapters, by considering some specific efforts and examples.<sup>4</sup> The chapter is divided into three sections. Whilst section one considers the historical development of the press office and of republican communication strategies, the subsequent sections concentrate on a contemporary examination. In section two, the different audiences and strategies are examined, and section three focuses on the party's efforts in communicating with the news media.

### ***Development of the Press Office and Communication Strategies***

Following the emergence of Provisional Sinn Féin in 1970,<sup>5</sup> the republican veteran Jimmy Steele opened the first republican press centre in Belfast, with the help of a small number of

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<sup>1</sup> This refers to the period after its emergence in 1970.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter Four.

<sup>3</sup> Martina Purdy, from the *Belfast Telegraph*, in survey, 1998.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapters Six and Seven.

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter Four.

people. Curtis described it as ‘a very loose arrangement, with no fixed headquarters nor formal meetings. It put out statements to the media, which were delivered by hand to the various offices in the city’ (1984:263.). The press office, was at the time, essentially a simplistic mechanism for the release of information or press releases from the IRA. The notion of an organised press office actively engaging in attempts to influence the media agenda and fulfilling a carefully crafted strategy was an alien concept. Its press conferences were disorganised and clandestine events. Indeed, one has been described by the journalist Simon Hoggart as:

a great cloak and dagger operation, with people arriving at staggered times, and ostensibly going to see a homeless family’s relief centre. Unfortunately for the IRA, the word got out, and so the hall was besieged with reporters, making it quite obvious to any passing army patrol what was going on. Mr Twomey (then officer commander of the Belfast Brigade) arrived very late, and seemed not quite aware of what he was supposed to do. (*Guardian*, 14<sup>th</sup> June 1974 in Curtis 1984:263-4)

The lack of status and the limited functions awarded to the press office resulted from the emphasis placed upon the IRA and the perception of Sinn Féin as a ‘poor second cousin to the IRA’ (Adams, 1986:150). Because of the 1970 split there was a lack of organisation that also played a crucial part in dictating and limiting the role and functioning of the Northern press office. This was particularly evident since, as Adams’ (1986) has suggested, before the split there was little concern for an organised political strategy. The republican movement was then primarily centred around the IRA and its military actions, while any form of political action and communication was seen as largely inconsequential.

### **The Origins of the Republican ‘Media Machine’**

It was only a few years later, in 1974, that the first concerted attempts to empower and improve the press office surfaced, with its move to ‘new’ premises, a semi-derelict building off the Falls Road in West Belfast. This was to be its site until June 1980, when it was forced to abandon the building following an eviction order from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. It was also in 1974 that republicans had access to the facilities of a telex machine for the first time, rented from the Post Office (Curtis, 1984). Notwithstanding having to operate in precarious conditions and with restricted access to organisational and operational facilities, the press office began to play an important and growing role. These initial transformations were a reflection of the broader changes which were taking place within the movement. Emanating from the failure of the short-term IRA strategy, a growing concern began to question the wisdom of a purely military strategy and the republican neglect of politics.<sup>6</sup> This meant that Sinn Féin’s principal role was to act as a tool to disseminate more diverse information, whilst continuing to seek and sustain support for the ‘war’ from republican communities (Sinn Féin, 1974), and in the process, the press office moved away from acting mainly as the outlet for IRA statements.

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<sup>6</sup> See Chapter Four.

Regardless of the limited functions awarded at the time to communication activities, its *Manual of Publicity* (1974) is the first known republican publication to outline the main principles underlying a successful communication effort. Focusing primarily on the publicity aspect of communication, it nevertheless addresses other areas such as ensuing statements to the news media.<sup>7</sup> Described by Tugwell as ‘excellent’ (1981:19), it denotes the emergence of a new way of thinking about communication; one which is intrinsically linked with political action and therefore somewhat ahead of its time. In stark contrast to the focus placed at the time on military strategy, the manual highlights the importance of securing and increasing the support of republican communities through acts of communication and publicity.

Having emerged in a troubled period, it is a reflection of some of the concerted moves which were beginning to be forged towards the development of a more political approach to the Troubles. Inevitably, this added a new communicative dimension to Sinn Féin’s struggle, instead of communication constituting an alternative strategy, the focus lay on the combined efforts of military, political and communicative dimensions. Thus:

the presence and activity of a Sinn Féin cumann should be obvious to all, both to those who live in its area of operation and to those who pass through it. This can only be achieved by **constant publicity**. We must be at it all the time, on all occasions and when every opportunity presents itself. True, there is plenty of other work to be done. But without constant and effective publicity most of it will not reap the rewards it should deserve. An active cumann without an active publicity programme does not make sense. (Sinn Féin, 1974:33)

This particular document highlights the benefits of developing and pursuing a coherent and effective communication strategy, which in turn would maximise Sinn Féin’s attempts to communicate to its own public and to the media. In particular, it suggests that the provision of information lies at the crux of any realistic and successful political existence:

the essential point [ ] is to realise that a lot of the results of activities in almost any sphere will be lost if the public is not fully informed about them. Members of the public may or may not be won to your points of view as a result of your actions. But if they are not informed of what you are doing, of what you believe, or where you stand on issues that effect them, they cannot be expected to make a favourable choice. (Sinn Féin, 1974:1)

Although the republican movement’s strategy focused inwards and pursued an isolated existence (Bean, 1994; Cox, 1997), the manual nevertheless contradicts this by acknowledging the existence of competition, stating that:

we have seen in our educational programme the necessity to act as an outward-looking group and to remain in constant contact and communication with the public. If we do not do this we will become isolated from the people and never succeed in gaining their support. External publicity is perhaps the main way in which we must set about this task. (Sinn Féin, 1974:5)

More specifically, the allusion made here is to the pressures arising from competition from other

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<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the differences between these terms and a general overview of the different components of communication and public relations strategies, see Chapter Three.

Northern Irish parties. Of particular concern to Sinn Féin was the SDLP, whose electorate it has and still aspires to capture, thus:

the importance of communicating efficiently in an increasingly complex world is appreciated by practically every company, group or organisation. It has led to the growth of the huge(ly) expensive "Publicity and Public Relations" industry. The importance attached to it by everybody from the Churches to the politicians to the international corporations is reflected in the increasingly large salaries which persons who are thought to be experienced in the art of effective and favourable communications are commanding. (Sinn Féin, 1974:5)

Although the content and focus of this publication recognises the importance of having a comprehensive and structured approach to communication, whereby 'every section of the movement [ ] should regard the promotion of good publicity as a major part of its task' (Sinn Féin, 1974:5), as already suggested, this was not mirrored in the practical arrangements and attitudes of the 1970s. Whilst this document highlighted the methods and value of effectively communicating the republican cause, both the lack of an organised structure and the weakness of Sinn Féin in comparison to the IRA meant that, in practice, communicative efforts were limited. Instead, Sinn Féin was continually seen as the propaganda<sup>8</sup> vehicle for the armed struggle, which was being spearheaded by the IRA.<sup>9</sup> Tugwell (1981) attributes this to the divisions of power within the movement, whereby the control is exercised by the IRA. While the IRA was responsible for conducting the military campaign, Sinn Féin attempted, unsuccessfully, to pursue and secure public support for the war and ensure that basic republican communication and morale was maintained. The party's communicative efforts were a clear example of Tugwell's suggestion of the role of propaganda in revolutions, enabling the mobilisation of the masses and ensuring support for the armed revolution (1981). Propaganda in this case 'performs only as a supporting arm. It is in the revolution that relies on the asset-to-liability shift to render government forces irrelevant to the outcome that propaganda becomes the decisive factor, with violence as its handmaiden' (Tugwell, 1981:17)

However, the 1975 IRA cease-fire meant that the role of the press office had to change, and would no longer serve the main purpose of issuing IRA press releases or commentary following IRA operations. Instead, the office was transformed into an incident centre to monitor any breaches in the cessation of fire, while providing information to journalists who were becoming more interested in the Troubles following the television coverage of the Civil Rights riots, in the late 1960s (Curtis, 1984).

<sup>8</sup> The term propaganda is used here in reference to 'the intentional control, manipulation and communication of information and imagery in order to achieve certain political objectives' (O'Sullivan *et al.*, 1992:185).

<sup>9</sup> Note that propaganda was also used during the Irish Civil War by both competing factions, the Irregulars, opposed to the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 and the Free State Army. Walker has stressed that 'both sides went to great lengths to get their respective messages across to the public. In those areas where they could, both imposed censorship – although not always rigid – of news and views unfavourable to their respective causes' (1987:97).

### A Changing Press Office

It was the release of a group of young northerners from the internment camps and their subsequent integration into the movement that started what was the first significant re-modulation of republican strategy and politics since the 1970 split. As the then Sinn Féin leader, Ruari O'Brádaigh, commented, some of those who were interned, amongst whom was Gerry Adams, began to question the republican strategy. This led them to challenge the validity of the on-going approach to the Troubles (Halliday, 1996 in Cox, 1997). As Danny Morrison puts it:

as we came out of jail, we were very keen to put demands upon the editorial staff of Republican News. In a very short period of time we found ourselves assuming editorial control of it, and in 1979 managed to merge with the Dublin-based republican paper An Phoblacht. (1985:84-5)

This meant that the growing politicisation of the movement, later enhanced by the party's electoral successes of the early 1980s,<sup>10</sup> resulted in some deep-seated modifications. As Bean (1994) has argued, these changes referred primarily to a shift away from a 'ghettoised' and 'guerrilla' approach to the conflict, to one which sought to transform the movement into a mass struggle where politics had an increasingly important role to play. Moreover, as the author also notes, both the process of politicisation and the creation of a mass struggle were crucial aspects in strengthening the republican base (1994). As highlighted by the *Manual of Publicity* (Sinn Féin, 1974), organised communication had a decisive role to play in this course of action. Whilst the manual emphasised the need to publicise the actions of the party and to secure the support of its communities, it was only years later and following the wider re-think within Sinn Féin that this was, in fact, implemented. Thus, 'as part of the revolutionary strategy to mobilise the masses, elections and "politics" would be useful platforms and rallying points whilst the armed struggle would act as a form of armed propaganda' (Bean, 1994:7). This stresses the development and implementation of the so-called twin-track approach, where the concerted efforts of the IRA and Sinn Féin were used to further the republican cause, as illustrated in the following comment 'the tactic of armed struggle is of primary importance because it provided a vital cutting edge. Without it the issue of Ireland would not even be an issue. So in effect, the armed struggle becomes armed propaganda' (Adams, 1986:64).

These changes extended to the press office and the republican communicative strategy. This saw a departure from what were essentially reactionary actions and messages, to what increasingly became more active and pre-emptive forms of communication, also termed as agitational work (Curtis, 1984). This approach was apparent in the development of more systematic efforts to communicate with journalists, and the setting up of regular contacts with the media. It also saw the creation of new structures of communication and improved facilities. Under the watchful

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<sup>10</sup> See Table 2, p.66.

eye of Tom Hartley, still a leading republican publicist, the centre:

began to be a focus for the press and for foreign support groups, supplanting the previous informal network. The telex machine was put to increasing use, and became a crucial tool, allowing republicans to convey their version of incidents immediately to the press, and for the first time enabling them to compete seriously with the various British public relations operations. (Curtis, 1984:265)

Counteracting republicans' concerted efforts in communicating, the late 1970s saw the curtailing of republican activities by the British government. Sinn Féin's relative success in communicating their version of events, in particular to the international press, coupled with the failure of the British forces to defeat the IRA, led the government to modify its strategy. This resulted in the implementation of a series of measures which sought to portray the conflict as a problem of law and order and republicans as mere criminals. Consequently, a series of raids and ransackings were carried out on republican premises with the aim of disrupting and ideally destroying their operations, as well as confiscating and destroying material.<sup>11</sup> The republican newspaper, *Republican News*, later, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*,<sup>12</sup> was also the target of numerous raids, the destruction of several editions and the seizure of printing equipment. Although at the time this caused severe disruption to the activities of an impoverished and limited press and newspaper production centre, British attempts to subvert and 'destroy' the party's communicative activities and the movement proved largely counterproductive. The reason for the British inefficacy was rooted in the ability of republicans to quickly find alternative arrangements and re-commence their communicative efforts, again demonstrating their skill and resourcefulness in overcoming difficult situations (Curtis, 1984).<sup>13</sup> Moreover, as Danny Morrison, the ex-party director of publicity has suggested:

before 1978, if I had been doing an interview with you, I would never have given my right name. In 1978 when Roy Mason moved against the staff of the Republican Press Centre in Belfast and tried to get *Republican News* closed down, we all appeared in court charged in our own names with conspiracy and IRA membership. But his moving against us was so clumsy, it strengthened our position to such an extent that when the charges were dropped, we were all able to 'go public'. For the first time since Maire Drumm was killed in October 1976, Sinn Féin had people standing up in public, saying: 'I'm a member of Sinn Féin, the IRA is right, the armed struggle is legitimate, the Brits are wrong, the loyalists are wrong' and so on. This was a totally fresh approach. Before, our politics had always been talked about and sold beneath the counter. Now (they are) being put forward openly. (1985:88-9)

The previously mentioned release of prisoners from the internment camps also meant that there were more potential activists and members that the party could recruit for its political

<sup>11</sup> In her book Curtis' (1984) states that in one of these raids British Army officials threw out of the window Sinn Féin's telex machine. What the British Army ironically failed to realise was that they were not destroying republican property, but instead they were destroying the property of the British Post Office.

<sup>12</sup> See Chapter Six.

<sup>13</sup> Note also that in an examination of the propaganda strategies of the IRA during the Irish Civil War in the 1920s, Walker commented that a 'lack of equipment meant that much of the material was shabbily produced, and yet republicans still managed to fight a vigorous propaganda war. [ ] Against severe odds, a remarkable amount of Republican literature was produced and distributed' (1987:97).

organisation. This sudden increase in ‘manpower’ offered Sinn Féin an opportunity to extend its communicative efforts. On the one hand, this allowed the party to deal with increased media inquiries, but it also saw the expansion of republican communication to other areas. The result was the production of a vast array of publications and publicity material, which widened the overall republican communicative apparatus. In particular, this was translated in a rise of publicity and information in the form of posters and pamphlets, for example, as well as educational material, forcing the party to create a separate department under the title of Republican Publications Office, in 1981. With its headquarters in a ‘bunker-like shop’ (Curtis, 1984:268) in Turf Lodge, Belfast, it was staffed at the time by up to three ‘volunteer’ workers who were responsible for the production of the party’s publicity material.

### Widening Communication

It was then in the late 1970s and early 1980s, that changes in the party’s communicative strategy and apparatus became even more noticeable. This revealed not only the mounting importance awarded to communication activities but also their growing diversity and quality. The further widening of communicative efforts, the different types of messages that were formulated and the ways in which they were conveyed were further evidence of this. Equally important were the improvements in the press office, and as Adams has suggested:

another example of the realisation of the importance of republican politics leading to a structured approach can be found in the production and availability of republican literature. A wide range of this literature (our opponents call it propaganda) is produced and distributed by Republican Publications and as we have improved our political structures and our political understanding the quality of this literature has improved. (1986:163)

Although there was a growing professionalisation in republican communication, this did not mean that the tasks of communication were becoming any easier. On the contrary, the growing aptitude in communicating and its success, in particular with foreign media, meant that Sinn Féin was still seen as a threat. In 1981, Richard McAuley, who in 1980 became the Belfast Head Press Officer, told Liz Curtis, that being a republican press officer was still a difficult and hazardous existence:

most people don’t want to do PR work because it’s very dangerous. It’s dangerous in two senses. It heightens your public profile and could lead you to getting stiffed by loyalists or put out of the road by the Brits. It’s also dangerous in that if you say the wrong thing – and I have made some cracking boobs over the years – you can embarrass the movement. (1984:272)

With heightened public role, following the election of Bobby Sands in 1981 and Gerry Adams in 1983 to Westminster, the Falls Press Office operated 24 hours a day and ‘Morrison and others slept, worked and lived from it’ (*AP/RN*, 2000<sup>14</sup>). As Miller put it the party’s success in the

<sup>14</sup> All quotes included in this thesis without an accompanying page number, unless indicated otherwise, do not have one as the articles were obtained from Internet.

elections ‘launched Sinn Féin on to the electoral battlefield and demanded a much greater investment in media relations’ (1994:85). The press office was moved to another semi-derelict building in the Falls Road:

where it shared the upper floor with the Belfast Sinn Féin office and the prisoners’ welfare department, while the ground floor was used as a waiting room for prisoners relatives and friends awaiting transport to the prisons. The press centre’s equipment was limited to a desk, a phone – the bills apparently paid by *Republican News* [ ] and a telex machine in a tiny room nearby. (Curtis, 1984:272)

With only one full-time staff member, although relying on the assistance of other party workers and casual helpers, the role of the press officer was to answer journalists queries, give interviews amongst other basic tasks (Curtis, 1984). Following the Hunger Strikes, journalists became increasingly more interested in information from elsewhere other than the Falls press office and began travelling outside Belfast. One ensuing development, in tune with what was happening in the party, was the start of decentralisation of republican press relations. This indicated the party’s belief that it was necessary to decentralise its operation at both the communicative and the political level in order to serve its communities more efficiently, yet, it was also an acknowledgement of changes in journalistic practices. This meant that party offices throughout the province, such as in Derry, became responsible for dealing with media enquiries regarding their region. Despite this decentralisation, the overall policy was still under the control of the Dublin office, reflecting the party’s ulterior nationalist aims of a united Ireland (Tugwell, 1981).

As a result of the aforementioned developments in the republican press office, the 1980s saw it repeatedly being referred to as the ‘republican propaganda machine’. Although as one author notes:

the notion of the ‘Provisionals’ propaganda machine – indefatigable, never resting’, as the *Observer* described it, was itself a propaganda device, designed to reassure the world that the British government was in the right, but helpless against the duplicity and superhuman efficiency of the ‘enemy’. Concrete descriptions of the ‘machine’ which would have spoilt the impression by revealing mundane reality, were eschewed. (Curtis, 1984:263)

Significantly, Richard McAuley told the American journalist Neil Hickey in 1981, ‘do you know the sum total of the famous republican propaganda machine everyone talks about? I’m it’ (Hickey, *TV Guide*, 26<sup>th</sup> September 1981 in Miller, 1994:85). Even so, the changes in strategy and positioning which were taking place,<sup>15</sup> began to emerge in the messages communicated and the language used. Despite the continual use of propaganda techniques during the 1980s, such as IRA activities which ‘raise the nationalist people’s morale, put Ireland on the world stage and demoralise the British Government and its forces’ (Sinn Féin, 1983:49), more positive and concerted attempts to communicate with the news media were also being forged. Republican

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<sup>15</sup> See Chapter Four.



communication efforts transformed themselves into proactive and well-developed strategies which sought to influence the news agenda, challenge the British government and, ideally, change public perception of republicanism (Adams, 1986). The onus was thus placed on communication as an intrinsic part of the republican struggle.

Although this was successful to some extent, the continuation of the armed struggle was proving increasingly contentious as there were difficulties in securing and sustaining support for the on going military campaign, especially in the face of no immediate progress in achieving the republican objective. Despite its efforts to highlight other issues such as unemployment and housing, media interest continued to focus on the military activities of the movement. The failure or the inability of the media to cover these parallel issues meant that the republican movement was primarily and narrowly portrayed as a military organisation. Additionally, there were other difficulties that had to be addressed. These partly related to the actual organisation itself which, according to Gerry Adams, was too weak, lacked structure and needed to overturn the legacy of the failed republican politics of the 1970s. Commenting on this, Adams argued:

Sinn Féin's major problem is our failure to date to build an effective organisation after long periods of self-imposed isolation derived from conspiratorial politics as well as censorship, of harassment by the guards and of a lack of political understanding. (1986:157)

There were also problems with the preparation, training and education of Sinn Féin politicians and activists. This was particularly noticeable in comparison with other main Northern Irish parties as 'they (middle class politicians) were taught their politics, methods of management, public relations work and other skills by experts. We learned ours on the streets, in prison and through a process of self-education' (Adams, 1986:154).<sup>16</sup> As Morrison has recently suggested at the time 'we had great difficulty to mobilise initially, although we got incredibly large numbers out in the end' (*AP/RN*, 13<sup>th</sup> April 2000).

### The Professionalisation of Republican Communication

Nevertheless, the party continued to make concerted attempts to develop further its communicative efforts and to overcome the negative effects of the long-standing IRA military campaign. At the same time, and as discussed in Chapter Four, these changes also resulted from much wider developments that were taking place both within Northern Ireland and at an international level as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union and communism. One way in which their impact upon republican communication was evident, was in the discourse, which was becoming much more moderate and pluralistic, and attempts were made to appeal to a much wider nationalist audience (Shirlow and McGovern, 1998). This was translated in a move towards a more 'peaceful' and 'positive' vocabulary, where previous republican demands, such

<sup>16</sup> In fact, as will be seen in the subsequent section of this chapter, this is something which the party has addressed through the organisation of training and educational sessions.

as British disengagement and the immediate return to a united Ireland, were replaced by interim solutions to the conflict. As Shirlow and McGovern have noted:

taking possession of the language of peace in order to re-define the meaning of the conflict was central to the new strategy and opened up a new communicative dimension. The adoption of the word 'peace', in 1987 by SF was deliberate and was seen as a means to break out of the containment strategy undertaken by the British and Irish states. (1998:180)

From 1981, the press centre continued to develop and grow and by 1989, there were three people working alongside Richard McAuley, in the position of Director of Publicity of the six counties, and Danny Morrison, as the National Director of Publicity. Similar patterns of growth were also taking place in Dublin, which by then also had up to three people working in the press office (Miller, 1994). Equally important was the development of an international dimension, overturning the previous isolation of the movement, and in 1988, the International Publicity and Information Committee (IPIC) was formed to target overseas audiences. This indicated the growing realisation of the importance of extending the republican message beyond Northern Ireland, Britain and Ireland and in particular to the USA, where republicans could appeal to Irish-America. In 1990, Gerry Adams stated:

it is also worth mentioning our efforts to upgrade our own international work. Sinn Féin is, contrary to enemy propaganda, a poor organisation with meagre material and financial resources, two essential requirements of international work. However, we have in conjunction with those involved started to modernise solidarity work in the USA, and in Europe, and we are currently reviewing this work in Britain, and, at a slower pace, Australia. (1990:9 in Miller, 1994:113)

As Shirlow and McGovern have noted, changes in republican language, such as the adoption of the words 'peace', 'freedom' and 'justice' were not just deliberate attempts to adapt to new political circumstances (1982:182). They were, in fact, planned moves to appeal and foment links with other groups, particularly international ones. This was necessary to combat the media's continued emphasis and focus on the military activities of the IRA, as O'Hare states 'despite the range of publicity we put out, most coverage in the media is on questions relating to the war' (in *Troops Out*, 1991:13).

### Curtailing Republican Communication

Complicating what seemed to be the development of a rather successful communicative effort and indirectly acknowledging this, on the 19<sup>th</sup> October 1988, the British government introduced the Broadcasting Ban. Under clause 13(4) of the *BBC Licence and Agreement* and section 29(3) of the *Broadcasting Act of 1981*, television and radio were prohibited from broadcasting direct statements by representatives of eleven Irish and Northern Irish political and military organisations, amongst which were Sinn Féin and the IRA.<sup>17</sup> For Sinn Féin, this meant that the

<sup>17</sup> The other organisations were the Cummann Na mBann, Fianna Éireann, Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), Official IRA, Republican Sinn Féin, Saor Éire, Ulster Volunteers Force (UVF), Ulster Defence Association and the Ulster Freedom Fighters

voices of their members, or party representatives could no longer be heard. Initially, the effects of the ban were devastating for republicans, who saw their already meagre, infrequent and negative coverage deteriorate even further.<sup>18</sup> Also, until the ban was removed, as Peter Snow put it, audiences were not able ‘to make their own judgements about Sinn Féin spokespersons without having the words literally snatched from their mouths’.<sup>19</sup> Adams himself commented:

the effects of Section 31 of the Broadcasting Act pose a considerable problem: not so much in terms of support for Sinn Féin specifically but in terms of disinformation – disinformation not just about the British presence in the 6 counties but also in terms of society in the 26 counties. More importantly, it denies the people the right to freedom of information. The whole ethos that flows from that censorship is very pervasive and results in a failure to investigate issues fully. (1995:158)

It was not just republican voices that could not be heard on television or radio, but, as argued by Rita O’Hare - the Director of Publicity in the early 1990s, the ban meant that journalists were less likely to include the party in its reports, in order to avoid the technical complexities of having to dub republican voices (in *Troops Out*, 1991). Jon Snow explained ‘the issue of the SF ban was persistent and a real problem. The mere mechanisms of setting up “legal representation of SF’s view” meant that it was difficult, in fact, to dissuade some reporters from bothering with their views at all’.<sup>20</sup> The consequences manifested themselves at a number of levels, in particular since ‘when we (SF) are not reported, our reaction, our view isn’t reported in the same way as all the other parties, then we are put aside, isolated’ (Rita O’Hare in *Troops Out*, 1991:15). Republican supporters also frequently refused to be interviewed as they believed that having their voices dubbed would make them a target for loyalist attacks.<sup>21</sup> One of the implications of this was a growth in alternative republican forms of communication, which allowed the party to by-pass the news media.<sup>22</sup>

However, the same process of modernisation and politicisation which saw the introduction of the Broadcasting Ban meant that Sinn Féin’s increasingly proactive stance undermined its efficacy in removing republicans from the news and, more importantly, from the public sphere.

In particular, since in 1991 Sinn Féin had:

press offices both in Belfast and in Dublin. Obviously our first and main task is to try to explain to people what Sinn Féin is about, what our aims are, what our policies are and that covers all aspects – we aren’t constantly engaged in questions around the war in the North, our job is disseminating information about what our policy is on housing, on unemployment, emigration, everything that affects people’s lives. So the range is very wide, but of course we’d be concerned to try to give people information, to answer some of the more scurrilous allegations that are made against republicans, to tell people

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(UFF).

<sup>18</sup> See Henderson *et al.* (1990).

<sup>19</sup> From the *BBC*, in letter, 26<sup>th</sup> January 1996.

<sup>20</sup> From *Channel 4 News*, in letter, 6<sup>th</sup> March 1996.

<sup>21</sup> Martina Purdy, from the *Belfast Telegraph*, in letter, 29<sup>th</sup> January 1996. In 1996 Gerry Adams wrote in his regular *Irish Voice* column that ‘in the past two years, thirteen members of Sinn Féin have been killed and seven former members of families of Sinn Féiners have been killed. Scores have been injured, some seriously. Sinn Féin offices have been attacked, in some cases with rocket launchers and heavy automatic weapons’ (20<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> April 1996 in 1997:53).

<sup>22</sup> See Chapter Six.

what is actually happening. (Rita O'Hare in *Troops Out*, 1991:13)

### Adapting to a Changed Status

This was particularly noticeable from the end of 1993 onwards, when Northern Ireland changed with the onset of the peace process. Increasingly, the party was seen as a legitimate representative of a significant section of the Northern Irish electorate, whose participation in any search for a peaceful solution to the Troubles was crucial. Despite the fact that direct censorship was still in place, Sinn Féin interviews increased and media attitudes towards the party changed. This led to a further widening of the republican message, and an increased professionalisation of the republican interview technique (Lago, 1998). As Jonathan Barton from the *BBC* argues:

the ban was totally ineffective in muzzling Sinn Féin, (and) it played into their hands by giving them a spurious glamour and appearing to justify their claims that their words, that their community was excluded from the democratic process (and) that their words were so hot that they needed to be suppressed.<sup>23</sup>

Further reflecting the dramatic changes which took place in the party from the 1980s to the 1990s, Ewen MacAskill from the *Guardian* noted that there was 'little contact with Sinn Féin until the early 1990s. At that point they began to increase their exposure and since then I have written endlessly about them on a wide range of themes connected to the peace process'.<sup>24</sup>

Nevertheless, Sinn Féin's offices continued to be raided and its party officials intimidated by the RUC throughout the 1990s. One such raid was described as follows:

the walls were knocked down and a floor torn up during the raid in the early hours of Sunday morning and, according to press officer Joe Kelly, tapes, documents, computer disks and contact books were seized from the press office, the adjoining Prisoner of War department and the offices of *Republican News*. (Farish, *PR Week*, 11<sup>th</sup> January 1990:1)

Still, this did not deter Sinn Féin's communication efforts, as Rita O'Hare maintained 'as far as plans for publicity are concerned it's fighting censorship' and 'we'll also continue disseminating information about Sinn Féin and about our policies' (in *Troops Out* 1991:15).

Despite the growing interest that foreign journalists were showing in the party, the movement also faced the challenge that the transition from the armed struggle to politics offered (Adams, 1996). As O'Hare also put it:

it took republicans some soul-searching for people who had been involved in a conflict and had been at the receiving end of a lot of propaganda. Some people had actually internalised the fact that, even though they knew that their case was right there was a perception out there that they were definitely wrong, or evil. (in Shirlow and McGovern, 1997:181)

This involved having to consider how best to exploit the changed political situation and the party's positioning within it. One strategy adopted was to emphasise other policy concerns, such as education, housing and employment, whilst also exploring the plight of the Prisoners of War (POW). As Robert Montgomery from the POW department explained, the 1994 IRA cease-fire

<sup>23</sup> In letter, 26<sup>th</sup> February 1996.

<sup>24</sup> In survey, August 1998.

meant that the department could now openly campaign for the release of all POW's:

there was a view I suppose, among a lot of people, that you can't call for prisoners release with the IRA campaign on-going, because they won't be released and it's not realistic, when you might want it and you might think it is proper, but it will not happen. But now with the cease-fire back on again, there is a realistic hope that prisoners will be released. *Saoirse*<sup>25</sup> will come to the fore and we will push these issues and have been quite a lot already, for the release of prisoners. [ ] So, in a situation where you are aware that the British won't release people, and the IRA campaign is the justification not to release them then you deal with the issues that concern them, so you highlight the issues, you know what is important to the prisoners in the position that they're in, the likes of transfer back and basic issues of discrimination.<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, Shirlow and McGovern suggest that after the 1994 cease-fire, there were changes in how the 'enemy' was described. This was ostensible in *An Phoblacht/Republican News* where descriptions of the RUC were no longer as negative and discriminating as the formerly used 'crown forces', 'sectarian bullies' or 'dupes' (1998:183). At the same time, communication strategies attempted to explore some of the positive experiences of cross-community events or situations. Although *An Phoblacht/Republican News* was still a republican paper as one republican put it 'the movement has got to talk to the others and we have to give people, like Unionists, a more sympathetic understanding. It's hard to swallow but we had to depict our enemies in a clearer and more positive light' (in Shirlow and McGovern, 1998:183). Not only had there been dramatic changes in republican attitudes,<sup>27</sup> but the transformation of republican communication was also linked closely to the need to adjust to a new political environment and positioning. In this, 'Sinn Féin is involved in a new contestation for political legitimacy which is being conducted through re-inventing the vocabulary of peace' (Shirlow and McGovern, 1998:172). As one journalist highlighted, republican language became increasingly more pluralist, conciliatory as well as sophisticated, reflecting changes in the party's communicative policies, and more importantly, in the politics and strategies of the republican movement.<sup>28</sup>

### A Contemporary View

In 1996, during a visit to the press office located in the Falls Road, Belfast (Figure 1, p.91) it was noted that the office was in a state of disrepair: carpets were missing or torn apart, windows were blocked or covered with mesh and some walls were partially destroyed - a legacy of RUC raids. In terms of its functional appearance, the office was disorganised and the working conditions were far from ideal. It shared a room with another department, and was still equipped with very limited and basic resources, apart from a fax machine and a telephone. Because of the raids and attacks on republican premises, there was an impressive security system installed, simultaneously protecting and isolating the premises from the outside world, and consisting of

<sup>25</sup> Republican campaign for the release of all republican prisoners of war.

<sup>26</sup> In interview, 29<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

<sup>27</sup> See Chapter Four.

<sup>28</sup> Unknown journalistic source, in survey, 1998.

the combined use of CCTV (Closed Circuit Television) and doors with a delay entrance system, as well as an iron cage guarded by CCTV on the outside of the building, which delayed entrance.<sup>29</sup> Inside, a similar system was in place, with security measures more concentrated between the ground floor (a reception area) and the first floor of the building, where the different departments were located. The exterior of the building, as seen in Figure 1 (p.91), was painted with republican murals, and surrounded by enormous rocks, preventing loyalist cars and RUC Landrovers from ram raiding the building.

At time of writing Sinn Féin has three main offices both North and South of the Irish border; in Dublin, Derry and Belfast. The party also has three offices abroad, one in Brussels, one in New York and one in Washington<sup>30</sup>, indicating the consolidation of the international expansion of the movement. The offices in the USA target mainly the financially and politically influential Irish-American community, whilst the office in Brussels focuses on European contacts. Although Sinn Féin is opposed to the European Union, which it sees as 'a vehicle for the creation of an economic and political superpower' (1994), the press office in Brussels is a recognition of the importance of having a 'voice' in Europe. The combination of these different aspects reveals a degree of professionalisation and sophistication that is able to outstretch party policy, as was the case of the *Manual of Publicity* (Sinn Féin, 1974).

Sinn Féin's headquarters are still in Parnell Square, Dublin and, according to Donncha O'Hara, a Northern press officer, there is some decentralisation of tasks in terms of what each office deals with, which allows each to concentrate on issues pertinent to its own area, although the overriding policy and major communication campaigns are designed by Dublin.<sup>31</sup> The Falls press office, which served as the focus for this research, was relocated to 'newer' premises between the end of 1997 and the beginning of 1998,<sup>32</sup> and is currently situated just a few hundred metres away from its previous location, on the first floor of the Old Conway Mill (Figure 2, p.91). The premises of the previous press office have now been transformed into a republican bookshop, where a vast array of material can be purchased.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> The system of the iron cage was introduced after the murder of three men inside the Sinn Féin premises by an off-duty RUC officer on the 4<sup>th</sup> February 1992.

<sup>30</sup> The 1997 *Sinn Féin Press Pack*, only mentions the Brussels and New York offices. Yet, in an article in *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, Mac an Bhaird (18<sup>th</sup> December 1997) refers to the Washington office.

<sup>31</sup> In interview, 27<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

<sup>32</sup> The precise date is unknown.

<sup>33</sup> See Chapter Six.



Figure 1: Sinn Féin's Office, Falls Road, Belfast (July 1998)

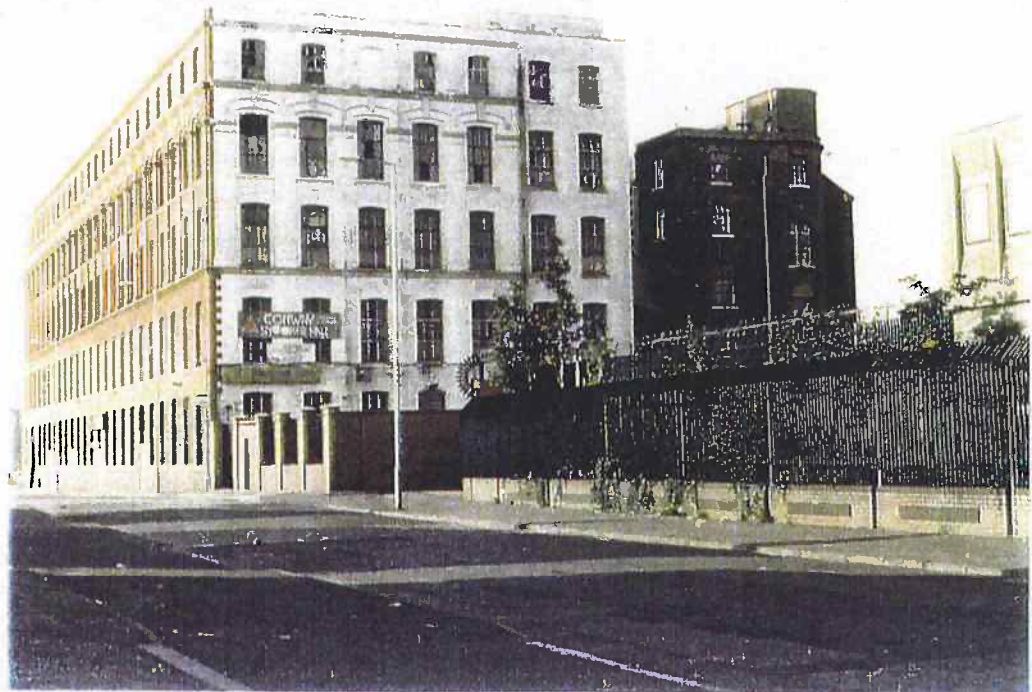


Figure 2: Sinn Féin's Office, Conway Mill, Belfast (July 1998)



During a visit in July 1998, it was apparent that despite the ongoing peace process, the party's office is still separated from the outside world by a reinforced steel door and guarded by a CCTV system, which screens the entrance to the premises. As can be seen from the photograph (Figure 2, p.91), whilst these premises are in a relatively better condition in comparison to the previous location on the Falls road, the building nevertheless appears somewhat derelict. The main difference between them is that unlike its predecessor, there is no clear indication that it houses a Sinn Féin office. The inside of the republican office, is substantially larger than that in the Falls Road, and different departments now have their own individual space. Yet, the organisation of the office and its different departments has not improved.

According to the press officer interviewed, there were in 1998 two full-time people working in the Falls press office and a number of part-time or occasional helpers, although it is unclear whether these are paid or voluntary workers. In terms of the working conditions and the facilities available, the office was equipped with a networked computer, with access to e-mail and the Internet, a printer, as well as a fax machine and telephone. Although the press office is primarily responsible for issuing press releases, it also assists journalists with any enquiries. This latter role is considered to be extremely important, facilitating the search and retrieval of material relevant to journalists stories, and in the process, portraying Sinn Féin as an efficient and helpful party. For example, the press officer interviewed suggested that increasingly, journalists were contacting them, explaining that they were intending to run a story on a particular topic and requesting information and contacts which might be relevant.<sup>34</sup> This implies a new role of the republican press office where, upon request, it is able to influence the content of news by carefully selecting which information, opinions and contacts are passed on to journalists. It also highlights the media's growing confidence and trust in Sinn Féin.

One significant difference which has taken place over the years is that in order to overcome what Adams (1986) saw as the lack of training of its officers and politicians, the press office now provides organised training and advice to any party worker who deals with the media. This is conducted through the organisation of weekend 'media training courses', where topics such as media relations, how to influence the media and interview techniques are explored.<sup>35</sup> The current head of Sinn Féin's public relations and press office, is Jim Gibney, who is also a member of the party's national executive, although Richard McAuley is described as 'Sinn Féin's press supremo' (*AP/RN*, 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1998). Commenting on the role of public relation officers, John Mullin from the *Guardian* observed the following:

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<sup>34</sup> Donncha O'Hara, Sinn Féin press officer, in interview, 27<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

<sup>35</sup> Donncha O'Hara, Sinn Féin press officer, in interview, 27<sup>th</sup> July 1998.



I suspect that Jim is very strong in formulating policy and so on, so he's got a key role and Rita O'Hare who is head of publicity based in Dublin<sup>36</sup>. I think overall head of publicity. Similarly she's (a) very strong leading line, these guys are PR people, they are the people that matter, and they would be very much to the fore. But [ ] when push come to shove, you are talking something like half a dozen: Gerry (Adams), (Martin) McGuinness, Mitchell McLaughlin, Rita O'Hare, Jim Gibney and (Richard) McAuley, [ ] people all sort of like that, you are talking sort of hard, inner core of people.<sup>37</sup>

Regarding its financial situation, this has always been a contested issue, with journalists alluding to fantastic economic resources coming from America and the party denying this. Miller (1994) has suggested that the early budget in the 1990s was around £7000, with fax and phone bills ranging from £400 to £800 per quarter and other resources, such as paper, approximately £100 a month. Richard McAuley told Miller that:

if they're (press officers) really lucky and the party's feeling generous, then they might get 50p for their lunch [ ] seriously. There would be a very small allocation of money set aside every week just for milk and tea bags and lunches and literally you're talking about a tenner. Outside that, any other money that's spent on the office is spent on equipment, either in terms of phone bills or buying computer disks. (1994:133)

However, journalists have repeatedly doubted Sinn Féin's claimed poverty, especially in recent years since the party has been allowed to raise funds in the United States. Martin Fletcher, the Belfast correspondent for the *Times*, has suggested that their resources are extensive and come primarily from donations from the USA:

per capita, they are probably one of the richest parties, certainly in Britain if not in Europe. Northern Ireland has the population of the size of Hampshire, 1.6 million people, a million dollars goes an awful long way. And on top of that, most of the party workers work for nothing, or very small stipend. All the Sinn Féin members of the Assembly will be giving their salaries £29000 a year to the party. All the expenses they receive during the Stormont talks, and they got, I don't know [ ] £100 a day per negotiator - all that went to the party. I don't think they can argue that they are poor.<sup>38</sup>

This opinion is shared by another correspondent of the *Times*, Audrey MacGee, who believes that 'they have huge resources [ ] now quite where it comes from is difficult to ascertain, but they have no problems with money'.<sup>39</sup> An article published in the *Financial Times*, suggested that the party had raised £595,000 in the United States over a period of two years (Burns, 7<sup>th</sup> October 1998:10). In one of Gerry Adams' columns in the *Irish Voice*, he refers to a fund-raising dinner in New York's Plaza Hotel attended by more than 400 people, each of whom paid over \$1000, totalling more than £250,000 in one single event (31<sup>st</sup> May-6<sup>th</sup> June 1995 in 1997:144). Moreover, according to the *Washington Post*, Sinn Féin paid \$4,035, approximately £2500, for two congressmen to visit Dublin and participate at party rallies (Denham, *Times*, 5<sup>th</sup> July 1998).

Although it might not be possible to determine exactly Sinn Féin's financial resources and how much of these are invested in communication, it can nevertheless be suggested that the increase

<sup>36</sup> Since this interview was conducted Rita O'Hare has moved to the United States.

<sup>37</sup> In interview, 8<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

<sup>38</sup> In interview, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1998.

<sup>39</sup> In interview, 21<sup>st</sup> July 1998.

in the quantity and quality of publicity material<sup>40</sup> must reflect some enhancement in resources. Even if technological development now means that with fewer resources and facilities, more professional and sophisticated material can be produced, its installation and maintenance still demands financial investment. More recently the party has also demolished its offices at the corner of Sevastopol Street, Belfast and purposely built a 'spanking new building' (*AP/RN*, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2000).

Whilst a number of serious and important developments in the republican communication apparatus have been highlighted, it is important to note that ultimately, the development of the press office must be seen in relation to the advancement of the wider republican movement. In tune with its different stages of political evolution,<sup>41</sup> the history of Sinn Féin's press office and its communicative strategies is also characterised by a number of phases. This means that the party's communicative abilities have evolved over the years since the early 1970s, from what emerged as a disorganised and poorly-resourced department, to what has now become an efficient and well-regarded communication machine. In a way, this illustrates that the furtherance of Sinn Féin's communication apparatus is very similar to that of other parties or organisations, where the passing of time has been 'rewarded' with increased resources and facilities. However, one of the main difficulties has always been the party's politics and its association with the IRA as well as the conditions in which it has operated, and its existence at the margins of the political process, surviving successive British attempts to silence it.

The process of modernisation, which the party embarked on from the mid-1980s, saw some changes in their approach to communication and politics. These were particularly noticeable from the latter part of the 1980s and the early part of the 1990s onwards, witnessing a more proactive and concerted approach to communication. Bean observes that: 'by developing a new form of struggle, the republican movement [ ] (was able to) secure (a) wider influence than it did with the armed struggle whilst still claiming a place at the conference table as part of a broad nationalist front' (1994:26). This was particularly conspicuous in the overall professionalisation of their media strategies which carefully exploited publicity opportunities, such as during Gerry Adams' visits to the USA in 1994.<sup>42</sup> Following one such visit, Adams commented:

I don't think that anyone, apart from the team who accompanied me, will realise how many interviews, meetings, speeches or statements were involved in the trip. Nor will anyone get a sense of the insanity which gripped us at times. But for Richard McAuley, it was a dream come true. Richard has been the Sinn Féin public relations officer for fifteen years. The media were actually queuing up for information as the days went by. Richard became quieter, more self-confident, even smug. He also adopted many

<sup>40</sup> See Chapter Seven.

<sup>41</sup> See Chapter Four.

<sup>42</sup> See O'Clery (1997).

American characteristics – introducing himself as Rich, for instance, and handing out business cards. (12<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> October 1994 in 1997:104)

Moreover, the development of republican communicative strategies illustrates their awareness of their roots and history but more importantly, a vision which will take them into the future, as Rita O'Hare has remarked:

I want that the past can be reflected in our future, to move us on, to be part of our future plans, but I also want publicity to reflect that republicans aren't people who are always looking back and what's happened in the past. I also think we have a huge duty to continue to reach out to the other people in this island [ ] so I would want to be able to reflect that in our public utterances and our publications. We are looking forward to the future and I'm going to be reflecting that in everything that I'm doing – what we want for the future, what we want in Ireland, how we want to live. (in *Troops Out* 1991:15)

### ***Audiences and Strategies***

Picard has contended that in order to fully understand the overall purposes of the communication apparatus and its output, we must comprehend the target audience of the message and its purpose (1989).<sup>43</sup> In addition, it is necessary to observe that whilst 'some organisations attempt to reach a very wide range of separate audiences via different channels. Others aim only to influence a very narrow group of people' (Miller, 1994:104). Thus, any examination of Sinn Féin's communication apparatus and strategies must necessarily also consider the different target audiences for their communication efforts. Once established, it is then possible to assess and evaluate more effectively the different techniques and strategies<sup>44</sup> used in communicating with or to these audiences.

### **Audiences**

In Tugwell's (1981) analysis of the politics and propaganda of the IRA, he argues that at the time of his analysis there was primarily a four-fold target audience. He identified these as supporters, activists and volunteers; friends; the uncommitted audience; and the enemy. Underlying this typology is the suggestion that different target audiences are formed from the different relationships between the message originator, in this case Sinn Féin, and the recipient – the audience. Here it is the level of intimacy and depth of the relationship that distinguishes each proposed category, whereby some audiences, such as supporters, have a greater level of intimacy with Sinn Féin than, for example, the British Army as the 'enemy'. Tugwell's typology, originally based on data on the republican movement from the 1970s, can no longer be seen as an accurate reflection of the current situation, particularly since the party's policies and positioning have changed since the 1970s,<sup>45</sup> and as discussed earlier in this chapter, these impacted on the evolution of the press office. Consequently, the republican movement that Tugwell (1981) examined is no longer the same and this typology also fails to acknowledge a

<sup>43</sup> For the purposes of this research, Sinn Féin is seen as a political party with a legitimate electoral representation. Unlike in Picard's study (1989), it is not described as a 'terrorist' organisation.

<sup>44</sup> Note the difference between these two, as discussed in Chapter Three.

<sup>45</sup> See Chapter Four.

separate category for the media, as one of the most prized audiences. Instead, it is necessary to establish the different target audiences for republican communication, still based on their relationships with the party, as suggested by Tugwell (1981), but also acknowledging their individual interests and the perceived aims in communicating with these particular audiences.

When examining contemporary republican audiences and indeed any audience for political communication, it must be acknowledged that there are two separate levels; a direct and an indirect one. The former target is that to which the party communicates directly, while the latter is composed mainly of the wider public, which is reached through the media, and can thus include other political organisations or parties.<sup>46</sup> This duality means that the party's communicative efforts are more effective in reaching out to an extended audience which otherwise could not be reached. As Richard McAuley has suggested:

there are different target audiences, there are different journalists speaking to those targeted audiences. Tonight, for example, we're issuing a statement (in Dublin). It is a statement issued with the Southern media and audience in mind. The statement that is being issued in the North is with another audience in mind. (May 1991 in Miller, 1994:112).

As one journalist stated, the party communicates to different publics via different media and with different aims, whereby:

Sinn Féin likes to get coverage in the unionist papers because they want unionists to 'understand' where they are coming from. They like to accommodate the *Belfast Telegraph* as it has a high circulation and reaches two key areas: the unionist and nationalist middle class. Sinn Féin wants to win over middle-class nationalists in order to grow. So it is always quick to accommodate local reporters. The *Irish Times* gets a turn when Sinn Féin wants to talk to the British through the papers.<sup>47</sup>

There are other examples of how the media is exploited to communicate with different audiences and with different aims in mind. In the following instance, the media is used as an intermediary between Sinn Féin and the public. After being stopped, as on many other occasions, by an RUC checkpoint Gerry Adams contacted different radio stations in the hope that one of them would interview him live on the air. He comments:

marooned in our own little checkpoint Charlie, to pass the time I phone around media newsrooms on the mobile phone. Eventually I get put through to Eamonn Dunphy on Radio Ireland. Eamonn and I chat away about my predicament. Halfway through our interview the RUC arrive at the road block and Radio Ireland listeners are treated to the RUC's version of zero tolerance policing. "Well Mr. Adams, I know who you are so you are free to go [ ] but I need to check out the driver's identity". (9<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> April 1997 in 1997:240)

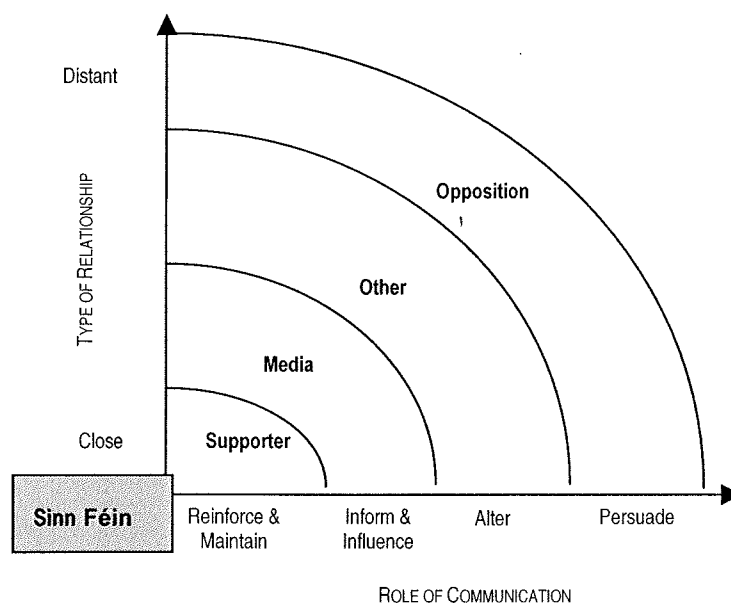
This was a clear attempt to exploit the situation in which Adams found himself and to derive publicity from it. The underlying message is that despite the party's move towards constitutional politics, Sinn Féin is still being 'persecuted' by the RUC. This also shows that Adams is well aware of the potential that such situations present, and the best ways in which

<sup>46</sup> In a study entitled 'Peace in Northern Ireland through the journalist channel' (1994), Page and Sparre outlined a number of ways in which communication to and between the different actors of the peace process was conducted through the media.

<sup>47</sup> Martina Purdy, from the *Belfast Telegraph*, in survey, 1998.

they can be exploited by generating further publicity for the party. As Martin Fletcher from the *Times* commented, Sinn Féin has ‘a very media savvy leader in Gerry Adams’.<sup>48</sup>

In terms of direct audiences, there are four main categories for republican communication defined on the basis of the relationship or perceived relationship, between them and the party, as well as their function (see Figure 3). The first category is that of supporters, which includes party volunteers, activists and their traditional supporters. Messages communicated to this group are designed to reinforce and maintain already existent support, although they can also convey information to non-supporting audiences. Whilst the media is a crucial target audience for republican communication, the party has always been conscious of the need to gather and secure the support of the communities they represent (Adams, 1986; Sinn Féin, 1974), and indeed the failure to do so has been the cause of some of its failed strategies.<sup>49</sup> Sinn Féin essentially seeks to represent its people, creating a mass struggle and an Ireland for the Irish. It is also in its supporters that the strength of the movement lies, thus communication to this group is vital.



**Figure 3: Sinn Féin's Target Audiences**

Direct communication to this audience is achieved mainly through the use of party publications, like *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, but also through a vast array of publicity material, such as murals, stickers and leaflets, of which some are examined in Chapter Six. Since the early 1990s, Sinn Féin has also communicated to some of its supporters through electronic media such as the WWW and e-mail.<sup>50</sup> A substantially different form of communication used by the party, which

<sup>48</sup> In interview, 8<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

<sup>49</sup> See Chapter Four.

<sup>50</sup> See Chapter Seven.

also indicates the importance awarded to their supporters, is the organisation of local meetings in the different regions of the Province. At these supporters can raise their concerns and policies are presented and discussed.<sup>51</sup> As Martin Fletcher explained, ‘they have a very sophisticated network [ ] for going around and holding discussions with their supporters’.<sup>52</sup> All these forms of communication are particularly important because they allow the party to bypass other mediated forms of communication, such as the news, and control the content of their message.

The second category of audience is the media, which the party aims to inform and, if possible, influence. The ability to provide information to journalists is seen as a crucial component in the party’s attempts to influence the news, in particular because of the negative media coverage it has received over the years. As one journalist argued, the main aim in communicating with the media lies in the party’s attempt to counteract the messages of the British government and unionists.<sup>53</sup> Sinn Féin also uses the media to convey its own policies and positions on a variety of issues.<sup>54</sup> The main means employed to communicate to the media are the issuing of press releases, press conferences as well as formal and informal interviews. The party also makes frequent contact via telephone and regularly calls newsrooms when there is an important issue it wants covered in the news. It also exploits the opportunities to communicate when journalists request information from them or ask for examples or contacts for their stories.<sup>55</sup> However, in these instances communication is not so much an organised and proactive event, but is instead an *ad hoc* reaction to outside requests.<sup>56</sup> This shows that communication with the media is both proactive and reactive: reactive when it responds to media requests for information, and proactive when it distributes information of its own accord or organises press conferences. As Martin Fletcher explains ‘they barrage the media with press releases, they don’t leak very much at all [ ] they hold countless press conferences [ ] they are very [ ] accessible if you want to telephone them, they will talk at length, they are very geared up for the media’.<sup>57</sup>

Reflecting more recent changes in republican policy and strategy are the third and fourth category of target audiences, although these are not the primary focus of analysis in this thesis. Following the process of restructuring and rethinking within republicanism, coupled with the modifications which were occurring both at national and international level,<sup>58</sup> since the early 1990s Sinn Féin has become more concerned with communicating with other audiences,

<sup>51</sup> Audrey MacGee, from the *Times*, in interview, 21<sup>st</sup> July 1998.

<sup>52</sup> From the *Times*, in interview, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1998.

<sup>53</sup> Unknown journalistic source, in survey, 1998.

<sup>54</sup> Donncha O’Hara, Sinn Féin press officer, in interview, 27<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

<sup>55</sup> John Mullin, from the *Guardian*, in interview, 8<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

<sup>56</sup> John Mullin, from the *Guardian*, in interview, 8<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

<sup>57</sup> From the *Times*, in interview, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1998.

<sup>58</sup> See Chapter Four.

including the Irish and British governments,<sup>59</sup> the SDLP and its electorate and the wider Irish people. Of growing relevance is also the internationalisation of Sinn Féin's audience, principally extending to the USA, where it now has two press offices. This importance awarded to American audiences is seen in the following extract from Gerry Adams' *Irish Voice* column:

all roads lead to Washington. That's why you, dear reader, are important, why Irish America plays such a pivotal role. You helped to create the Peace Process. It belongs to you. Make it work. Don't let John Major screw up the best chance for peace we have had in seventy-five years. (20<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> September 1995 in 1997:181)

The fourth category of opposition audiences, as the term implies, includes the likes of unionists and loyalists, whereby communicative efforts seek to neutralise, counteract and, if possible, change their perceptions. These also reflect altered party attitudes where unionists concerns are being addressed instead of dismissed (Adams, 1997). Communication to these two groups is also achieved at two distinct levels. There is direct communication between them, although not with unionists who continue to refuse to negotiate with republicans, and there is communication at an indirect level, namely through the media.<sup>60</sup>

#### The Importance of Targeting Republican Messages

This recognition of the different target audiences for republican communication is vital for an accurate and complete understanding of the party's communicative strategies, specially since they determine the tactics employed in the process. However, and as mentioned, a crucial target audience for republican communication and, in fact, for political communication, is the media, through which Sinn Féin can highlight its commitment to peaceful negotiation, as Gerry Adams has mentioned on a number of occasions whilst writing his column for the *Irish Voice*:

last month this column intended informing *Irish Voice* readers about the plight of Irish Republican prisoners. The prompting for this came from what appeared to be the inevitability of the release of Lee Clegg. I am sorry now that I didn't get around to writing that piece. It might in some way have forewarned Irish-Americans' opinion about the cavalier way that the London government is treating the Irish Peace Process, and about the dangers for all of us if the British government continues to behave in an irresponsible manner. [ ] I still need to write about the prisoners, but the urgency of the current situation demands that I deal with the need now for everyone with influence to persuade the British Tory Party to face up to its responsibilities. (12<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> July 1995, in 1997:160)

Niall O'Dowd, publisher of the *Irish Voice*, invited Adams to write a column for the newspaper in 1992, whilst the Broadcasting Ban was still in place. He commented that 'the *Irish Voice* column was, I think, an important link. I like to think that he exploited that opportunity, that many of the great developments to come were first signalled in the pages of the *Voice*' (in

<sup>59</sup> Until the modernisation of Sinn Féin, in the 1990s, the British, and to some extent the Irish government, were seen by the party as the enemy and responsible for the conflict. Recent changes in the politics of the republican movement have meant that although it recognised that both governments have an important role to play in the search for peace, it ultimately sees the unionists and loyalists as preventing the formation of a united Ireland.

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, Page and Sparre (1994).

Adams, 1997:3). Different departments within Sinn Féin also target various and multiple audiences, depending on the message, as shown by the POW department's actions:

the main targets we are pushing towards, I think, are the public, you know. You could say that you are targeting politicians but it is difficult to target politicians because they tend to be a bit long in the tooth. Okay, people are long in the tooth as well, but politicians are much more involved and therefore can do more. At times, at times you also try to target the specific issues, you may take up an issue which affects people in Dublin, target people in the Free State trying to keep them informed of what the situation is, again it is very sort of issue-led, sort of depending on what is happening, depending on what you can do.<sup>61</sup>

Another dimension in republican communication and one that is recognised by journalists is the adaptation of the message to suit specific target audiences. This can be seen both in the way republicans communicate to the public and also to individual journalists. While Sinn Féin has an underlying message, the party is nevertheless aware that to successfully communicate to different publics, it must adapt its message to suit the needs and the characteristics of the audience. This process of adaptation can include changes in language or emphasis but more simply it means that some issues are explored only with certain audiences. For example, Martin Fletcher from the *Times* has suggested that the republican 'message to a meeting of republicans in South Armagh is different to the one they would put up on the *BBC*, and that is different from the one they would deliver to Irish-Americans in New York'.<sup>62</sup>

Clearly, as Donncha O'Hara stressed, Sinn Féin recognises the different target audiences for republican communication, alongside the advantages in directly and indirectly communicating to a multitude of audiences.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, as mentioned, changes in target audiences have also been noticeable; more specifically there has been an expansion of these in comparison to Tugwell's 1981 assessment. For example, in relation to unionists and loyalists the author suggested that:

provisional politics ignored this important group, and their propaganda never attempted persuasion. Violent coercion was instead employed, which had the effect of polarising opinion and making the task of winning Protestant support for some kind of all-Ireland solution more than ever difficult. (1981:25)

This has now changed in recognition of the need to address unionist concerns and the party's own role in determining the future of the Province, as Adams stated:

unionists are an intrinsic part of Ireland, this is your home. Republicans don't want you to leave it nor do we wish to dominate you. You have a right and a responsibility with the rest of the Irish people to shape our shared future. We acknowledge our responsibility, as part of a reciprocal process, to try to convince Unionists of our good intentions with regard to their future on this island. In a situation of deep division such as exists here, all of us have to suspend the distrust we harbour regarding the intentions of others. Let us listen to each other. Sinn Féin is prepared to do that. We urge others to do the same. (1997:265-6)

<sup>61</sup> Robert Montgomery, Sinn Féin POW officer, in interview, 29<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

<sup>62</sup> In interview, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1998.

<sup>63</sup> Sinn Féin press officer, 10<sup>th</sup> January 1996 and 27<sup>th</sup> July 1998.



However, it has not been so much Sinn Féin's aspirations that have changed, but rather it has been the methods in which these can be achieved. Indeed, Miller has suggested that 'the growing politicisation of SF and its involvement in politics meant that not only did strategies and audiences become more targeted, but that there were new audiences to reach in the North and the South of Ireland' (1994:112). Sinn Féin itself commented that:

this is achieved through various activities – advertising, public relations work, sponsorship or worthwhile community projects, etc. The aim is to get “good publicity”, to counteract “bad publicity” (by anticipating trouble before it arises if possible) and to consciously and constantly promote the “message” (or product) by keeping it before the public at every opportunity through every possible means. It means keeping in the public eye and constantly seeking new ways of keeping before the public. (1974:1)

### Forms of Communication

The party also provided its own typology of forms of publicity, and although outlined in their 1974 *Manual of Publicity*, many of the principles included are still applicable to contemporary republican communication. It argued that there are two main types of publicity, internal and external. The former:

is vital, so that members are clear about what they are doing, why they are doing it, how they fit into the general scheme of things. [ ] It leads to better relations all round and results in the development of new and better ideas and methods of working from the ranks of those who are actively engaged in the work. (1974:3)

Alternatively, external publicity is seen as a crucial activity of any organisation that aims to enlist public support. It is through publicity that the party is able to communicate directly with the community and it is through publicity that support can be canvassed. In terms of the different methods of publicity, the manual listed a total of seventeen. These are: public meetings; sales of papers; sales of literature; letters to the press; press statements; press photographs; press conferences; interviews on radio and television; leaflets; pickets; posters; advertisements; songs and music; stickers and flags; 'any other ideas'; education; and finally publicity itself. This typology provides a valuable list of the different methods of publicity or, more generally, forms of communication that have and still are used by republicans.<sup>64</sup> The only significant addition is the use of new information technology, and particularly the use of the WWW and e-mail.

Moreover, one way to examine Sinn Féin's communication efforts is by applying the typology devised in Chapter Three based on the work of Wragg (1992) and McNair (1995).<sup>65</sup> This identifies three separate categories that characterise republican political communication efforts, or what McNair (1995) terms political public relations. These are the different types of communication practices that pinpoint the aims, platforms or modes of communication, and finally, the specific methods that are used. It is the combination of these three elements which

<sup>64</sup> See Chapter Six.

<sup>65</sup> See Table 1, p.38.

totals the variety of communication efforts. According to this model, Sinn Féin's communication is thus delineated; firstly its aims are to manage the media, the party image, and internal communications or information.<sup>66</sup> Secondly, the different platforms of communication indicate the main mediums used in communicating, such as broadcasting, print, the Internet, display advertising and public speaking. Finally, the different methods of communication such as: press releases and press packs; newsletters and publications; press conferences; interviews; briefings (formal and informal); promotional items; organised events; videos and murals, amongst so many others, identify the types of messages produced.

Republican communication efforts thus emerge from a combination of different factors, principally the target audience, the aim in communicating, the medium of communication chosen, and the type of message used. Ultimately, this implies a significant degree of professionalisation and a recognition that different forms of communication can be adapted to suit different messages and audiences. It also shows that there is a need to adapt messages and forms of communication to changing circumstances as, Gerry Adams highlights:

there was once a time when I used to warn publicly of the dangers which were inherent in the British attitude. Whenever I did this my concern was always misinterpreted as a threat. So instead I took to raising my concerns privately, at first with all those with whom I was in contact, and then because it was becoming tedious and because I thought few were listening, unless I was asked I raised the dangers of Major's high risk strategy only with allies or with those whom I considered to be genuinely concerned and open to what I was saying. (14<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> February 1996 in 1997:202).

Also significant in determining republican communicative efforts is the structure of the party itself seen as being composed of people:

who see themselves as victims and oppressed. Therefore make common cause with each other. This unites them in a way that [ ] other strands, elements of society in Northern Ireland aren't united. They are embedded with this idea that they've got to fight for their rights and stick together.<sup>67</sup>

As stated in the previous section of this chapter, while the party is predominantly based in the North, where it is more prominent, its political and communicative headquarters are based in Dublin, where policies and strategies are decided on by a core group of leading republicans. The result is a unified and centralised political strategy that also extends itself to communication activities and ultimately leads to the repetition of a common message. As Anthony McIntyre explains, 'the party has maintained in some respects the culture of the army (IRA). Not necessarily the coerciveness of the army but relies on the culture of self-censorship. [ ] (and) rely(ies) on other republicans and Sinn Féiners to marginalise or ignore those in turn who speak out'.<sup>68</sup> The result of this is what numerous journalists have stressed; that in comparison to other political parties, republican messages are more controlled and that alternative or contradicting

<sup>66</sup> See Chapter Three.

<sup>67</sup> Martin Fletcher, from the *Times*, in interview, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1998.

<sup>68</sup> In interview, 5<sup>th</sup> August 1998.

views do not emanate from the party. Whilst it is frequent to see unionist disputes and conflicts in the media, the same does not happen with Sinn Féin,<sup>69</sup> as John Mullin suggested, ‘if you look at Ulster unionist battles (these) are fiercely played out in the public, horribly played out in public [ ] (in) Sinn Féin everything is sort of done behind closed doors’.<sup>70</sup> Instead, there is an endlessly repeated message that is centrally defined, and it is then replicated throughout.

### ***Communicating With the Media***

Sinn Féin is a highly disciplined party, both in terms of its political organisation and its communicative efforts, and this is observable at a number of different levels, although the focus of this study lies in examining its media strategies and its attempts to communicate with the media. Recognising the importance of this audience, and ensuring that the republican message is as coherent as possible, are among the main principles behind republican communication. For example, whilst each Sinn Féin department is responsible for producing its own press releases, it is nevertheless the responsibility of the press office to check these for content and mistakes. It is also its duty to ensure that the message does not contradict party policy.<sup>71</sup> Additionally, the press office is required to advise all Sinn Féin departments and other parallel organisations, such as community groups, on all matters to do with the media, ranging from advice on the content of a particular message to recommendations as to which media are more suited and responsive to that message. This shows that at a practical level, the press office has a strong understanding, gained mainly from experience of the workings of the media. As Robert Montgomery from the POW department explained:

the press office doesn’t sit above the POW department. There’s no hierarchy as a censor, but, I mean, if they think we should be sending (press releases) to other papers, then they’ll say. But it will not be the case of “you shouldn’t do that”, (instead it is) “send it to that paper” or maybe “you should do this”.<sup>72</sup>

### **Controlling the Message**

The control and discipline of the party is seen at another level, in that and as mentioned previously, its communication and publicity policy emanates from the Dublin office. This is subsequently put into practice by the different press offices and their respective officers.<sup>73</sup> The result is that Sinn Féin’s communication strategy and its messages are seen as coherent, strategically developed efforts, in tune with the party’s policies.<sup>74</sup> As one journalist argued, Sinn Féin always wants to control its messages because the fewer and the more formal its contacts are with the media, the smaller the chance of party members speaking out of line.<sup>75</sup> The

<sup>69</sup> See Chapter Nine.

<sup>70</sup> From the *Guardian*, in interview, 8<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

<sup>71</sup> Donncha O’Hara, Sinn Féin’s press officer, in interview, 27<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

<sup>72</sup> In interview, 29<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

<sup>73</sup> In interview, 29<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

<sup>74</sup> Confidential journalistic source from the *Irish Times*, in survey, 1998.

<sup>75</sup> Unknown journalistic source, in survey, 1998.

repetition of this message is said to have an effect on media coverage,<sup>76</sup> as Martin Fletcher has commented ‘they (Sinn Féin) stay on message, in many ways they remind me of New Labour, they are very disciplined, they stay on message, they won’t be distracted, they answer the questions they want to answer, they don’t answer those they don’t want to answer’.<sup>77</sup>

This control of output ensures that party representation in the media is a cohesive one, limiting the opportunity to explore dissent or disagreement within the party, as ‘they decide their message in the morning and everyone agrees it and that is basically what it comes down to. They are just very, very disciplined’.<sup>78</sup> The insistence on the same republican message is also a tactic of saturation as part of an attempt to get the message picked up by the media. Additionally, control is also placed upon the mode of delivery of information, as certain party representatives specialise in releasing specific types of messages.<sup>79</sup> For example, Gerry Adams likes to be associated only with good news.<sup>80</sup> This was a point stressed by another *Times* journalist, Martin Fletcher, who commented that ‘when you see Mitchell McLaughlin being put up for a press conference, you know something has gone wrong. It tends to be the figure [ ] who they (Sinn Féin) [ ] send out when things are going badly. Adams tends to come out when things are going well’.<sup>81</sup>

### The Importance of Language

Similar care is placed in the selection of language and rhetoric to be used. Robert Montgomery, from the Falls POW department, explained during an interview that as a new ‘member’ in the office he had to familiarise himself with the republican language required to communicate with the media. He also had to learn what he termed ‘political media speak’, which, according to him, was not complex and refers to the language used to ensure that the press release would be picked up by the media and with which journalists would be familiar and interested.<sup>82</sup> Again, this shows a tight control over communication, the importance of language in the Northern Ireland conflict<sup>83</sup> and, more importantly, the language in which the media are interested.

Republican rhetoric must also necessarily reflect and be in tune with the wider party strategy. So, for example, the move into constitutional politics has been reflected in the messages communicated. As one journalist suggested, they have now moved from ‘strident republicanism to mature media management, developing a voice which is less shrill and has a greater

<sup>76</sup> Deáglan de Bréadún, from the *Irish Times*, in survey, 13<sup>th</sup> March 1998.

<sup>77</sup> From the *Times*, in interview, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1998.

<sup>78</sup> John Mullin, from the *Guardian*, in interview, 8<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

<sup>79</sup> Audrey MacGee, from the *Times*, in interview, 21<sup>st</sup> July 1998.

<sup>80</sup> John Mullin, from the *Guardian*, in interview, 8<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

<sup>81</sup> In interview, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1998.

<sup>82</sup> In interview, 29<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

<sup>83</sup> See Shirlow and McGovern (1997).

ressonance'.<sup>84</sup> Another journalist described this as 'a gradual shift in emphasis towards politics' and that the careful and crafted control of the message was a deliberate republican attempt to ensure that their "affairs" are handled in the best possible way'.<sup>85</sup> Such changes were also identified as the use of 'conciliatory language and message to the British media in an attempt to tackle the demonisation of Sinn Féin by unionist parties. "Reasonableness" is at the heart of their strategy'.<sup>86</sup>

### Media Relations

The evolution in the organisation of the press office in terms of staffing and facilities is also paralleled by their efforts in dealing with the media. As Martin Fletcher has suggested:

they cottoned on to the need to use the media long before I arrived, and people who have been in much longer than I, compare their conferences of sort of 10 years ago, which would take place in a spartan old room in Dublin somewhere, with the rather sophisticated conferences they have nowadays.<sup>87</sup>

Journalists have commented that republicans' efforts are similar to all journalists, although they might be more helpful towards the journalists they regard as being more useful.<sup>88</sup> Mark Davenport from the *BBC* claimed that, 'as a correspondent reporting mainly to a British audience I know I may not get the ease of access accorded to some others. But I also know that Sinn Féin is sophisticated enough to keep me informed as they want their message to reach my audience'.<sup>89</sup> Still this does not mean that the party is not aware of the differences, even the more subtle ones within the media. In the following extract, Adams highlights what he sees as the disparities between the American and British media:

the interviews I did in the US were much more assertive, probing and balanced than the sound bites reproduced here (Northern Ireland and Britain) suggest. I am sure there are marginalised and silenced people in the US but I think there is also a genuine free speech ethos which is totally alien to the censored and closed media we endure here. Journalists appear to have much more independence. Certainly I found no trace of the self-censorship which is so prevalent in Ireland and Britain. (9<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> February 1994 in 1997:43)

Although there is little that the party can do to control or diminish these, the simple fact that it is aware of the differences within the media and the prevailing culture of self-censorship within Britain demonstrates its deep understanding of the media and how it operates. Whilst control of the media would be desirable, knowing how it functions allows party communicators to develop counter strategies, such as speaking media language. By establishing how the media operates and by adapting republican messages to media demand, the party can devise ways to increase the success of its communication efforts. As any other organisation seeking to influence the

<sup>84</sup> Chris Jones, from *Channel 4 News*, in survey, 13<sup>th</sup> March 1998.

<sup>85</sup> Confidential journalistic source, from the *Irish Times*, in survey, 30<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

<sup>86</sup> Chris Jones, from *Channel 4 News*, in survey, 13<sup>th</sup> March 1998.

<sup>87</sup> From the *Times*, in interview, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1998.

<sup>88</sup> Lena Ferguson, from *Channel 4 News*, in survey, 28<sup>th</sup> April 1998.

<sup>89</sup> In survey, 29<sup>th</sup> September 1997.

news, it uses a variety of methods to communicate with journalists, including the issuing of press releases and faxes; the organisation of press conferences; and increasing their availability for formal and informal interviews and briefings. Also, as one journalist based in the United States, Martin Kettle, stated, the party used to communicate to him via e-mail, however, 'they no longer send me e-mail, thank goodness, as it was very voluminous'.<sup>90</sup> Messages are also sent to international news agencies allowing Sinn Féin to reach out, in a more efficient manner, to a more extensive audience, and in particular to an international one.<sup>91</sup>

Another tactic used is to regularly identify a number of relevant issues which it then raises with the media, of which the POW issue was an example. In this sense, the party is a proactive organisation, seeking out opportunities to communicate its interests and establish direct contact with journalists.<sup>92</sup> One clear example of Sinn Féin adopting a proactive communication stance, is also evident in the USA, where it is through persistent contact with journalists and the media that it has been able to convey its message. The use of personal contact also plays an important role, such as when Gerry Adams addressed the Association of American Correspondents in London (Adams, 1997), or visits 'the boardrooms of major newspapers when he's in the USA' (Mac an Bhaird, *AP/RN*, 18<sup>th</sup> December 1997). This 'one-to-one contact with editors who shape coverage and write newspapers leaders is perhaps the best way of getting the message out' (Mac an Bhaird, *AP/RN*, 18<sup>th</sup> December 1997).

However, there are also those journalists who see the party in a different light, as one media representative states: 'they rarely if ever contact us. (although) Quite often helpful on the phone once we have contacted them and helpful and chatty when we meet'.<sup>93</sup> This view of the party as primarily a reactive organisation, an opinion also supported by Vincent Browne who suggested that it is journalists who have to approach the party,<sup>94</sup> shows that there are two facets to the party's communicative apparatus. On the one hand, it is a proactive organisation that initiates the communication effort, whilst simultaneously it also is a reactive organisation that responds to events triggered by others.

### Successful Communication?

This question of the nature of the party's role as a communicator is intimately linked with the success of its strategies, in particular because of the growing pressures upon journalists. Rita O'Hare suggested some years ago that despite republican efforts and their extensive production of information and messages:

<sup>90</sup> From the *Guardian*, in survey, January 1998.

<sup>91</sup> Sarah Smith, from *Channel 5 News*, in survey, 1998.

<sup>92</sup> Unknown journalistic source, in survey, 1998.

<sup>93</sup> Sarah Smith, from *Channel 5 News*, in survey, 1998.

<sup>94</sup> From the *Irish Times*, in survey, 7<sup>th</sup> April 1998.

not all media outlets, either radio stations or papers back Sinn Féin's statements. A lot of them give unbiased and balanced coverage and will quote what we say about something just as quick as they quote anybody else. [ ] But it's where there is a complete and determined refusal to let anyone see Sinn Féin as anything else other than talking about the war, trying to do everything they can to ensure that people's view of Sinn Féin is a mouthpiece for the IRA. [ ] This type of coverage is evidenced much more so in the south of Britain than in the North of Ireland. Their aim is to portray republicans in general [ ] it's just a constant onslaught of not just ignoring us but portraying us at worst mad and at best impractical dreamers chasing after something that is not longer either attainable or desirable. (in *Troops Out*, 1991:13)

The question that is then raised is whether or not Sinn Féin frequently communicates with journalists, or whether its communicative efforts are largely dismissed. Although it is not possible to determine the exact level of the party's communication with the media, there are, nevertheless, two aspects which must be considered. Firstly, the press officer interviewed in the Old Conway Mill Sinn Féin office suggested that they issue between two and 20 press releases a week; the problem is that the vast majority of these are simply not picked up by the media.<sup>95</sup> At the same time, although the party communicates with the media, as Rita O'Hare commented, the difficulty is that journalists are interested in the IRA and not in Sinn Féin, so most of the party communication is dismissed (in *Troops Out*, 1991). For example, Ewen MacAskill recognised Sinn Féin's politicisation and its professionalisation of communication. Nevertheless, his main interest continues to lie with the IRA.<sup>96</sup> This was also an opinion shared by other journalists, who said they were interested in knowing what future lies ahead for the IRA, and how it will react to the issue of decommissioning.

Sinn Féin has repeatedly stated that it is not the IRA, it is a political party with a legitimate electoral representation and that it 'can only speak for itself and on behalf of its electorate' (Sinn Féin, 1997). Hence, if there is a continued media interest in the IRA<sup>97</sup> and Sinn Féin communication efforts focus on much wider issues, reflecting the politicisation and the pluralism of the party, then it is obvious why some journalists continue to see Sinn Féin merely as a reactive organisation. Although, as Vincent Browne commented:

Sinn Féin has little difficulty in communicating with the public because there is such media interest in them. It needs merely to hold a press conference and it gets pretty extensive media coverage certainly in Ireland but also in Britain and often in the United States.<sup>98</sup>

One journalist suggested that there is little interest in Sinn Féin's economic, educational or other policies. What is important to journalists is the peace process and its role in it as well as that of the IRA and that for as long as the IRA exists there will be continued interested in the party.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Donncha O'Hara, in interview, 27<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

<sup>96</sup> From the *Guardian*, in survey, August 1998.

<sup>97</sup> See Chapters Eight and Nine.

<sup>98</sup> From the *Irish Times*, in survey, 7<sup>th</sup> April 1998.

<sup>99</sup> Martin Kettle, from the *Guardian*, in survey, January 1998.

Whilst some journalists recognise the quality of the republican communication apparatus and their efforts, and regarded this as a highly professional media operation, they nevertheless argue that the party's success in influencing the news agenda is solely on those areas in which others have failed.<sup>100</sup> However, according to one journalist, this success is not linked to the techniques adopted but to the issues themselves.<sup>101</sup> Yet, what this fails to acknowledge is that issues are raised by the parties through communication techniques and are subsequently picked up by the media. As Mark Davenport from the *BBC* put it 'we react to events'.<sup>102</sup> In essence, as Richard Ayre has acknowledged:

Sinn Féin's policies for resolving what they regard as British occupation of the North of Ireland have changed radically over the past two or three years. Many of these issues, which are now the subject of political debate in Northern Ireland, have become part of the agenda solely because of that change in approach by Sinn Féin.<sup>103</sup>

### **Overview**

They have a Rolls Royce PR machine and leave nothing to accident. They are totally single minded in their objectives, forever brainstorming working out strategies.<sup>104</sup>

Sinn Féin has always recognised the importance of communication, both at an internal and an external level. In 1986, Gerry Adams stated that 'the media demand special attention because of their importance in influencing their audiences' opinions and views' (1986:147) and that 'communication is vital and frank, and open dialogue between all levels of our organisation is something we are working to create' (1986:155). More recently, in 1993, Adams gave an insight into the importance he awarded to the media, by recounting an incident that occurred in 1967 in which he was involved:

pacifism was to be our watchword. No problem! Civil disobedience was the order of the day. Only no one told the RUC. They beat us up. They had us into the back of a Land-rover before we even got out a syllable of politically correct, collectively agreed, properly cleared protest. They were like lightening. And not a camera to record it for the masses. Such indignity can be endured if a cause can be advanced, if the cameras are rolling or the flash bulbs are flashing or if Martin Luther King is the victim. A bit of a pain otherwise. (1<sup>st</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> September 1993 in 1997:24)

However, it has been the perceived degree of importance, as well as the different roles awarded to communication and the techniques used in the process, which have changed over time. There have also been some significant modifications in the structure and operations of the press office, and the functions it has served since the emergence of Sinn Féin in 1970. These changes are very similar to those which occur in any press office and they are connected with the normal process of evolution, where new forms of communication are explored as well as new audiences targeted. At the same time, there is an added dimension of development which is unique to the republican movement. It has evolved from what was originally a simplistic and mediocre press

<sup>100</sup> Confidential source, from the *Irish Times*, in survey, 30<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

<sup>101</sup> Sarah Smith, from *Channel 5 News*, in survey, 1998.

<sup>102</sup> In survey, 29<sup>th</sup> September 1997.

<sup>103</sup> From the *BBC*, in letter, January 1996.

<sup>104</sup> Martina Purdy, from the *Belfast Telegraph*, in survey, 1998.



operation, to one that is now seen as one of the most, if not the most, efficient communication 'machines' in Northern Ireland. This aspect of transformation is a result of modifications within the party itself, such as the refocusing of its policies and political strategies during the 1980s and 1990s. For example, the development of republican policies against gender discrimination has now meant that the party uses more women in their communication efforts than the other Northern Irish political parties do.<sup>105</sup> Equally important are the transformations within Northern Ireland and at an international level.

It is only with an understanding of these different factors that it is possible to see how and why the party's communication apparatus and its strategies have evolved. Intrinsically, as Bean suggested in 1994, 'by developing a new form of struggle (hence a new form of communication) the republican movement can secure wider influence than it did with the armed struggle, whilst still claiming a place at the conference table as part of a broad nationalist front' (p.26). Thus, republican communication efforts must always be seen as indicative of wider party attitudes, as Audrey MacGee explains:

you can certainly say that post-cease-fire they really became much more sophisticated, but even pre-that [ ] they were very message conscious, but certainly [ ] after the cease-fire they began to [ ] I mean it was also part of their strategy, because they had to be [ ] to justify their backing for the cease-fire they had to prove that politics could work, and one way to prove politics could work, [ ] was by using the media, by working through the media. The higher their profile was, and the higher the profile they maintained, [ ] the easier it was for them to prove to their constituents that politics was working. There is no doubt there has been a dual strategy, but [ ] in terms of their use of the media, and [ ] the way they negotiated with the media it was definitely on the political front.<sup>106</sup>

In the sphere of the press office, these changes have been witnessed in the growth of the number of press officers working on either a full-time or a part time basis, paralleled by a significant improvement in working conditions and as Martin Kettle puts it, 'they are very responsive to journalists needs'.<sup>107</sup> Even if internal, national and international changes have dictated how the party and its communicative apparatus have developed, the characteristics of the movement itself are also significant factors. Lena Ferguson, from *Channel 4 News* suggested that 'part of their success is their attraction to younger people and a large volume of staff. This may be because many of their supporters are unemployed'. Also they seem to have more young, energetic people than any other party especially their main electoral rivals, the SDLP'.<sup>108</sup> The more politicised and professional the party became the more diverse and extensive were its communicative efforts. One journalist has reinforced this view by suggesting that 'their success over the marching issue'<sup>109</sup> was largely because local resident groups were promoted in the

<sup>105</sup> Martin Fletcher, from the *Times*, in interview, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1998.

<sup>106</sup> Audrey MacGee, from the *Times*, in interview, 21<sup>st</sup> July 1998.

<sup>107</sup> From the *Guardian*, in survey, January 1998.

<sup>108</sup> In survey, 28<sup>th</sup> April 1998.

<sup>109</sup> This refers to long standing contention on the annual Orange Order marches through nationalist communities.

media rather than just the same old Sinn Féin stories. The technique also made it less obvious that SF were promoting the story'.<sup>110</sup>

Furthermore, changes were also witnessed in republican messages using more conciliatory and pluralistic language that was in tune with the party's own evolved political approach. The result is that, 'they have succeeded in gaining acceptance as a political party'.<sup>111</sup> Most journalists believe that there is a so-called 'republican media machine' and that its approach to communication illustrates a highly effective public relations enterprise. This is seen as combining the 'spin doctorism abilities of new Labour with a skill for street politics which surpasses, say, the SDLP'.<sup>112</sup> It also relies on the employment of 'spin doctors like Richard McAuley, who eats, breaths and digests Sinn Féin and republicanism (for a loss less dosh than Mandy<sup>113</sup>)'. Ultimately, it has been repeatedly suggested that:

Sinn Féin have a very high quality PR (public relations) structure. Their press releases are timely, frequent and to the point. Their press conferences are fairly frequent and on the whole they treat the media well, providing spokespersons and access to leaders (contrary to other parties who ignore the media).<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Sarah Smith, from *Channel 5 News*, in survey, 1998.

<sup>111</sup> Ewen MacAskill, from the *Guardian*, in survey, August 1998.

<sup>112</sup> Mark Davenport, from the *BBC*, in survey, 29<sup>th</sup> September 1997.

<sup>113</sup> This is in reference to Peter Mandelson.

<sup>114</sup> Martina Purdy, from the *Belfast Telegraph*, in survey, 1998.

## Chapter Six: Practices of Political Communication

In 1974, Sinn Féin stated in its *Manual of Publicity* that party publicists and communicators ‘should see to it that no opportunity is lost to publicise the aims and activities (of the party)’ (p.5). The importance of communicating politics, also highlighted by Gerry Adams in *Free Ireland* (1995), meant that press officers ‘should consciously seek ways and means whereby the movement’s policies & philosophies can be put forward to as wide an audience as possible’ (Sinn Féin, 1974:5). Whilst the *Manual of Publicity* is more than 25 years old, it awarded a role to communication and political action which, at the time, was not mirrored in the strategies of the republican movement.<sup>1</sup> Although it stressed the importance of communication as part of the wider republican strategy, throughout the 1970s, republicans continued to place an emphasis on military tactics. However, the re-evaluation of policy which began in the late 1970s, early 1980s increasingly saw the realisation and implementation of the manual’s suggestions. This resulted in the development of a more organised approach to communication. The process of modernisation and political re-tuning of Sinn Féin which continued throughout the 1980s, culminating in the early 1990s with the start of the peace process, further enhanced the transformation of its communicative practices. This unique transformation has meant that its communicative efforts are now seen as the most efficient and successful of all Northern Irish political parties and often equalled to New Labour. Deáglan de Bréadún from the *Irish Times* stated that this is the result of ‘an effective combination of hard work on the ground with a media barrage’,<sup>2</sup> and that:

they are unlike other political parties because of the secrecy which surrounds many of their meetings and activities. They run a highly professional media operation which seeks to control the activities of journalists as much as possible.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter then examines some of the republican communication efforts, focusing upon those devised for the media and their own supporters, although a number of these are useful in communicating with an audience that extends beyond republican grassroots. The aim is to give the reader a sense of the diversity and quality of such endeavours, whilst also observing their evolution over time. In conducting such an analysis, the chapter makes the relevant connections between the different techniques of communication and their underlying aims. The objective here is to provide one of many possible illustrations of republican communication practices and thus locate these in relation to the previously discussed professionalisation and sophistication of its communication apparatus.

However, it should be noted, that it is not the aim here to examine all or an extended sample of

<sup>1</sup> See Chapters Four and Five.

<sup>2</sup> In survey, 13<sup>th</sup> March 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Martha Kearney, from the *BBC*, in letter, 29<sup>th</sup> January 1996.

the party's communicative efforts. This analysis does not aim to represent a thorough and extended examination of all forms of republican communication, instead it focuses on a small selection of these. The material examined represents a 'typical collection' of different types of communication efforts that a visitor to one of Sinn Féin's offices or bookshops could have discovered in 1998. During a visit in the summer of 1998, I went to the party's offices in the Old Conway Mill, West Belfast, and asked for examples of Sinn Féin's promotional and communication material. One of the party's press officers, Donncha O'Hara, gave me two posters and five press releases.<sup>4</sup> While visiting the republican bookshop in the Falls Road, also in the summer of 1998, I randomly purchased a selection of promotional items which were inexpensive and easy to carry, including eight bumper stickers and five badges; the stickers costing £1 each and the badges 50 pence each. Finally, material was also obtained from David Miller's private collection of republican material, in particular the newsletters and publications, the latter of which totalled 32 issues of nine different publications.<sup>5</sup>

It is from this random selection of purchases, acquisitions and loans that the subsequent analysis and discussion is based and in this sense, the methodology used to obtain this material is somewhat unconventional. Moreover, the chapter provides a starting point from which to discuss how republican practices of communication with the media or republican supporters have changed over the years. This also informs further on the evolution of Sinn Féin's communication apparatus and strategy, which was the focus of the discussion in Chapter Five. This chapter is thus divided into two sections, each looking at different types of communicative efforts targeted at distinct audiences. In the first section, communicative practices to the media are examined by looking at a selection of press releases and press packs. The second section focuses on republican attempts to communicate with their own supporters in the first instance, although some of these efforts stretch to a more extended target audience. Here, a selection of print publications, promotional items and other techniques are considered.

### ***The Media as an Audience***

Communicating with the media is a crucial activity of any political organisation, and the ability to do so in a successful and professional manner has been repeatedly stressed in this thesis. Since politicians are unable to communicate directly with an increasingly growing public, it is via the news media that mass political communication is viable. This means that to communicate successfully to the public, politicians must first be able to communicate in an efficient manner to journalists. In the case of Sinn Féin, as highlighted in Chapter Five, communication with the media is pursued in a number of ways, including telephone

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<sup>4</sup> The five press releases obtained from Sinn Féin were all dated from 1996. The other press releases were analysed in original copy and subsequently photocopied from the Linnenhall's library political collection in Belfast. See Appendix Three.

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix Three, Table 6, p.284

conversations from the party to journalists, the organisation of press conferences and the setting up of informal and formal interviews. However, it is through the production, issuing and distribution of press releases and press information packs that messages are first communicated to journalists. As Sinn Féin itself stated in 1982:

the press release is probably the single most important means of communication with the media. News editors and journalists like press releases: they save work. The reporter or sub-editor values having the facts displayed in an accessible form with pointers for further information. (p.10)

### **Forms of Communication**

This means that Sinn Féin's abilities to communicate to the wider public are also connected to their aptitude in communicating with the media,<sup>6</sup> making it even more crucial that press releases and press packs are produced in a professional manner and are useful to journalists. Thus, they must clearly and unequivocally outline the party's policies or positioning and provide journalists information in a way that will be of interest to them. Press packs, on the other hand, can be seen to embody the party's identification passport to new journalists. They are designed either to serve as an introduction, which gives a general background to the party and its policies, or to focus on a single issue. Eventually, these documents are geared to raise journalists' interest in the organisation and to present the party as helpful and professional.

Alternatively, press or news releases are generally understood to be carefully composed and specific messages, usually typed or word-processed, which are then distributed to journalists. As a method of relaying information they also confer the producer of the message, in this case Sinn Féin, control over the content of the message and how, when and to whom it is released. Apart from this, they also 'give the [ ] senders the chance to offer their selection of facts and views without these being filtered through anyone else' (Sinn Fein, 1982:10.). As Sinn Féin's own *Manual of Publicity* explains:

the main aim of the press release is to bring items of news, which might otherwise go unnoticed, to the attention of editors. It can also be used to supply the text of speeches, on important occasions, which might otherwise go un-reported either because the paper in question is unable to send a reporter due to pressure of business or because the paper needs a copy in advance to meet publishing deadlines. (1974:15)

Therefore, the information conveyed in these documents must be carefully produced, as they have the ability to set the initial tone of the party's public position, and to influence journalists understanding of the same. The requirements for their production are that:

the information be of interest to the particular publication;  
that it has news value;  
that it is written and presented in an understandable form;  
that the information is not stale; (and)  
that it reaches the right person. (Sinn Féin, 1974:16)

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<sup>6</sup> This points to the fact that good communication strategies do not necessarily result in media coverage, nor in good media coverage. Nevertheless, their employment provides a useful starting point to publicise the organisation and raise journalists' awareness.

Although 'producing press releases requires work and care' (Sinn Féin, 1982:10), Robert Montgomery of Sinn Féin's POW department characterises the process as 'pretty straightforward. [ ] Basically, what you are doing is commenting on the issue and sending it out. All you are asked for is one of the councillors to comment on the issue, and repeat his comment'.<sup>7</sup> It is in providing this type of party commentary to journalists that much of the current work of the republican press office concentrates on.<sup>8</sup>

### Information Documents

On the other hand, press packs such as the *Information Pack* (Sinn Féin, 1997), serve more general functions. In the case of the *Information Pack* examined, this has been devised for the international media and conveys background details of interest to journalists who are unfamiliar with Northern Ireland and with Sinn Féin. Among the information provided are different contact addresses for the various party officers, an outline of Sinn Féin's main political positions, its aims, and some of its concerns, for instance the issue of POWs. In the document, Gerry Adams writes:

you are in Ireland at a time of great uncertainty and unease [ ]. In welcoming you to Ireland and to aid you in your understanding of the issues involved, Sinn Féin have put together this information pack. [ ] We hope that your stay in Ireland will be a pleasant one and that this information will be of benefit to you and will assist your understanding of the current impasse. If you require further assistance or help, please feel free to contact any of our press offices at the addresses provided. (p.3)

Furthermore, as John Mullin from the *Guardian* has argued international journalists are one of Sinn Féin's most prized audiences.<sup>9</sup> Republican preference for international journalists is rooted in the party perception of them as more favourable to the republican cause, and as providing access to an international dimension. Thus, since the early 1980s, and in particular in the aftermath of the Hunger Strikes, international journalists have been a key target audience for republican communication efforts.

A second type of press document, which used to be produced weekly by Sinn Féin, was the *Information Service*.<sup>10</sup> The responsibility for the generation of this service was held by the Foreign Affairs Bureau in conjunction with the International Publicity and Information Committee. Also aimed at a purely international audience, these documents contained more in-depth information than the traditional news release, covered a broader range of issues, and were regularly produced, rather than one-off publications like the *Information Pack* (1997). Their content could vary from a review of weekly events or concentrate on a particular situation. As far as could be ascertained, the *Information Service* was in place in the late 1980s - early 1990s,

<sup>7</sup> In interview, 29<sup>th</sup> July 1998

<sup>8</sup> Donncha O'Hara, Sinn Féin press officer, in interview, 27<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

<sup>9</sup> In interview, 8<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

<sup>10</sup> See Table 5, p.284.

and represented the party's attempt to extend the reach of the republican message and influence the foreign news agenda.

The re-modulation of the party's communicative apparatus and strategies, following the onset of the peace process, saw the replacement of the international *Information Service* by more efficient forms of communication. Amongst these are the use of the Internet<sup>11</sup> and international news agencies, which provide access to a more extended audience in a more efficient manner.<sup>12</sup> This newly developed reliance on international news agencies is particularly interesting as it indicates that Sinn Féin now considers that these allow for the relatively secure and unbiased communication of the republican message. This shift in strategy from producing and distributing their own information to relying on the mainstream media, implies a newly forged confidence in the traditional media. Also, the fact that Sinn Féin now sees these media as providing an opportunity to communicate without the fear of distortion or bias, in turn reflects changed media practices and an acceptance of Sinn Féin as a legitimate political party.<sup>13 14</sup>

Alternatively, documents such as *Press Briefing – Irish Republican POW Campaign* (1983) are the combination of an extended press release and a press information document and focus on a particular issue. These efforts are aimed at the journalistic community in general, which Sinn Féin hopes to inform on issues of concern and ideally see these covered in the news. In this particular case, the aim was to highlight the plight of republican prisoners of war: one of the party's long-standing, key issues, which it has repeatedly tried to publicise.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Republican Press Release**

As suggested in the introduction to this chapter, for the purposes of determining the quality of Sinn Féin's press releases, a selection of 37 of these was randomly obtained from the Linenhall Library in Belfast and from the party itself. An additional press release was also accessed for comparative purposes from the party's WWW site.<sup>16</sup> This selection covered an estimated period of 22 years, and of these 37 press releases, four were issued in the 1970s, six in the 1980s and the remaining 27 were issued in the 1990s.<sup>17</sup> Whilst there is not an even distribution of this selection of press releases over the three examined decades, this should not be seen as a drawback or as limiting this discussion. As stated the main objective of this analysis is to give

<sup>11</sup> Mark Leron, officer in Sinn Féin's Press Office, in interview, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2000.

<sup>12</sup> Sarah Smith, from *Channel 5 News*, in survey, 1998.

<sup>13</sup> Mark Leron, Sinn Féin press officer, in interview, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2000.

<sup>14</sup> Some of the changed media practices and the adoption of a less biased approach to Sinn Féin and the republican message were examined in research conducted into approaches to Sinn Féin interviewing on British terrestrial television. From this research the most important finding to emerge was a changed journalistic practice and attitude towards Sinn Féin from the start of the peace process, when they were increasingly seen as legitimate politicians rather than terrorists; see Lago (1998).

<sup>15</sup> The prisoners were released as part of the Good Friday Agreement, which was reached on the 10<sup>th</sup> April 1998.

<sup>16</sup> This particular press release was chosen as it was the Internet version of one of the traditional press releases examined. This is also dated from the 24<sup>th</sup> July 1996 and is entitled 'Martin McGuinness Speaks to International Media', at <http://www.utexas.edu/students/iig/archive/sinnfein/releases/pr072496.html>, accessed on 15/09/98 at 10.42.

<sup>17</sup> See Appendix Three, Table 4 and Table 7 in p.284-285.

the reader a sense of the evolution of the republican press release within its framework of existence and time of production. It is not the objective here to determine any major quantitative findings on Sinn Féin's production of press releases.

The analysis focused on both questions of content, layout and design, whilst also considering issues of language, meaning, text fluidity, detail and quantity of information provided. Additionally, the study also compared the press releases with the 'Golden Rules for Issuing Press Releases' in the party's *Manual of Publicity* (1974) and the suggestions outlined in *The Role of Officers in Sinn Féin* (1982), which also addresses the production of press releases. This examination serves as a spring board from which to understand how changes in republican communication have been reflected in the actual messages. More specifically by looking at a number of features of the text and determining how their evolution results from a conscious effort to improve and professionalise republican communication.

### Press Release Requirements

Regarding the 26 'Golden Rules' for the issuing of press releases (Sinn Féin, 1974), these can be divided into two broad categories of layout and format considerations and structure and text fluidity.<sup>18</sup> Under the latter category, the rules state that the main news item should be prioritised and included in the beginning of the release. Paragraphs should also be kept short and information should answer the following questions: who, how, where, why and what. Equally, every release should have a headline and a contact address. In the case of press releases with more than one page, these must have a key identifying word in the top left-hand corner. Press releases should also be issued on official note paper, typed on one side of the page and carefully checked for errors and mistakes. *The Role of Sinn Féin Officers* (Sinn Féin, 1982) emphasised that the success of press releases was related to the quality and clarity of writing, in particular of its headline and introduction, but that it should also include extensive quotes. Robert Montgomery, from the POW department, also stressed the importance of the quality of writing in the production of a press release. His argument was that it did not necessarily have to embody excellence, but that it should be composed in a style which is appealing to journalists.<sup>19</sup>

The examination of the press releases briefly considered some of their typical characteristics, such as the presence of an identifying logotype, the general layout and length, as well as the provision of a contact address and date of release. Whilst these aspects might seem inconspicuous details for some, in comparison to other issues, such as the content of the

<sup>18</sup> According to this typology, 15 of the 26 rules were of a layout and formatting consideration, eight were of structure and text fluidity consideration, whilst two were of both considerations simultaneously.

<sup>19</sup> In interview, 29<sup>th</sup> July 1998.



message, they are nevertheless important aspects for the successful production of press releases according to the above criteria. The main reason for this lies in the fact that Sinn Féin has to compete with other organisations for journalists attention. If press releases are not produced in a manner which will attract this, then it is more likely than not they will simply be dismissed. As Martin Kettle from the *Guardian* commented, from the point of view of journalists, it is crucial that an organisation like Sinn Féin tries to ‘suit their needs’,<sup>20</sup> and this must necessarily be reflected in the production of press releases.

### Visual Image

In terms of the presence of the logotype,<sup>21</sup> which through the repeated use of a visual symbol, facilitates the identification of who produced the release, it was found that the majority of releases, 19 of the 37 press releases, had a logotype.<sup>22</sup> Whilst there was no distinct pattern as to the use or otherwise of logotypes, these were more frequent in press releases dated from the 1990s onwards. In relation to design, it was noted that not a single one was repeatedly used, although there was a tendency for some to share similar features. This was particularly noticeable from the start of the mid/late 1980s, when the words ‘Sinn Féin’, or more simply ‘SF’ are set against a representation of the island of Ireland. Indeed, this same logotype has been used throughout a variety of republican communication efforts, ranging from posters to the WWW.<sup>23</sup> This reflects a more coherent approach to communication and the need to develop a unified image for the party. In this sense, the use of the logotype has been of a more recent development which emerged from the party’s attempt to publicise and market itself in a consistent manner as a fundamental piece of the Northern Irish political jigsaw.

More recently these promotional efforts have been re-designed, this time to reflect what has become a growing interest in the creation of a pan-nationalist Irish front. Thus, in the earlier part of the year 2000, a new Sinn Féin logo was developed which now uses the Irish tricolour flag, one of the ‘chief national emblems’ (Loftus, 1994:58). The words ‘Sinn Féin’ have become less prominent than before, mirroring the party’s moves to align itself with other forms of Irish nationalism and its efforts to advance its electoral stance amongst the traditional electorate of the SDLP.<sup>24</sup>

Although press releases dated from the mid-1980s onwards and, in particular, the early 1990s

<sup>20</sup> In survey, January 1998.

<sup>21</sup> Defined as ‘a printed symbol used by a corporation or business company [ ] as its emblem’ (Hawkins *et al.*, 1992:404).

<sup>22</sup> These were dated of 1986; 5<sup>th</sup> February 1990; 14<sup>th</sup> May 1991 (Unemployment conference report); 19<sup>th</sup> October 1993; 5<sup>th</sup> April 1994; 6<sup>th</sup> April 1994 (Letter to John Major); 6<sup>th</sup> April 1994 (no title); 31<sup>st</sup> August 1994; 5<sup>th</sup> September 1994; 9<sup>th</sup> December 1994; 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1995; 4<sup>th</sup> April 1995; 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1995; 14<sup>th</sup> October 1995; 25<sup>th</sup> January 1996; 24<sup>th</sup> July 1996; 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1996.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Figure 23, p.165.

<sup>24</sup> See Chapter Four.

identified themselves as such in their heading and represent clear efforts to communicate with the media and, early attempts did not. In some instances, such as on the 4<sup>th</sup> March 1980, it was not even obvious from an initial examination that the document was in fact a press release. It was only from reading it that it was possible to determine that this was indeed a republican message to the media. Additionally, while those releases dated from the 1990s clearly resemble official and professional attempts to release information to the media, earlier efforts lacked this sophistication and could thus be more easily dismissed by an overworked journalistic body. Overall, in terms of the layout and presentation of the press release, there was a clear and visible improvement from the late 1980s onwards, and in particular during the 1990s. This progress mirrors the changes at the organisational level of the party, with the noted improvements in the press office and the resources available for the production of messages.<sup>25</sup> It also reflects other political re-evaluations within the movement, which sought to increase its profile and enhance its image as part of mainstream politics, thus emerging from concerted efforts to improve the party's stance.

The second element considered was the provision of details on follow up contacts. The underlying principle behind the supply of this information is that it gives journalists the possibility to pursue the subject matter or issue if necessary or desired, and also allows the party to comment or clarify further. It was established that of the 37 press releases analysed, only eight<sup>26</sup> did not contain contact addresses or telephone numbers for republican press offices. Moreover, it was also noted that from the 1980s onwards not only was there an increase in the number of releases with a contact address, but also a greater diversity of contacts provided. Instead of focusing solely on the Belfast or Dublin offices, the Derry Press office was included as well. The provision of other contact addresses reflects the process of decentralisation of the party and its communicative efforts, which took place from the 1980s onwards. This resulted from the expansion of the party's communicative apparatus extending to other areas, such as the production of publications, also in response to journalists needs, as discussed in Chapter Five and its paralleled professionalisation. This process is also visible in the 1997 *Press Pack*, which includes contact addresses for Sinn Féin in the United States and Brussels.

The other element analysed was the indication of the date of production or release, which allows the journalist to establish the degree of its novelty and relevance. From this, it was also found that a very small number, only six<sup>27</sup> of the 37 press releases, were not dated. Additionally, as in previous cases, it was also established that the vast majority of undated press releases were

<sup>25</sup> See Chapter Five.

<sup>26</sup> These were dated from *circa* early 1970s; 4<sup>th</sup> March 1980; *circa* 1986; *circa* 1987/88; 14<sup>th</sup> May 1991; 4<sup>th</sup> September 1993; 29<sup>th</sup> August 1995 and 29<sup>th</sup> October 1995.

<sup>27</sup> These were dated from *circa* 1970s; 1986; *circa* 1987/88; December 1995; 1996; 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1996

produced in the 1970s and 1980s and not in the 1990s. Ultimately, these different elements stress that there has been a progressive improvement and sophistication in the production of press releases, thus reflecting Sinn Féin's greater aptitude and commitment to the communication of politics.

### The Message

The final element examined was the question of length and style of writing of the press releases. Although again this might seem inconsequential at first, the already mentioned competition for access to journalists demands that messages have to be clear and focused, whilst also revealing their degree of professionalisation. Extensive, unclear press releases are more likely to be dismissed than those that journalists can quickly and easily read whilst still obtaining the necessary information. Similarly, press releases containing information or based on topics deemed irrelevant can also be dismissed by newsmakers. Accordingly, it was established that the vast majority of the press releases examined were written in a concise manner, and only ten<sup>28</sup> extended beyond a single page. However, those which were longer than a page either relayed party speeches, or outlined complex party policies, such as the 'Launch of 26 County Local Government Reform' on the 10<sup>th</sup> April 1991, thus justifying their extended length.

In terms of the quality of writing, releases produced in the 1970s and 1980s did not use a style of language which could be seen as formal and professional. An improvement in the style of writing, embodying a greater degree of formality and officialdom was particularly visible from the 1990s onwards. For example, whilst there were a number of minor spelling mistakes and misuse of words evident in the press releases dated from the early 1970s, such errors had largely disappeared in the 1980s. In one instance, the word 'equitability' was repeatedly scrolled out from the release and replaced in hand-writing with 'balance'.<sup>29</sup> There were also some instances where the English used in the text was rather informal, as can be seen in the following example extracted from a 1986 press release on the Hillsborough Treaty:

the cause of Irish Nationalism, that is the right of the Irish people to national self-determination, has not been advanced one iota by this treaty. [ ] The SDLP has always been prepared to accept minimum positions. Over the years they have gone in and out of Stormont like yo-yos'. (1986)

The differences in the quality and formality of writing were particularly perceptible when examples of earlier press releases were compared with later ones. As Robert Montgomery from the POW department explained, the ability to write press releases and in particular the language which should be used was something which had to be learned and improved through time and

<sup>28</sup> These were dated from *circa* early-1970s; 1986; 27<sup>th</sup> May 1987; 1987/88; 10<sup>th</sup> April 1991; 14<sup>th</sup> May 1991; 4<sup>th</sup> March 1993; 5<sup>th</sup> April 1994; 25<sup>th</sup> January 1996 and 24<sup>th</sup> July 1996.

<sup>29</sup> This refers to the press releases entitled 'Correspondence with RTE', dated the 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1974.

experience.<sup>30</sup> As Gerry Adams has stressed repeatedly,<sup>31</sup> the lack of training and education of Sinn Féin officers, evident in the 1970s and 1980s, meant that these press officers had more ‘difficulties’ in producing press releases and thus resulted in less professional efforts. In contrast, the importance awarded to the education of its members from the mid-1980s onwards has meant that Sinn Féin officers, for example, are now prepared, trained and educated to deal with the media. This has resulted in improved communication efforts and the production of more professional press releases, while the political and strategic changes which occurred in the party in the 1980s and early 1990s<sup>32</sup> were also noticeable in the discourse used and in the messages communicated. For example, those releases from the 1990s emphasised the party’s role in the peace process and the wider policy areas with which it is concerned. Its language was also different as seen in the use of terms such as ‘equality and parity of esteem’ and ‘dialogue’.<sup>33 34</sup>

Alternatively, press releases from the 1970s and early-mid 1980s reflected the republican movement’s emphasis on a military strategy and the demands of an immediate re-unification of Ireland, whilst focusing on the ‘wrong doings’ of the British and unionists. This mirrors the view it held at the time, that the British remained in Northern Ireland for economical and defence reasons, as articulated in the press releases. For example, in one release dated of 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1980, it is stated that ‘Sinn Féin denies the claim of England to exercise any jurisdiction in Ireland and the evil of the British presence’. As discussed in Chapters Four and Five, the collapse of the Eastern Block and failure of the armed strategy forced Sinn Féin to reassess its tactics, and its perceptions on the continued British rule in Northern Ireland. This resulted in a substantially different approach to the Troubles manifested across the range of the party’s communicative efforts, including its press releases. The outcome was a change in the topics explored but also, as mentioned, a change in the language used.<sup>35</sup>

As well as transformations in layout, style of writing and discourse, modifications and improvements were also noticeable in the increased inclusion of quotes or comments from party politicians. Again, this was particularly clear from the mid-1980s onwards and was seen as providing an opportunity for Sinn Féin to convey its message in a more direct form. The introduction of the Broadcasting Ban, in 1988, also meant that the provision of quotes in press releases offered the possibility to circumvent the restrictions imposed on the broadcasting of republican voices. Such quotes from party members allowed journalists to reproduce or rephrase

<sup>30</sup> In interview, 29<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Adams (1986).

<sup>32</sup> See Chapters Four and Five.

<sup>33</sup> This refers to the press release on Martin McGuinness’ address to the international media, dated the 24<sup>th</sup> July 1996.

<sup>34</sup> This change of language was also something which Shirlow and McGovern (1997) noted in relation to *An Phoblacht/Republican News* and this is discussed in second part of this chapter.

<sup>35</sup> See also Shirlow and McGovern (1997).

these on air without fear of retaliation. Besides, this can also be seen as a generally effective way for the party to provide comments that journalists can include in their news stories, without having to interview party members. In fact, those press releases produced in 1990s even began to consist predominantly of quotes and party commentary in an attempt to ensure that party positions appeared in the news. This aspect of the press release was seen by Robert Montgomery as fulfilling one of the crucial roles of press releases, in other words, facilitating party commentary.<sup>36</sup> However, as Audrey MacGee from the *Times* has cautiously noted:

I think when it comes to Northern Ireland [ ] their (press release) language is much more careful [ ] their statements are much [ ] I wouldn't say clouded, but much more is needed when reading them because you are always looking for slants and messages, and you know, indications of the way things are going. Whereas if they just apply [ ] to the community level, say a drugs statement for example, they're much more black and white.<sup>37</sup>

### The Evolution of the Press Release

Overall, the analysis of these different elements suggests, in the first instance, that the development of the republican communicative apparatus, as discussed in Chapter Five, has resulted from a deliberate republican attempt to professionalise the production of its press releases, reflecting a more sophisticated and committed political party. These have become increasingly more sophisticated visible not only in terms of their visual appearance but also their content. Moreover, whilst this selection of press releases reflects the evolution of the party's approach to communication, it also echoes other changes which took place at the same time. As Curtis noted in 1984, the role of the press office in the 1970s consisted mainly of issuing information of IRA activities, or responding to actions of others.<sup>38</sup> In this sense, and as illustrated by the selection of early press releases, the issues covered reflected the politics of the time. On the other hand, the politicisation of the movement from the 1980s onwards, meant that the party was increasingly expanding its political remit, namely, becoming more concerned with other issues such as unemployment, education and health.

Ultimately, press releases have become an integral aspect of Sinn Féin's communication strategy, which, as press officer Donncha O'Hara explained, is still one of the main activities of the press office, alongside dealing with media queries.<sup>39</sup> For Sinn Féin, the issuing of press releases is seen as a stepping stone from which to access the news agenda and to put the party's view across. As one journalist argued, these consist of 'press statements of comments on events and reactions to comments or policy statements of others, all faxed, typewritten or telephoned to our offices'.<sup>40</sup> It is through such press releases that the party can first comment on events or

<sup>36</sup> Sinn Féin POW officer, in interview, 29<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

<sup>37</sup> In interview, 21<sup>st</sup> July 1998.

<sup>38</sup> This is clearly visible in the archive of press releases held by the Linenhall Library's Political Collection in Belfast.

<sup>39</sup> In interview, 27<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

<sup>40</sup> Confidential source from the *Irish Times*, in survey, 30<sup>th</sup> July 1997.

raise issues, and by following this initial release of information, more possibilities for Sinn Féin to communicate its messages emerge. As Martina Purdy from the *Belfast Telegraph* explained, ‘press releases are the means by which Sinn Féin can package their message. Their key concerns/agenda are always prominent in such releases’.<sup>41</sup>

### **Adapting and Reproducing Messages**

Though the republican use of press releases explores the basic opportunities that such a form of communication offers, there is, nevertheless, another side to this. During the analysis of the 37 press releases, two interesting and insightful aspects emerged. The first was the issuing of the same message in two press releases by two different press offices, and authored by two different republican politicians. The second instance refers to the issuing of the same release, but this time through two different platforms of communication.

#### **Messages North and South**

The first case concerns two press releases, one dated 5<sup>th</sup> April 1994, entitled ‘Hartley replies to Dr. Rodgers’, issued by the Belfast press office and the other, dated the 6<sup>th</sup> April 1994, headed ‘Comments by Sinn Féin General Secretary Lucilita Bhreatnach’, and issued by the Dublin office. The press release issued from Belfast is aimed at Northern-based journalists, whilst the one issued from Dublin is targeted at journalists from the Republic. Although issued on different days by different press offices and with different titles, these two press releases were nevertheless practically identical. The only instance where they differ is the minor exclusion of one sentence, as can be seen below:

Sinn Féin wants the same clarification, the same right to clarification as every other party. **We would expect that Dr. Rodgers would uphold our rights and those of our electorate.** The impasse around clarification has been created by the British government. Sinn Féin wants to move out of this stalemate and out of this very critical phase. This is why clarification is required.<sup>42</sup>

compared to:

Sinn Féin wants the same clarification and the same rights to clarification as every other party. The impasse around clarification has been created by the British government. Sinn Féin wants to move out of this stalemate and out of this very critical phase. This is why clarification is required.<sup>43</sup>

In an attempt to ensure that this particular message was picked up by the media, republicans released it on two consecutive days and from two offices. However, what is largely the same text and commentary is also allegedly being made by two different people. In the release from the Belfast office, the comments are attributed to Tom Hartley, a Northern politician, while in the Southern release they are accredited to Lucilita Bhreatnach, a politician from the Republic. This shows one instance where Sinn Féin press officers adapted what is more or less the same

<sup>41</sup> In survey, 1998.

<sup>42</sup> Emphasis added. Press release is entitled ‘Hartley replies to Dr. Rodgers’ and is dated the 5<sup>th</sup> April 1994.

<sup>43</sup> Press release is entitled ‘Comments by Sinn Féin Secretary General Lucilita Bhreatnach’ and is dated the 6<sup>th</sup> April 1994.

message to suit two different target audiences in an attempt to maximise its reach. This is achieved by issuing the releases on two different days, and by claiming that the statement included has been made by a politician from the same geographical area of the journalists that are being targeted. In other words, the message issued to the Northern press claims that the author of the statement is a Northern politician with whom journalists will be more familiar with, and vice-versa.

As the Dublin correspondent for the *Times*, Audrey MacGee, suggested, while different press offices might issue similar or identical press releases, journalists based in the republic receive primarily press statements from the Dublin office. Those based in the North receive their information from the Belfast office.<sup>44</sup> This means that journalists such as Audrey MacGee would most likely be unaware of this practice and the fact that the same message is accredited to different politicians. The use of this technique offers an insightful view into the use and production of press releases, and in particular into the process of maximising and targeting the republican message. Ultimately, it also informs on the professionalisation and expertise that is associated with this practice, showing the depth of republican understanding of the media and how this can be exploited by the party.

#### Fax versus Internet

The second instance that also illustrates the republican manipulation of the press release refers to two, supposedly identical press releases, one issued via the traditional fax method and the other posted on the Internet, on July 24<sup>th</sup> 1996. While both are entitled 'Martin McGuinness Speaks to International Media' and are very similar in terms of subject matter, they are significantly different in content and only the three introductory paragraphs are identical. The traditional release is also substantially longer than the one that was made available on the party's web site. The adaptation of the message in this case, reflects the characteristics of the medium used to transmit it, namely, that press releases placed on the WWW have to be considerably smaller in order to facilitate the reading, which has to be done on a computer screen.<sup>45</sup>

Secondly, the message was also adapted to suit the audiences targeted through the WWW, primarily an international audience, by giving different contact addresses in the two press releases. Whilst the traditional, faxed press releases included the address for Sinn Féin West Belfast office, the release on the web included the contact address for Sinn Féin in the USA. Clearly, this shows an awareness by Sinn Féin of both the need to maximise the reach of the

<sup>44</sup> In interview, 21<sup>st</sup> July 1998.

<sup>45</sup> See Chapter Seven for a discussion of republican use of the Internet.

same message and to adapt messages to suit the target audiences by adapting the contact address, which, as discussed, is an important republican communicative practice.

In both of these instances, the issuing of the same press release by two different offices, and by two different mediums and the necessary adaptation of the messages indicates a complex and professional approach to communicating politics, mirroring the already discussed, sophisticated apparatus. In effect, this analysis has shown not only that communication with the media is a crucial activity of the republican press office, but that it is mainly performed through the issuing of press releases. As Robert Montgomery explained, the press release has now become the main method of communicating with the media,<sup>46</sup> and has thus been improved and adapted vis-à-vis its target audience. However, while producing press releases might be ‘pretty straightforward’, the problem is that by and large these efforts are simply ignored by the media, ‘we put press release after press release, after press release all the time, and most of them aren’t picked up’.<sup>47</sup>

### ***Communicating With the Public and Republicans***

Almost every political party, group and association in Northern Ireland has, at some time committed itself to print. The physical form of their publications varies from sizeable pamphlets and weekly or monthly journals to posters, press statements and scruffy bits of paper handed out on street corners. (Howard, *Fortnight*, 11<sup>th</sup> January 1974:11)

Whilst press releases and press packs are used primarily as attempts to communicate to the news media, republican communication is also aimed at much wider audiences. As discussed in Chapter Five, these range from unionists as a target audience, to the British and Irish governments, and also include those which, in one way or another, support the republican movement. Alongside the use of press releases and press information packs as forms of communication, the use of print and other communication methods, in a variety of shapes and forms, is also an important facet of political communication (Trent and Friedenber, 1991). Whilst the news media are a crucial target audience for political communication, it is nevertheless dangerous to depend on them solely. This has been particularly evident in the case of Sinn Féin, whose media coverage was for many years, limited and biased, thereby tainting the party’s ability to communicate to other audiences. In fact, as Sinn Féin’s own long-standing rival, the SDLP has suggested ‘while the easiest and often the most productive way of gaining access to the local community is through the local newspaper, there are other means available to you (the publicist)’ (1985).<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Sinn Féin POW officer, in interview, 29<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

<sup>47</sup> Sinn Féin POW officer, in interview, 29<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

<sup>48</sup> There was no page number in the original document.



## Print Communication

In terms of the use of print in political communication, this is two-fold as it can act as a means of disseminating information to different publics and also be effective in reinforcing existent partisanship and support (Trent and Friedenbergh, 1991). A third role can be added to this, encompassing a useful source for journalists interested in more detailed and varied information, although the vast majority of them tend to refrain from using such material.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, one of the existent problems in the currently available research is that it has tended to focus on generic discussions of roles and functions of print material, such as Ward's *Getting the Message Across* (1992). More specific forms of print communication have largely been overlooked, with the exception of leaflets and pamphlets, which are used to reinforce messages and provide an overview of the main arguments. Although leaflets are an effective way of communicating information, they are nevertheless limited in similar ways to display advertising in the quantity of information they can convey. Sinn Féin, suggested that:

leaflets, especially if they are being distributed free to the public, ought to be direct, clear and straightforward. They have to be at least as interesting as the main headline on an evening newspaper, something to make a person stop and look, to make him curious, even make him laugh - they have to attract attention. (1974:29)

Whilst leaflets and pamphlets are used as part of republican communication efforts, in particular during election periods, there are a number of other print techniques which are used in more complex ways to communicate the republican message. Moreover, these have been largely overlooked in the existent research with the exception of a few studies, such as that by Picard (1991) and more recently Jarman (1997). The overall aim of these republican efforts, which became increasingly popular from the early 1980s onwards, was the production of information or policy documents that had the ability to serve a multipurpose role. Conveying either general information or providing a more comprehensive and extended opportunity to communicate republican policy, they were aimed at a variety of audiences, amongst which were the news media. Until the early 1990s, these documents were produced by different Sinn Féin departments, primarily with the aim of informing certain audiences on selected issues deemed to be of relevance to both party and audience. Thus, they have been one aspect of the party's much wider communicative efforts. Their use has ranged from the publicising of general party politics, such as documents on employment or the European Union, for instance *An End to Discrimination in Employment* (1987) or *Democracy or Dependence – the Case Against Maastricht* (1994), or more specific like election manifestos such as *A New Opportunity for Peace* (1997a).

As Gerry Adams highlighted in his 1995 book *Free Ireland*, the development of Sinn Féin as a

<sup>49</sup> This is mainly due to the growing pressures faced by journalists, who have to produce increasing amounts of news with limited resources and time. Nevertheless, reporters conducting in-depth investigative work might use these party publications.

politically active and politically-minded party has resulted in an increased production of party publications. These emerged as concerted attempts to communicate both to the party's own supporters and to the media, but were also seen as effective ways of highlighting and publicising party policy. Their growth reflected a new approach to print in republican communication, whereby it would convey Sinn Féin's message but also hold crucial educational functions vital to the transformation of the movement from its insular and marginalised position into a mainstream political party. Some of these documents are now placed on the party's WWW site in an attempt to expand their audience and maximise their reach,<sup>50</sup> a similar practice to that explored in the issuing of press releases. Ultimately, their sheer existence, quantity, diversity and quality, indicates the growing attention which has been placed on the production of these documents and the potential they offer in effectively communicating the republican message. It also indicates the growing development of Sinn Féin as a political party which has extended its remit to areas other than seeking an end to the British rule of Northern Ireland. In this way, the transformation of republican print publications indicates primarily the professionalisation and the sophistication of its communication apparatus as well as its move into mainstream politics.

### The Evolution of the Printed Message

For Sinn Féin to publicise the new role that it wanted to occupy in Northern Irish politics, it had to invest from a very early stage in different methods of publicity, including print. As Davis has argued:

the periodicals spawned by a terrorist struggle are [ ] a vital part of the action, not a mere accessory. They serve to mobilise and sensitise potential supporters to answer the charges of opponents, to glorify fallen heroes of the guerrilla struggle and to provide and advertise the political agenda of the guerrilla's open support groups. [ ] The periodicals have also to maintain and adapt the basic ideology of the armed struggle, while countering that of opponents, and answering their periodical's. Far from periodicals merely publicising terrorist actions, militant deeds often illustrate the essential message purveyed by revolutionary papers. (1994:49)

As suggested by Davis, any understanding of the republican use of print must necessarily take into account that these efforts embody, in the first instance, a direct form of communication with the movement's own supporters. What this means, and as Martin Fletcher from the *Times* pointed out, is that 'marginalised' organisations such as Sinn Féin simply did not trust the media to communicate to their own audiences.<sup>51</sup> Regardless of the party's efforts towards the media and their attempts from the early 1980s to develop more political activities, journalists' tendency to pursue an agenda of bias and discrimination did not change until the early 1990s. Moreover, despite the improvements in the press office and its ability to deal more efficiently with media queries, bias continued to shadow media coverage of republicans. This meant that in

<sup>50</sup> See Chapter Seven.

<sup>51</sup> In interview, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1998.

order to communicate its message to its own supporters, and to engage in what Curtis termed 'a battle for hearts and minds' (1984), the party had to explore alternative forms of communication.

Republican communications emerged as providing the only viable means by which the movement could communicate with its own supporters whilst still retaining control over the message. Thus, a concerted approach to republican communication evolved in the 1980s, as well as an attempt to retain the support of its own communities and expand this further if possible. With the exception of *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, the practice of republican communications has primarily embodied, a response to media bias and to the British governments' successive attempts to eradicate Sinn Féin from the public sphere. In this sense, the development of republican print publications, which mushroomed in 1980s, also points towards the assignation of a more important role and status to communication, and the realisation that to succeed politically and socially print is vital (Adams, 1986). One such example to emerge was *Iris*, which started in the late 1970s and was described as 'the most sophisticated of the Irish propagandist magazines' (Bell, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1985 in Davis, 1994:52). The following decade saw the appearance of others, including *Ireland International News Briefing*, *A Women's Voice*, *Coolock News* and *The Captive Voice*. Of the publications selected for this examination,<sup>52</sup> four emerged in the early 1990s, these are: *Sinn Féin West Belfast Bulletin*; *Irish Political Prisoners Information File*; *Ireland Information Fact File* and *The Irish Worker*. As the titles suggest, these publications covered a range of topics and were aimed at different audiences.

Underlying the aims of such a diversity of newsletters and magazines is the communication of the republican message to its supporters. The development of these different forms of communication was seen as providing the republican movement with the opportunity to by pass the main information gatekeepers and gain direct control over messages within their own republican public sphere. This domain encompassed different republican communities and organisations, within which Sinn Féin and the IRA functioned. They also granted an opportunity for the repetition of republican messages across a variety of party publications, including *Sinn Féin West Belfast Bulletin*, and *Iris*. Rather than depending on information from the mainstream media, it was instead fuelled by the movement's own knowledge and hence generated and circulated within the sphere itself. Thus, it was largely through the production of communicative efforts and messages aimed at their own communities that support for the republican cause was sought and sustained.

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<sup>52</sup> See Table 6 in p.284.

## Adapting the Message

From the analysis of the selection of publications, and the development of the party's communicative strategies and apparatus, it is possible to say that republican publications have been a composite of different communicative efforts emerging at different periods. Although the use of print 'exploded' in the 1980s, each publication held different aims and was targeted at different audiences within the category of supporters. It is the result of these two aspects, the aim and the audience, which determined their content in conjunction with party policy. For example, whilst the content of some publications was dictated primarily by the issue upon which it focused, the subject matter of others was dictated by the audience at which they were aimed. So while the *Irish Political Information File* and *The Captive Voice* focused on the plight of the republican prisoners of war, the difference between them was the audience for whom they were written and the function they held, whereby the former was aimed at an international audience with the objective of raising their awareness of the situation of the POW's, while the latter targeted republican grassroots. As expressed in the editorial of *The Captive Voice*, the magazine:

affords us (the POWs) a platform and a opportunity to present in the print our views on those topics and issues which affect daily life both inside and outside of the jails. The magazine contains political analyses of current national and international affairs, culture, short-stories, poetry and the latest up-dates on prison related campaigns and issues. Satire and humour can also be found within the special features, cartoons and artwork illustrations. (Sinn Féin, 1996:ii)

On the other hand, publications such as *A Women's Voice* and *Coolock News* had their content determined by their specific target audience. This means that republican print publications have been aimed at particular audiences to explore problems relevant to them or from a pertinent standpoint. Alternatively, they have highlighted certain issues to which the movement wants to draw attention. So, for example, publications such as *Ireland Information Fact File* and *Ireland International News Briefing* had their content determined by the fact that they were published by the Foreign Affairs Bureau and were aimed at an international audience, as seen in their focus on exploring the role of Sinn Féin in Northern Irish politics and in their highlighting the 'wrong-doings' of the British government. Their aim was to appeal for the help of the powerful Irish-American community by emphasising how these readers could contribute to the republican struggle. Alternatively, a publication such as the *Sinn Féin West Belfast Bulletin* had its content determined both by the audience it was trying to reach - those residing in West Belfast - and by the issues in which they would be interested. At the same time, it was also apparent that some of the publications that concentrated on a geographically dictated topic, like *Coolock News* or the *West Belfast Bulletin*, appealed to other audiences such as those residing in the area covered by the publication, but which did not necessarily support Sinn Féin, for example, the wider nationalist community.

Moreover, one of the main characteristics of the republican communication efforts is also seen in their production of print publications. This is not just the adaptation of the message to the target audience, but also an understanding of the target audience itself. Aware that an international audience might have a limited knowledge of the Troubles and its participants, the *Ireland Information Fact File* and the *Ireland International News Briefing* also included a glossary for abbreviations specifically for the IRA. This points towards the same understanding identified in the case of press releases: that republican messages need to be repeated to as wide an audience as possible whilst simultaneously being adapted to suit each of these.

Another instance where this adaptation of the message is seen alongside a continued emphasis placed on republican ideology is in the case of *A Women's Voice*. Although there is a considerable quantity of information in this publication, which reflects such perceived interests of its female audience as issues of child care, there is nevertheless still a substantial representation of wider republican concerns. Therefore, while issues similar to those in other publications are raised, for instance the role of Sinn Féin in Irish politics, this is expressed from a women's point of view and examines the effects from this perspective. Also, while *The Irish Worker*, produced by the Trade Union Department, focuses on examining issues and party policies which are of concern to workers, *A Women's Voice*, on the other hand, examines republican policies on domestic violence and divorce, amongst others.

What these publications show in terms of Sinn Féin's communication efforts in the area of print publications is the influence of a combination of different factors, and in particular the audience and the aim of the message. More crucially, they also indicate the diversity of republican messages and communicative efforts in the area of print and how this has been shaped by the party's own changed stance. Thus, the dedication of a single publication to different target audiences, such as workers or women, reflects the development of Sinn Féin's political role during the 1980s. It also indicates its consolidation of interests in areas of policy other than ending the division of Ireland. The decentralisation of communicative functions is further reinforced by the fact that this selection of publications was produced by at least seven different departments ranging from the Republican Publications Department to the POW Department, the Women's Department and the Trade Union Department, amongst others. Ultimately, this reflects the party's attempt to assert itself as a serious political actor whose concerns have shifted from the narrow military approach of the 1970s to one increasingly concerned with political action.

### Operating Within Constraints

However, efforts to develop alternative forms of communication to mainstream media, or to

explore the potential that they offer have not been without complications. One problem that republicans have systematically encountered, has been in their production and distribution. In terms of their production, the lack of organisational and financial resources in the 1980s and to some extent 1990s, the disruption caused by successive British raids on republican premises and the general harassment of republicans made it a difficult task. Obviously, this had a number of implications. For example, as part of this research I subscribed to *The Captive Voice* for one year in 1997 but I did not receive a single issue. With the exception of *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, the compilation and delivery of these publications was very unreliable. For instance, although *Iris* was, in theory, a biannual publication, there were at least two instances when issues were not produced on time, if at all. In fact, only two issues were produced over a period of more than three years, between July 1985 and November 1988, and none between August 1989 and August 1990.

Problems in the production of *The Captive Voice*, have been particularly noticeable. As it was produced solely by republican Prisoners of War, as Robert Montgomery explained, depending on the situation in the prisons, there would be delays in its production. In relation to the failure of my subscription Montgomery also clarified, that following the discovery of the republican escape tunnel from Long Kesh in the Spring of 1997, republican POW's were prevented from using the computing equipment on which they wrote *The Captive Voice*.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, Rita O'Hare also highlighted the difficulties the party faced in getting these publications out to the public (in *Troops Out*, 1991). She stressed that although *Iris*, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* and *The Captive Voice* could be purchased from newsagents, most were simply unwilling to sell these publications for fear of loyalist retaliation. Furthermore, the distribution of these publications by paperboys was also a dangerous endeavour. Even so, despite all the complications that were faced in producing and distributing such publications, there was also a noticeable evolution in terms of the quality of their production. Thus, the improved facilities available to Sinn Féin and the added experience that party workers gained over time meant that the publications, in particular *The Captive Voice*, changed significantly over the years, witnessed in an improved quality of production, print and an expanded use of colour.

### The Contemporary Use of Print

However, the majority of these publications have now disappeared or have changed dramatically, such as the *Sinn Féin West Belfast Bulletin*, which has become a fortnightly publication. In fact, most of the publications discussed here ended in the early 1990s as a result of the changed political situation in Northern Ireland, a different positioning of Sinn Féin and a

<sup>53</sup> Sinn Féin POW officer, in interview, 29<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

re-appraisal of the party's communicative efforts. As Mark Leron, one of Sinn Féin's press officers explained, what used to be an extensive and diverse use of print communication has now become a more structured, professional, improved and specific use of this technique<sup>54</sup>. Thus, most of the republican use of print to communicate with its own supporters has now ended, and with it a substantial body of its print publications. The reasons for this are three-fold. On the one hand, the party no longer feels the need to communicate to so many different audiences and in particular to the different segments of the republican audience by using different publications. It also considers that the situation in Northern Ireland has changed so dramatically since the early to mid-1990s that Sinn Féin is now part of mainstream society and politics and the pertinent issues have also changed. Its changed position in society has also resulted in modifications of journalistic attitudes to the party, moving away from the traditional, biased approach.<sup>55</sup>

The result, according to Mark Leron, is that Sinn Féin no longer has to act as a proactive communicative force, that has to raise, through print, the issues with which it is concerned. Instead, these issues have now become part of the public debate and are thus covered by the media.<sup>56</sup> Other issues, such as those upon which *The Captive Voice* focused, have more recently simply disappeared with the release of the POWs as part of the Good Friday Agreement. Instead, Sinn Féin has opted to emphasise the use of print communication as a more reactive form of communication. Thirdly, the party also believes that more benefits can be extracted by using print for the production of one-off, yet superior quality policy documents. Examples of those named by Mark Leron concern demilitarisation of Northern Ireland; *Women in Ireland*; *Peace in Ireland*, or *Local Power*, amongst so many others, all of which were produced in the mid or late 1990s.

Moreover, there is also a sense that the use of print communication to reach the movement's own supporters is no longer necessary since Sinn Féin has moved into mainstream politics. Thus, at present the party no longer has to place much emphasis in exploring alternative forms of communication and can instead focus upon using existent mainstream media to communicate the republican message.<sup>57</sup> This shows that the evolution of republican communication practices noted in relation to the issuing of press releases and the increased reliance on international news agencies has also extended itself to print communication aimed at its own supporters. Furthermore, the use of the WWW by the party provides a viable alternative for the party to pursue its communicative efforts. For instance, what used to be a print format of the *Irish Political*

<sup>54</sup> In interview, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2000.

<sup>55</sup> Mark Leron, Sinn Féin press officer, in interview, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2000.

<sup>56</sup> Sinn Féin press officer, in interview, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2000.

<sup>57</sup> Sinn Féin press officer, in interview, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2000.

*Prisoners Information File* was integrated into the party's web site between 1993 and 1994 before finally disappearing in the mid-1990s. However, more recently the party has launched a free quarterly publication entitled *Dublin News* that will be distributed to 100,000 households in Dublin. This new initiative has been described by Gerry Adams as marking 'an important stage in the development of Sinn Féin. The paper is indicative of the strong network of local activists that we have in communities throughout this city' (Maguire, *AP/RN*, 17<sup>th</sup> December 1998).

### **An Phoblacht/Republican News**

Equally important in the re-evaluation of the party's communicative efforts is the role that has been awarded to what has now become one of the only survivors of the latest reconstruction of republican communication, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*. Since its inception in 1970, it has been commonly perceived as the official printed voice of the Irish republicanism. Unlike other publications and communicative efforts, its history and development is well known.<sup>58</sup> Initially, the newspaper was composed of two separate publications that on the 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1979 were merged to form a single edition. Having evolved from the 1969/1970 split in the republican movement, from which Sinn Féin was created, *An Phoblacht* was published for the first time on the 31<sup>st</sup> January 1970, and *Republican News*, in June of the same year. From a very early stage these two separate newspapers were seen as catering for different audiences; *Republican News* was published in Belfast and catered for Northern republicans, while *An Phoblacht*, based in Dublin, was aimed at a Southern audience and was considered the official paper for the movement (Curtis, 1984).

*Republican News* also played a more crucial role in the development of Sinn Féin and in its first editorial, Jimmy Steele, who had also opened the first republican press centre in Belfast, wrote:

we shall preach the Gospel of Tone in seeking to unite all our people, Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter in the common cause of our Nation's unity and independence. We shall condemn and denounce from whatever quarter it may seek to raise its ugly head, the monster of religious bigotry and intolerance. The socialism of James Connolly, the idealism of Patrick Pearse and the unrepentant Republicanism of Tom Clarke, we shall try to inculcate into our people – pointing out to them the rugged freedom road which they travelled in that service. (*Republican News* vol.1 (1) in Curtis, 1984:264)

As can be seen here, the aim of the Northern-based paper was to pursue the republican ideals of a united Ireland, and the role of republicanism in this struggle. In attempting to indoctrinate the ideas of the so-called founding fathers of republicanism, it reinforced what was at the time the rather insular position of the movement.

However, both papers had a troubled development, more so *Republican News*, which was

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<sup>58</sup> See Curtis (1984).



frequently raided by the British authorities and saw its material confiscated or destroyed on a number of occasions.<sup>59</sup> Still the changes that were taking place within the party from the late 1970s onwards meant that they would also affect their production. Curtis has suggested that *Republican News* found itself at the centre of the polarisation that was emerging within the party in terms of future strategic developments. Indeed ‘on one occasion [ ] a whole edition of the paper was burned on IRA orders’ (1984:266). Furthermore, the same group of Northerners that had been released from internment and who had begun to question the validity of a purely military strategy, started to infiltrated themselves in positions of power.

Following his release from internment in 1974, Danny Morrison took over as editor of *Republican News* and began to implement changes in the paper to reflect the transformations which were taking place at the political level (Morrison, 1985). The result was an increasing competition with its fellow, Southern-based rival - *An Phoblacht*. As Curtis explains, ‘the latter was far less militant, and the existence of the two papers emphasised the division between the Northern radicals and the more conservative Southerners’ (1984:267). Unable to sustain and justify the competition between both papers and recognising the crucial role that *Republican News* had played since the release of Danny Morrison, ‘*Republican News* swallowed up *An Phoblacht*’ on the 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1979 (Curtis, 1984:267). This created a single republican newspaper with the name of *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, which could be more easily controlled and would be seen as the unified voice of Irish republicanism.

As Danny Morrison clarifies, ‘since then it has gone through major changes, changing from a paper that merely reported the news from a republican point of view to one which developed analysis and arguments, reflecting political changes inside the movement itself’ (1985:85). In fact, it is this second idea that exemplifies the way in which party communication efforts have evolved over the years in tandem with party strategy. For example, Picard (1991) showed in his analysis of *An Phoblacht/Republican News* up to 1990 that the publication consisted primarily of stories which were somehow related to the military activities of the IRA, the British forces or of others. He stated that one third of the publications’ content focused on providing political justifications for IRA activities, while justifications for the activities of the other forces present in the Province amounted to 25% of its subject matter (1991). However, Picard’s findings must be understood in relation to the strategy of the republican movement at the time. Thus, this reflects a period when military activities by the British forces, the RUC, loyalist or republicans were at a high and are thus mirrored in the coverage.

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<sup>59</sup> See Curtis (1984).

## A Modern Voice of Republicanism

Since the begin of the 1990s, the paper has become increasingly more attuned to republican efforts to develop a peace strategy and to embark on the peace process. The adaptation of the newspaper to the changed party strategy shows not only that the party politics have changed, but also that the content and tone of the republican messages have evolved accordingly. As Adams states, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* is now:

a centralised expression and platform of republican politics. [ ] If one looks at past issues of either of the two papers before the merger and seeks to analyse them as representing the politics of the movement, one may very well come to inadequate conclusions. At times, especially when many Republicans were underground and unconcerned or unable to influence the content or the presentation of our newspapers, they were really a reflection of the particular politics and emphasis of the few people who worked very hard to produce them. Since the merger and our re-orientation this has changed and An Phoblacht has gone from strength to strength, praised even by our critics as the best political newspaper in Ireland today. (1995:167)

Shirlow and McGovern (1997) have also suggested that for the party to be able to pursue with confidence and coherency its more peaceful and constitutional stance, emphasising the need to negotiate and compromise and find an all-inclusive solution, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* had to rethink its language. Just like republican messages in general, it now uses less confrontational forms of expression and instead places the onus on Sinn Féin's political role and the challenges which Northern Ireland still faces, such as unemployment, health and women's rights. They also stress that it has developed to the extent that it now has news on or of interest to unionist communities, in particular where similar situations or experiences are shared with republican communities.<sup>60</sup>

These attempts to include matters relevant to unionists reflect not so much efforts to attract this section of the people, but indicate a growing concern for unionist predicaments. As Gerry Adams has stated so many times, 'we in Sinn Féin have a duty to develop our contacts with the unionist community' (16<sup>th</sup> - 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1994 in 1997:48). This means that concerns to both communities such as on unemployment or transport are increasingly explored and parallels drawn. More recently, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* has launched a campaign for the closure of the Sellafield nuclear installation in Scotland, an issue which is of interest to both nationalist and unionist communities. Additionally, changes have also been witnessed at other levels, as Shirlow and McGovern comment that 'in order to advance the non-violent strategy *An Phoblacht* [ ] has deployed less offensive terms towards non-republican communities' and less negative terms are used towards the British forces and the RUC (1997:183).

Currently, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* is seen by journalists as the platform used to address

<sup>60</sup> See also Pettit (1998).

its own supporters but which also attempts to reach non-supporters.<sup>61</sup> Although some recognise it as 'skilful propaganda'<sup>62</sup>, others fail to see that it has moved with time. Instead, they accuse it of still looking 'back to the past'<sup>63</sup> and that it 'tends to be aggressively propagandistic rather than reflective in its content and there is much more news than analysis of Sinn Féin activities'.<sup>64</sup> Nonetheless, it is important to recognise that, as Mark Leron from Sinn Féin, pointed out, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* has become the most crucial component of the party's print communication practices.<sup>65</sup> At the same time, it is also the most important and repeated public effort of communication in which the party engages. Thus, it is in *An Phoblacht/Republican News* that considerable focus and resources have been channelled. At the level of production, this has been mirrored in an enhanced quality of output and a commitment to improve this even further. In addition, since 1994, it is available free of charge on the World Wide Web, thereby potentially reaching millions of people.

### Other Forms of Communication

Whilst there has clearly been a radical transformation of the party's overall communication apparatus and strategy visible in its use of print, the same cannot be said of some other forms of communication. Just like the use of print communication, other methods of communicating to their supporters and the public have been used since the early 1980s. The only difference is that these alternative forms, unlike print, have become progressively more popular. This has been particularly evident since the start of the peace process, when, according to Mark Leron, there was an upsurge of interest in republican promotional items.<sup>66</sup>

In terms of the range of material that these alternative forms of communication encompass, the party's 1990 *Catalogue of Republican Publications* advertised T-shirts, metal badges, videos and posters. In addition, any visit to a Republican Bookshop will give an idea of the range and the extent of alternative republican communication practices. Similar to the use of print in communicating with republican supporters, these alternative methods also assign control over the message to Sinn Féin. Moreover, they are an effective means for the party to communicate to its audiences without having to rely on mainstream media, which, in the 1970s and 1980s was an important republican concern. While in many cases these communicative efforts were aimed first and foremost at already existent republican supporters, more recently, with the start of the peace process, they have reached more widespread audiences.

<sup>61</sup> Sarah Smith, from *Channel 5 News*, in survey, 1998.

<sup>62</sup> Martina Purdy, from the *Belfast Telegraph*, in survey 1998.

<sup>63</sup> Unknown journalistic source, in survey, 1998.

<sup>64</sup> Deáglan de Bréadún, from the *Irish Times*, in survey, 13<sup>th</sup> March 1998.

<sup>65</sup> Sinn Féin press officer, in interview, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2000.

<sup>66</sup> Sinn Féin press officer, in interview, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2000.

Although some alternative forms of communication have become an increasingly important facet of the republican communication apparatus and strategy, the radical transformation of the republican communicative machine in the 1980s and 1990s has also had an impact upon some of these. This has been particularly perceptible in terms of their quality of production, but also in the messages conveyed. While both these transformations reflect the evolution of the party and its communicative apparatus, they also mirror the changed politics of Sinn Féin and its stance in Northern Irish politics. Nevertheless, there is still an important body of communicative practices that remains rooted in the republican movement of the 1970s and 1980s.

### Painting the Message

One such alternative form of communication, which has been examined elsewhere<sup>67</sup> has been the use of murals. As Rolston (1988) suggests, these began to be used in 1981, yet in comparison to other forms of communication used in the early 1980s, murals offered what was seen as an opportunity to further extend the republican message. Thus, they emerged and remained as a more popular, informal and relatively inexpensive form of communication. Behind these communicative efforts were small groups of young unemployed Irish republicans who participated in the struggle by making their message as notorious as possible within their communities. Hence, 'the emergence of the murals specifically derived from the wave of popular support for the republican hunger strikes. Youth groups, turned from scrawling graffiti on walls to painting more elaborate murals' (Rolston, 1988:9).

Despite the precarious and disorganised conditions in which many of these were painted, there were at least 150 murals in nationalist areas of Northern Ireland already by 1981 (Rolston, 1988). Their function was to sustain and reinforce community support for the republican movement, but also to act as a daily reminder of the ongoing struggle, its sacrifices, heroes and villains. As Rolston put it 'as conscious political expressions, wall murals in Northern Ireland derive from, and exist in order to strengthen, the identity and solidarity of local areas. They are directed in the first instance – and sometimes in the only instance at a local audience (1988:7).

As a form of republican communication, mural paintings emerged at a time when popular support for the Hunger Strikes of the early 1980s and the republican movement was at a record high and thus embodied this euphoric support for the republican cause. Despite the movement's inability to sustain support for the Hunger Strikes or for the Armed Struggle murals continued to remain an important form of popular communication.

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<sup>67</sup> See Rolston (1988) and (1992) or Jarman (1997).

Whilst the production of murals was a hazardous task, with vast numbers of these being destroyed by paint bombs, or their painters harassed by the RUC or the British Army, they nevertheless provided an important arena from which to publicise the republican message. Mural paintings also had a number of advantages over other forms of communication, namely print. Of particular importance was that they allowed the movement to bypass the continued problems which it faced in the production and distribution of print material, as already discussed, while still providing control over the message. The nature of mural painting also meant that fewer resources were needed than for print.

From the 1980s onwards, mural paintings have continued to be used as part of the movement's communicative efforts, and has formed a significant part of its electoral strategy (Rolston, 1988). Although such efforts have been limited in their reach, murals have been an effective and popular method of communication that has primarily concentrated on capturing the attention of republican grassroots. As has been argued, mural paintings also 'permit more elaborate ideas to be expressed: ideas that increasingly challenge or refocus the traditional values of the community, which are displayed on the banners and represent them as reduced by the experiences of the Troubles' (Jarman, 1997:210).

The use of murals also reveals a different aspect to the party's communicative apparatus, namely a more populist and less concerted effort. At the same time their use also highlights the already discussed, repeated adaptation of the republican message. Even if mural painting has embodied a popular form of communication in the first instance, it has gradually been integrated into the wider communication and publicity apparatus and strategy of the republican movement and of Sinn Féin (Rolston, 1988). Thus, having emerged at the margins of the party, it is now a vital component of the republican media machine without necessarily being identified as such. Additionally, it has also evolved in terms of messages, like other forms of communication already discussed here, accompanying and reflecting the developments within the party, and while their initial focus was in the prison struggles, mural paintings have been used to address a range of political issues, and more recently many have focused on subjects that appear to have little to do with the generally accepted demands of the IRA. (Jarman, 1997:234)

As Jarman suggests, there has been a clear evolution in the content message of the mural paintings, from placing their spotlight on the armed struggle throughout most of the 1980s, they have now become more attuned to the political developments in Northern Ireland, and focused upon the peace process. At the same time, they are also continuing to be included as part of the celebration of Irish culture and identity, and 'the old militaristic language of national liberation struggle has been replaced by a broader celebration of a total culture of resistance' (Jarman, 1997:447). This in itself illustrates how the party's communicative apparatus, strategies and

messages have evolved over time and how alternative forms of communication also play an important role in reproducing republicanism. As Lena Ferguson, from *Channel 4 News* suggests:

the most interesting and different aspect of their (republican) approach (to communication) is the use of murals and graffiti – its remarkable how often a painting appears within days of an announcement that completely illustrates their philosophy or viewpoint.<sup>68</sup>

In fact this type of communicative effort, which, according to Rolston, 'represent(s) a political message larger than life written on local walls for all to see and comprehend' (1988:12), has become a central aspect of the political process. Unlike the use of print publications, it has continued to grow and become more popular, just as other alternative forms of republican communication. However, one question which for the time being remains unanswered is whether, as a vehicle to communicate republicanism to its grassroots, it will also eventually disappear, like most of Sinn Féin's print publications aimed at its own supporters.

### Filming the Message

One alternative form of communication that has survived the latest radicalisation of republican communicative practices is video. Advertised in the 1990 republican publications catalogue, the use of video by republicans also dates back to the early 1980s. Its use originated from party communicative efforts to explore alternative forms of communication that could be used in the propagation of the republican message. While it offers a means to further publicise republicanism it has also served other roles than simply communicate with the movements' grassroots. Its use has been focused on two main aspects: an educational and a publicity role, although the former has dominated. As Roberts noted in 1988, the Education Department frequently employed video in the early 1980s. Indeed, Gerry Adams has repeated on a number of occasions (1986 and 1995) that the republican movement was primarily working class and ill-prepared. Without an improvement in the structure and the preparation of its staff, the potential of the movement was limited. Thus 'videos have become one of the means by which a predominantly working-class organisation can develop its political skills' (Roberts, 1988:95).

As noted in a Sinn Féin document entitled *Notes on Using Videos*:

the main point we feel is that videos provide an easy and useful way to hold educationals at cummann<sup>69</sup> level which everyone could gain from. And that videos should also be thought of as something individual members can borrow, watch in their own time, or watch with friends, and thus disseminate the nature of our struggle and of Sinn Féin. (in Roberts, 1988:95)

The use of video as an educational tool was also identified by Roberts as providing an opportunity for Sinn Féin politicians and press officers to develop and improve their media and

<sup>68</sup> In survey, 28<sup>th</sup> April 1998.

<sup>69</sup> Refers to a local group.

interviewing skills. As Donncha O'Hara explained, video is employed in current media training of Sinn Féin officers and politicians.<sup>70</sup> In adopting this form of communication, the party aimed to improve its organisation and establish the necessary conditions through which knowledge and skills can be developed and exchanged within the organisation.

While the use of this technique was seen as an effective tool to educate the party, it was also regarded as providing a further alternative form of communication with which to bypass the traditional message. This was particularly important in the late 1980s and early 1990s as it provided Sinn Féin an opportunity to circumvent the restrictions which were imposed by the Broadcasting Ban. However, such attempts to side-step the effects of the Broadcasting Ban were limited because 'despite the development of production techniques within the organisation and the building up of video libraries, the audience for such work remains on the whole the membership itself and its supporters' (Roberts, 1988:95). Nevertheless, as Roberts stressed, the introduction of video in the 1980s also represented the shift in the republican perception of the importance of communicating politics, which has been repeatedly stressed in this thesis. In particular, this development of its communicative practice has been described by Danny Morrison as a transformation from a movement based on the selling of newspapers and raising money on the street and in the home, to an 'open political organisation' (in Roberts, 1988). Furthermore:

Sinn Féin's use of low-level technology has a progressive role to play in both establishing self-identity and disseminating information efficiently and providing the necessary conditions whereby members and supporters can raise political consciousness in pedagogic exchange. (Roberts, 1988:94)

More recently, as part of the republican communication strategy, video has continued to be used for educational and publicity functions. Thus, it is still an integral part of the party's own educational programme, especially in relation to the development and improvement of its politician's media skills and in communicating with its grassroots. Increasingly, video is now used to communicate at republican meetings throughout Northern Ireland. Since the start of the peace process, the use of this form of communication has been extended even further to focus on the publicity this technique is able to generate. It was during the 1997 General Election campaign that Sinn Féin produced a party political broadcast for the first time and, as Mark Davenport explained, 'their party political broadcast video was extremely effective in presenting the party as the defender of young nationalists against the Orange Order, the RUC and the Army'.<sup>71</sup> Martina Purdy from the *Belfast Telegraph* commented that 'they used a hard hitting political broadcast focusing on Drumcree – the only issue that hits a raw nerve with “moderate”

<sup>70</sup> Sinn Féin press officer, in interview 27<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

<sup>71</sup> From the *BBC*, in survey, 29<sup>th</sup> September 1997.

nationalists. The video was so controversial it went to court over an edit. What publicity!'.<sup>72</sup>

Video is also employed to convey Sinn Féin's message to official organisations such as the International Body on Decommissioning. In a meeting with this body in December 1995, the party submitted a document entitled *Building a Permanent Peace in Ireland* (1996a), along with accompanying videos (Adams, 1997). Additionally, video is also a regular feature on the party's WWW site, in particular during their *Árd Fheis*, and is used to relay what are seen by the party as important events, such as speeches by prominent speakers like Gerry Adams. However, the use of this form of communication has been mainly constrained by the fact that it requires extensive and expensive resources, unlike many other practices of communication and therefore as a form of communication it does not provide a very clear illustration of the evolution of Sinn Féin's communicative efforts, although it does highlight the professionalisation of its apparatus.

#### Other Avenues to Publicise the Sinn Féin

Illustrating this are bumper stickers, which are an important and vibrant aspect of the party's communicative efforts and through which the evolution of messages is visible. In analysing the selection of eight bumper stickers, which were purchased at the Falls republican bookshop, the differences between these were most noticeable in terms of the messages conveyed. It is in their visual aspect that immediate distinctions are noted. In this specific case of promotional items, what was particularly clear was the evolution from those produced in the 1980s to those in the 1990s. The 1980s group of stickers (Figure 4; Figure 5; Figure 6 and Figure 7, p.141), still focuses on the use of the tri-colour Irish flag, embodying a unified Ireland. In stark contrast the group of stickers produced in the early, mid-1990s (Figure 8; Figure 9; Figure 10 and Figure 11, p.142), do not use the tri-colour and instead appear as more visually neutral messages, not emphasising the republican slant as in the previous group.

In terms of their content, the first group reflects the politics of the republican movement at that time, by drawing associations with the IRA and the creation of a united Ireland. On the other hand, the second group, mirrors a new republican rhetoric and politics which have moved away from the immediate re-unification of Ireland. Instead, it concentrates on the peace process and the need for talks to find a solution to the conflict. This group also reflects a more pluralist republican stance that is interested in a broader range of issues, such as the re-routing of orange marches and exploring the equality and peace agendas.

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<sup>72</sup> In survey, 1998.



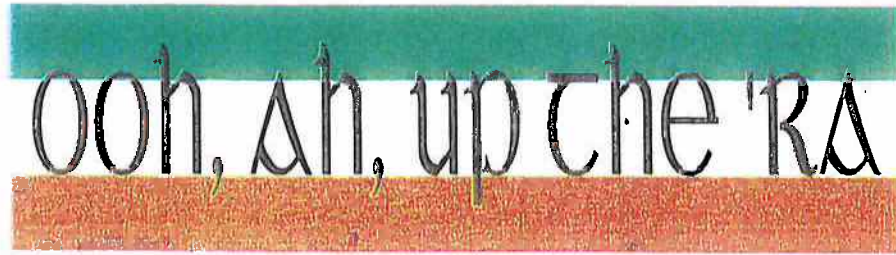


Figure 4: 'ooh, Ah, Up the Ra' (bumper sticker)



Figure 5: 'Saoirse' (bumper sticker)



Figure 6: 'Ireland 32' (bumper sticker)



Figure 7: 'Ireland United Gaelic and Free!' (bumper sticker)



Figure 8: 'I'm for Talks' (bumper sticker)



Figure 9: 'Re-route Marches (bumper sticker)



Figure 10: 'Ban Plastic Bullets' (bumper sticker)



Figure 11: 'Disband the RUC' (bumper sticker)

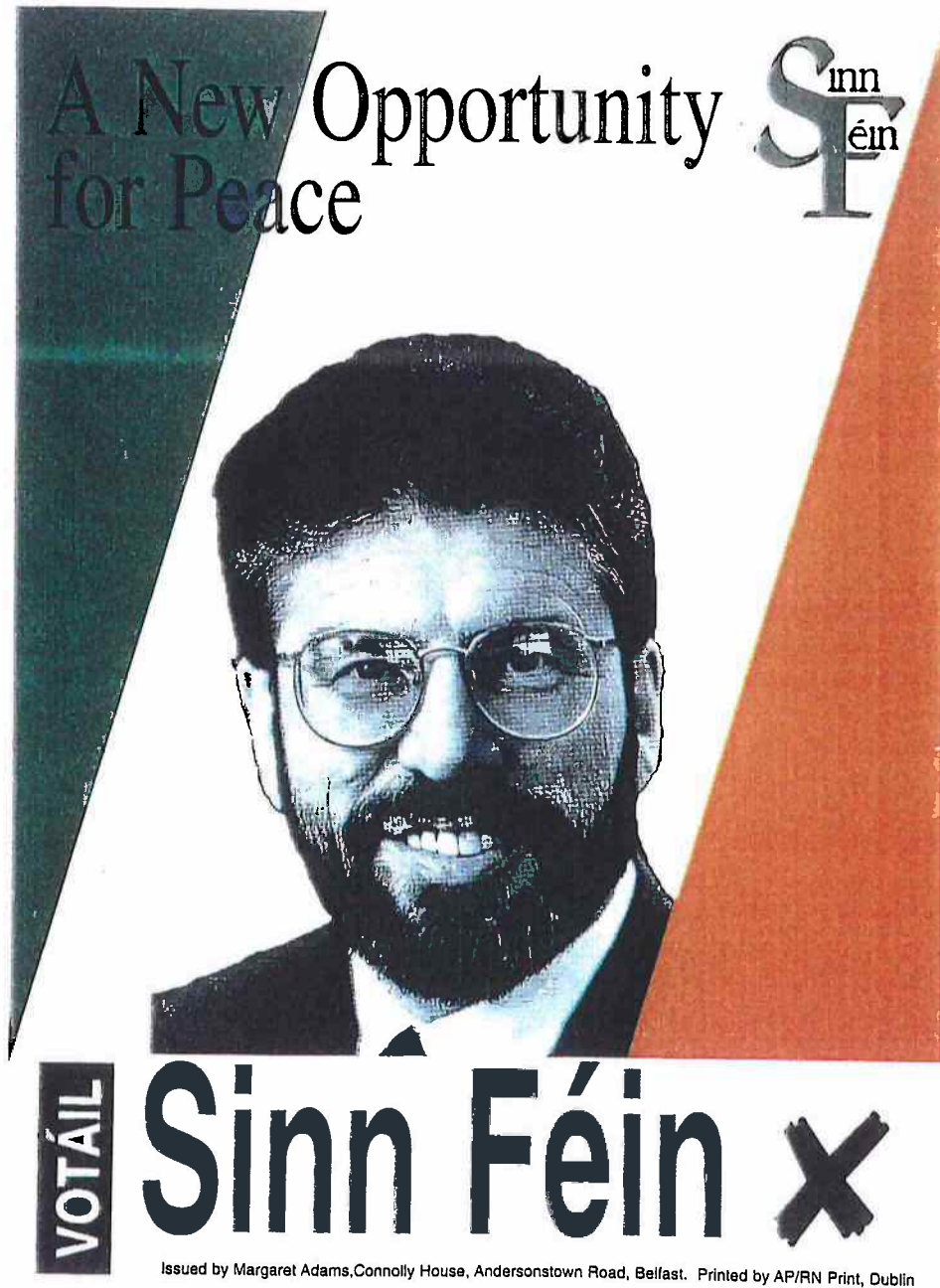


Figure 12: 'A New Opportunity for Peace' (poster)



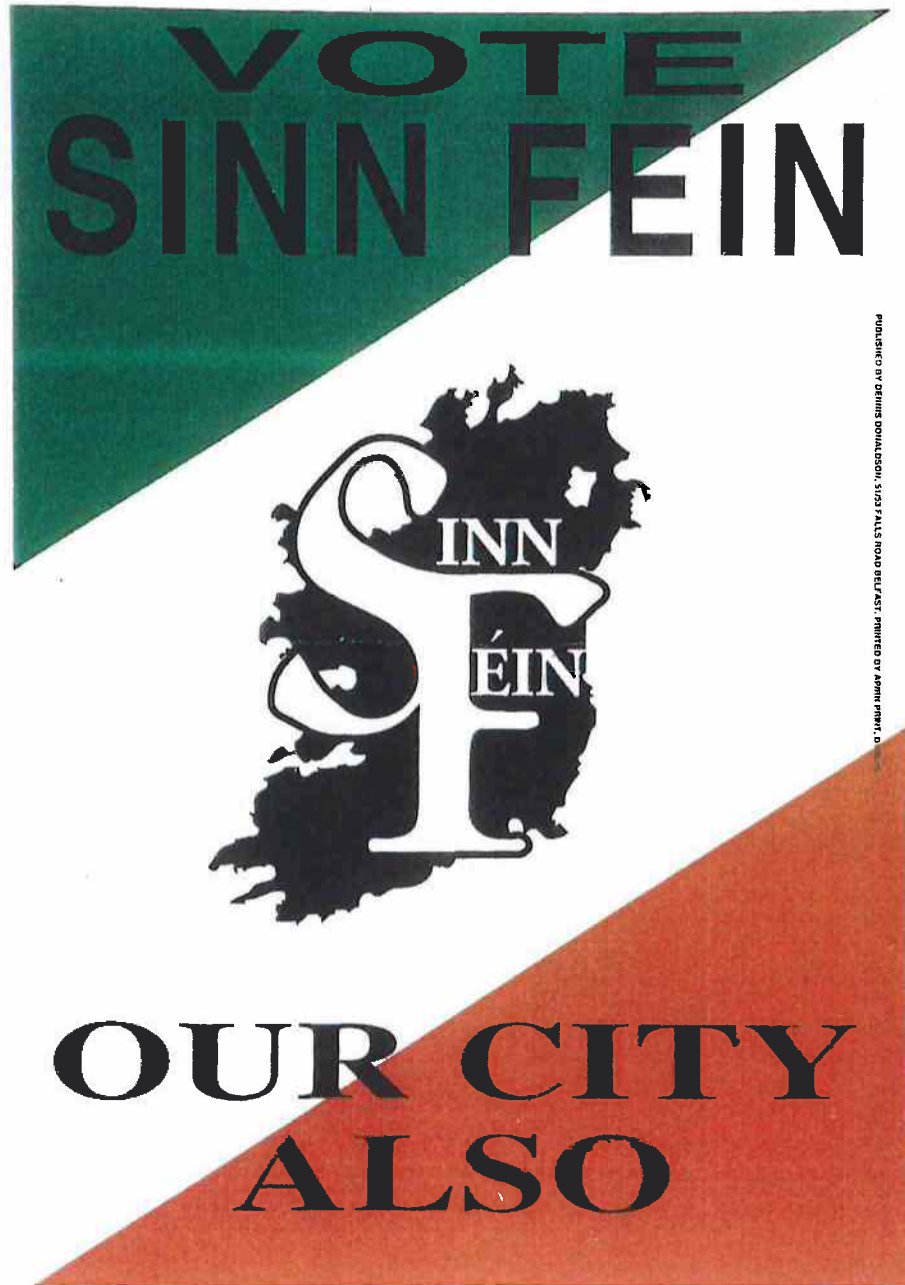


Figure 13: 'Our City Also' (poster)

As can be briefly seen in these examples, not only has the republican message changed, but also the way in which the message is conveyed appears to be more in neutral manner. The removal of the Irish tri-colour, and the exploration of topics relevant to communities other than just republicans, such as the banning of plastic bullets, also reflects the party's move into mainstream politics and its attempt to contact a broader audience. Thus, while the use of this communicative technique has centred in communicating with republican grassroots, more recently it is also seen as a way to communicate with other more distant audiences. Amongst these is the wider nationalist community, which Sinn Féin wants to reach in its bid to forge a strong pan-nationalist drive and to enhance its electoral performance.

Other examples, such as political posters, reinforce similar changes in the messages conveyed. The two examples which were briefly examined relate to the 1997 General Election and 1997 Local Election (Figure 12 and Figure 13, p.143-144). In these instances the messages conveyed reflect the party's commitment to the peace process in its claim for 'A New Opportunity for Peace'. It also asserts an interest in local issues and the inclusion of the republican communities in politics, as enshrined in the slogan 'Our City Also'. These posters attempt to appeal to a republican audience but also the wider nationalist community, as Chris Jones suggested, 'Sinn Féin will continue to target SDLP voters portraying themselves as the only party who can seriously deliver a better quality of life for nationalist people'.<sup>1</sup>

### **Overview**

In this sense, the use of these types of visual material which are 'a key way they contact the public',<sup>2</sup> reflect a changed republican message and its move into constitutional politics. Yet, it also emphasises Sinn Féin's application of traditional forms of political communication which are employed by mainstream political parties, and its participation in the electoral process. Thus, what an examination of Sinn Féin's use of print and alternative forms of communication shows is that there has been clear progress in the professionalisation and sophistication of the party's attempts to communicate with its own supporters. This is evident in the nature and quality of the messages which are being produced. At the same time, the increasing sophistication of its communicative machine has meant that some forms of communication, like bumper stickers, which were traditionally aimed primarily at its grassroots, are now also used to communicate with much wider audiences. Furthermore, what is particularly interesting in the examination of the evolution of republican communicative efforts is how this is deeply entwined with the party's position in Northern Irish politics.

<sup>1</sup> From *Channel 4 News*, in survey, 13<sup>th</sup> March 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Martina Purdy, from the *Belfast Telegraph*, in survey, 1998.



Figure 14: 'Ireland United'



Figure 15: 'Ireland United, Gaelic and Free'



Figure 16: 'Ireland'



Figure 17: 'Out of the Ashes Arose the Provisionals'



Figure 18: 'Sniper at Work'

Equally, other forms of communication are becoming increasingly more important and popular, both amongst grassroots and other audiences, and according to Mark Lerner, there has been a dramatic growth in the interest in promotional material that celebrates republicanism in an historical dimension.<sup>3</sup> Thus the party continues to produce badges celebrating the IRA and the Armed Struggle, which no longer represent contemporary republican politics, such as those illustrated in Figure 14 to Figure 18 (p.146), which draw on the republican movement of the 1970s and 1980s. As Loftus has argued:

much of the traditional nationalist imagery in Northern Ireland is displayed not in the public through face but within the privacy of the home or the prison cell. [ ] The availability of tricolour badges was due to Provisional Sinn Féin's readiness to market any kind of image with which they could win support and funds, and their use was clearly related to the current badge-wearing craze amongst western youth. (1994:58 and 90)

Rather than embodying contemporary republican messages, these types of communicative acts have now become popular romanticised memories of a different Sinn Féin and a different republican movement.

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<sup>3</sup> Sinn Féin press officer, in interview, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2000.

## Chapter Seven: Surfing the Net for Sinn Féin

The widespread practice of political communication has tended to rely on the use of conventional platforms of communication. Those who sought to publicise their message to either a restricted or a wider audience have long depended on what are commonly understood to be traditional forms of communication, such as print media and public speaking. However, in the early part of the 20th century and particularly with the advent of television and radio, political communicators were forced to embrace newer mediums of communication and to re-assess their communicative strategies, adapting to new ways of delivering politics. More recently, further technological developments, especially the computer revolution, have once again resulted in the emergence of new opportunities to communicate, raising further challenges for party strategists. Specifically, it has been the linking of computers, a process known as computer-mediated communication, which permits a rapid and easy exchange of information, that has had the greatest impact.<sup>1</sup>

As a sophisticated and organised political party, Sinn Féin has, over the years, recognised the importance of communicating politics.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, in its attempts to develop a successful communication apparatus, it has explored the potential that different platforms of communication offer. As discussed in previous chapters, this meant that while using print to communicate the republican message, it has also used other, less conventional methods of communication, such as mural paintings. This employment of alternative forms of communication also allowed the party to extend the reach of its message. By developing its own forms of communication, Sinn Féin has been able to avoid what was for many years an entrenched, anti-republican news media and instead, communicate directly with the public and in particular with its own supporters.

This chapter aims to examine how this new form of communication has been used by Sinn Féin and how this fits into its wider communication apparatus and strategy examined in Chapter Five. The chapter also explores how this new medium has impacted upon the republican message and its communication of politics, and specifically, whether messages are adapted to suit the different audiences the movement is trying to reach. The chapter is thus divided into three sections before ending with a brief overview of the main arguments presented in Part II of this thesis. In section one, the medium of the Internet and what it offers as a platform to

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<sup>1</sup> See Morris and Ogan (1996).

<sup>2</sup> See Chapters Four and Five.



communicate politics is considered, while in sections two and three, the party's web site and its use of electronic mail are examined. Its aim is to determine whether the use of this platform of communication reflects the same degree of professionalisation and sophistication of its communication practices, as discussed in Chapters Five and Six.

### ***The Internet***

Of the different computer network systems that have been developed the most successful so far has undoubtedly been the Internet. This is understood as a global association of millions of computers and thousands of networks that transport data and facilitate the exchange of information. It was originally developed in 1969 by the Pentagon's Advanced Research Projects Agency<sup>3</sup> with the aim of creating a non-centralised computer network able to sustain power losses and widespread destruction, such as that caused by a nuclear war.<sup>4</sup> It was only in the 1980s that the Internet began to be commercially developed, and by the mid-1990s it had become popular amongst the general public. Since then it has evolved into an indispensable aspect of modern communication.<sup>5</sup>

The two most popular systems of computer-mediated communication of the Internet are the World Wide Web and electronic mail, although the term Internet is frequently used to refer to the WWW. As a tool of information storage and transfer, the WWW is 'a system of Internet servers that support specially formatted documents'<sup>6</sup> which use a specific Internet protocol, HTML. Originally developed by Tim Berners-Lee at the European Laboratory for Particle Physics in 1989, it has since evolved into an effective and highly popular platform making information readily and widely available. The only requirements are access to a computer, a modem and a telephone line, or to a computer which is already linked to an existent network. The overall principle of the WWW is that information is saved at a particular computer server which, upon request from another computer then provides access to the information held in its domain.<sup>7</sup>

The other popular feature of the Internet is electronic mail, commonly referred to as e-mail. As the name itself suggests, it refers to mail sent by electronic means, where both the sender and recipient must have access to a networked computer. Since its development in the early 1970s,

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<sup>3</sup> In a programme entitled ARPANET Advances Research Projects Agency Network.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.stars.com/Internet/History>, accessed on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2000 at 13.42.

<sup>5</sup> See Rash (1997).

<sup>6</sup> [http://webopedia.internet.com/TERM/W/World\\_Wide\\_Web.html](http://webopedia.internet.com/TERM/W/World_Wide_Web.html), accessed on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2000 at 14.01.

<sup>7</sup> The system uses a multitude of individual pages written in HTML, which combine to constitute what is known as web sites. It is also based on a series of rules (hypertext transfer protocol) which allows the exchange of information such as text, images, sound, video, etc amongst other. The process of exchange takes place through browsers (which read the pages) and servers (which store the pages).

its merit and use have grown, allowing faster and more efficient communication between people.

In comparison to other forms of communication, Abramson *et al.* (1988) have suggested that the Internet and other forms of computer-mediated communication differ from the traditional mass media, such as print and broadcasting in six principle ways. These are:

1. it can transmit a far greater volume of information from a wider range of sources to a single access point.
2. it can transmit the information at a much faster speed.
3. it allows for far greater user control of the information received. Consumers can collate and print their own news sources.
4. it allows for greater targeting of audiences by distributors: the higher volume of media traffic permits narrowcasting in place of broadcasting.
5. it allows for decentralisation of information control: the number of sources of information has increased and the costs of establishing oneself as a vendor of information (on the Internet, particularly) have decreased.
6. it introduces interactivity to media technology, allowing citizens to debate (with politicians or other groups of citizens from considerable distances or to engage in written dialogue via computer. (in Gibson and Ward, 1998:15)

As can be seen from these characteristics, the Internet and computer-mediated communication hold a number of advantages in comparison with other forms of communication, such as those discussed in Chapter Six. Of particular relevance is its ability to reach a much wider audience in a short period of time and with reduced costs. In essence, the Internet has the ability to convey different messages in a single effort while still allowing the targeting of the message to suit the different audiences it reaches. Additionally, Rash (1997) has argued that there are five main aspects which depict the Internet and thus determine the way in which it can be used, namely: interactivity; limited bandwidth; limited demographics; location independence; and 'netiquette'.<sup>8</sup>

### **Functions of the Internet**

In terms of its generic uses, December (1996) has argued that these can be broadly divided into three main categories: communication, interaction and information. As a means of communication, the Internet facilitates the process of exchanging information. As a platform of communication the Internet is also a sphere where people can freely engage with the material available and thus communication results from a process of exchange between sender and receiver.

### **Communicating Politics on Net**

As a platform to communicate politics, its use is important in a number of ways, in particular since it is comparatively cheaper than print. It also has the ability to provide up-to-date

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<sup>8</sup> Referring to the type of behaviour and the etiquette behind Internet usage, this category is not particularly relevant for this study as this analysis does not focus on audience use of the medium.

information without having to incur further expense, which, for example, the re-issuing of a print publication would demand. As Rash states:

- what we know is that taking politics to the nets can result in several specific things that most campaigns and most candidates want:
- unfiltered access to voters
  - fast and inexpensive access to workers
  - effective access to the media
  - control over perceptions
  - feedback from voters. (p.68)

Of greater importance is its ability to bypass the traditional mediated forms of mass communication (Tumber and Bromley, 1998). This is crucial in a number of instances: firstly, because it assigns control of the message to politicians and their strategists. Secondly, in side-stepping journalists, messages no longer have to be adapted and developed to suit the news media and thus do not have to be written in what Robert Montgomery from Sinn Féin called 'media language politic'.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, in allowing marginalised groups, or simply groups that could not otherwise access a mass medium, to communicate via the Internet can be seen as widening the democratic debate. Instead of political communication being used chiefly by mainstream organisations that have extended resources, the Internet has provided an alternative avenue for smaller and poorer groups to communicate. As Tumber and Bromley suggest, 'the development of an infrastructure of computer networks based on the Internet is creating a flexible new environment for the dissemination of public information' (1998:160). They add 'it will become a major force in political campaigns for big players and may become, if the optimists' predictions are realised, a new arena for alternative and minor political parties and candidates to reach the public' (p.161).

However, unlike the authors' cautious optimism, the Internet has, in fact, already become a forum via which so-called minor organisations can try to reach the public. One example of this is the WWW site for the Official Monster Raving Loony Party,<sup>10</sup> which at the 1997 British general election, polled only 8,375 votes. Likewise, the Internet has the capacity to broaden and democratise the political debate by providing access to groups of individuals whose voice could previously not be heard, although this in itself does not imply that they can successfully influence public opinion. As an alternative form of communication, it has the power to challenge the role of mainstream news as the main information provider or 'our window on the world'. These aspects are particularly important as the Internet is becoming increasingly more popular with the potential to undermine or subvert the role of the news media and to re-invent the notions of political communication and the public sphere.

<sup>9</sup> In interview, 29<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

<sup>10</sup> This is located at <http://freespace.virgin.net/raving.loony/>, accessed June 2000.

Alternatively, more negative concerns have also been raised, in particular regarding the impact of the so-called widening effect that the Internet has, as well as its non-mediated existence. Firstly, the increased ease in placing information in the public domain has the potential to undermine the quality and accuracy of the information made available. In addition, the use of the Internet might lead to an even greater commodification of information and politics, thereby diminishing its value and respectability. Therefore, rather than widening the political debate and creating a more informed public sphere, it might act as a counter-measure to this and commodify even further politics and political communication.

Moreover, the lack of censorship and regulation and the selection process imposed by the news media might also mean that the Internet becomes the preferred medium for political propaganda or even for political hatred to be expressed. The difficulty in regulating the Internet aggravates this even more. For example, it was recently reported that the RUC has employed the use of computer experts to monitor loyalist web sites. Of particular concern to the security forces were some of the threats that were voiced on this forum supporting the use of violence, such as the bombing of Dublin, and as illustrated by the following:

in an online interview a RHD terrorist said: 'A Friday or Saturday afternoon would be best for maximum impact. If it causes the Irish government to have a rethink, then, and I say this with great sadness, it would be worth women and children losing their lives. Another article on the site seeks to justify the killing of lawyer Rosemary Nelson. A security source said: 'Obviously much of the material is perfectly legal, although the views are pretty disgusting'. (*Belfast Telegraph*, 15<sup>th</sup> November 1999)

In effect, as part of the political process, the Internet has both the potential to contribute positively to the public sphere or, alternatively, to add further negative aspects. More likely than not it will do both, although ultimately:

the Internet is allowing minor parties in the United Kingdom to mount a more significant challenge to their major counterparts than in other media. The Internet equalises voters' ability to access party information, and the quality of the minor parties' Web sites rivals that of their major counterparts. (Gibson and Ward, 1998:32)

However, as the use of the Internet is still relatively recent, especially in communicating politics, it is somewhat premature to speculate on the possible impacts it might have. What is certain is that the Internet has become an integral part of the modern political process whereby politicians and parties have the opportunity to explore what can be considered, at least for the time being, a devolved and autonomous form of mass communication.<sup>11</sup> Equally, this means that future research both in the field of political communication and, more generally, in media studies, must necessarily explore further what for the time being is largely uncharted territory.

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<sup>11</sup> The term devolved is here used in the sense that unlike broadcasting and print, the Internet has the power to devolve the control of forms of communication to the public. Furthermore, this will continue for as long as governments are unable to censor or regulate the content of the Internet.

As Rash (1997) states in his book *Politics on the Net: Wiring the Political Process*:  
 the existence of the nets has developed into a theme that now flows through the political process. In some campaigns it's a minor presence, and in others it helps win elections, but one way or another, the medium of the nets is surely there, just as television was surely there at the end of the 1950s, just before the world learned its full effect during the Kennedy-Nixon debates. Now the nets are beginning their time of ascendancy. By the presidential election in 2000, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to conduct a national or state-wide campaign without them. (1997:ix)

As Rash notes, as yet, the Internet might not be the preferred medium to communicate politics, but its potential has been identified and political organisations and others are dedicating increased efforts and resources to this new medium. However, these attempts are still limited and are said to fall short of exploiting the Internet's true potential. In particular, Rash stresses the lack of originality and the failure to harness and apply the medium's unique characteristics.

However:

until recently, mass communication researchers have overlooked not only the Internet but the entire field of computer-mediated communication, staying instead with the traditional forms of broadcast and print media that fit much more conveniently into models for appropriate research topics and theories of mass communication. (Morris and Ogan, 1996:39)

Additionally, the research that exists has tended to be either excessively technical<sup>12</sup> or has bordered on philosophical discourse.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, one of the main problems encountered during this study process was the lack of previous research that could contribute and inform the methodologies applied to analyse republican use of the new electronic media.

### ***The Internet as a Platform of Communication***

Sinn Féin's official use of the Internet began when the party launched its first web site in 1994. However, republican use of computer-mediated communication had already started a few years earlier when, in the early 1990s, Irish republican supporters based in the United States began posting messages on an existent, Irish political science, e-mail discussion list. As argued in an article by Delaney in *AnPhoblacht/Republican News*, independent Internet usage started when 'Irish political science academics banned republican news items from their e-mail Internet facility' (18<sup>th</sup> December 1997). Instead, an Irish-American republican from New Jersey (USA) named Eugene McElroy, founded what was the first ever independent Irish news and discussion list. Then, 'for no good reason, online Irish republican activism took hold in Austin, Texas' (Delaney, *AP/RN*, 18<sup>th</sup> December 1997). From this point onwards it became the responsibility of a student called Fergus O'Dea, who later became the *An Phoblacht/Republican News* WWW site administrator.

While republican supporters were already using the Internet before the party integrated it into its

<sup>12</sup> Such as December (1996) and Rudy (1996).

<sup>13</sup> Such as Newhagen and Rafaeli (1996).

communication apparatus, it was only when they were prevented from communicating through already existent structures that a separate Irish online list was created. Until then, the use of this platform of communication was achieved by taking advantage of existent services, and its emergence as an independent form of communication was a requirement rather than a proactive and strategic decision. Hence, the first years of online republican communication were not so much concerned with the organised communication of politics, but more with establishing and facilitating communication between republican supporters resident in the USA. It also served as a way to inform such supporters, of the developments in the Province and of Sinn Féin's campaign to end the partition of Ireland. It was only with the development of Sinn Féin's own WWW, site in the mid-1990s, that computer-mediated communication became part of the party's communicative strategies. From then onwards it has developed as an organised effort to publicise the republican message.

Similarly, its emergence denotes affinities with that of other forms of communication, as discussed in Chapter Six. Although initially not embodying an official and concerted attempt to communicate republican politics, the creation of an entirely separate republican news and discussion list evolved in the first instance as an alternative form of communication, such as print. Like the evolution of other republican communicative efforts, most of the party's communicative practices have resulted from attempts to circumvent some form of censorship or regulation imposed upon the republican message. In this particular case it was censorship imposed by Irish political scientists in the USA, while in other instances it relates to censorship imposed by the British government on mainstream media. Additionally, the fact that Irish republican online communication was first developed in America has been one of the major distinctions between this platform of communication and print, for example. Whilst most republican communication started in Northern Ireland, and was mainly aimed at primarily a Northern Catholic republican working-class, online communication, on the other hand, focused largely on an international dimension.

### **Sinn Féin on the WWW**

When, in 1994, communication via the Internet was officially deployed by Sinn Féin and a more strategic approach to the medium developed, it signalled the move of Northern Irish politics into the virtual world, led by Sinn Féin – the first party in the six counties to establish its own web site. Likewise, as will be discussed, it was only with the official integration of the WWW in communicating republican politics that the true potential of the platform began to be recognised. In particular, its potential ability to reach millions of people who navigate the web sphere on a daily basis. The fact that Sinn Féin was the first party to introduce the Internet to Northern Irish

politics in itself indicates its degree of professionalisation and modernisation in communicating politics. It also shows how the party has been prepared to take a number of risks and invest time and resources into embracing new forms of communication. Moreover, although journalist Lena Ferguson has suggested that 'their methods are similar to any other political party', she adds that 'in fact they may be more efficient and sophisticated than many others in Northern Ireland, e.g. having an Internet site quite early on'.<sup>14</sup>

Official republican use of the Internet began at a time when a re-evaluation of the more traditional forms of communication, such as print, was taking place. As discussed in Chapter Six, following changes within and beyond the party, the development of a new political strategy resulted in a re-assessment of its communication strategies. For example, its use of print changed from being one of its main communication techniques to becoming a more strategic one. Equally, this transformation of the party's communicative strategies was fuelled by a changed media coverage and its belief that it no longer had to rely on alternative forms of communication to publicise the republican message.<sup>15</sup> The emergence of the Internet also had a crucial part to play in this process, mainly because it provided a more cost effective and competent means through which to communicate the message. It also had the potential to reach a much larger audience than print ever could. This meant that electronic media offered republicans an opportunity which they could not overlook: the chance to reach an extended and more diverse audience at a fraction of the cost and effort.

While republican use of the Internet was initially anything but a concerted communicative effort, its integration into the party's apparatus reinforced the need to re-evaluate its communication policy. The development of Sinn Féin's presence on the Web was also part of the third main phase in the evolution of its communicative efforts. The first one consisted of developing an organised approach to communication in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The re-evaluation of its communication apparatus and its messages, which took place in the mid/late 1980s as result of changes in the national and international political environment, was the second phase. The latter and more recent phase has been the modernisation of the republican media machine and the move towards embracing the new electronic media.

As the Internet initially provided a point of contact with the international republican community, the first republican issue to go online was *An Phoblacht/Republican News* (Figure 19, p.157), in 1994 (Delaney, *AP/RN*, 18<sup>th</sup> December 1997). The overriding aim in placing *An*

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<sup>14</sup> From *Channel 4 News*, in survey, 28<sup>th</sup> April 1998.

<sup>15</sup> See Chapter Six.

*Phoblacht/Republican News* in the virtual world was to facilitate access to the official voice of Sinn Féin, in particular amongst Irish-Americans. Thus, a largely identical version of the publication was placed online which anyone could access for free, unlike its print version. The main difference between the online and the printed version resided first and foremost in the absence of illustrations and photographs. However, unlike its printed counterpart, the virtual version provided visitors free access to an archive for past issues of the publication. A few months later, Sinn Féin launched its own party web site where, as will be discussed, an extensive range and quantity of republican information has been since made available. According to Delaney 'these two sites have proven to be easily the most popular Irish political web sites, reaching well over a thousand people every week' (*AP/RN*, 18<sup>th</sup> December 1997).

### Exposing 'Classified' Information

Initially, both sites were based at a server of the University of Texas, USA, under the responsibility of Fergus O'Dea (Williams, *Newsbytes*, 26<sup>th</sup> March 1996). Although at the time 'much of the content [ ] (was) made up from the Sinn Féin official newsletter (*AP/RN*) and transcripts of President Gerry Adams speeches' (Williams, *Newsbytes*, 26<sup>th</sup> March 1996), some of the site content began to raise certain concerns regarding Internet usage. The controversy surrounding the republican site revolved around supposedly classified information on the British military presence in Northern Ireland. This information included an online and interactive reproduction of a Sinn Féin document entitled the *British Military Garrison in Northern Ireland* as seen in Figure 20 (p.159) which had been published in 1994. Here it is stated that:

since the British Government's enforced partition of Ireland in 1921, they have systematically created and sustained a military state in the six north-eastern counties of Ireland. [ ] It is time for this garrison to go. [ ] Outlined in these pages is a structural overview of the current levels of overt British militarisation in north-eastern Ireland. (Sinn Féin 2000b)

Also in the document is a clickable map of Northern Ireland, which lists the different security installations, surveillance towers, checkpoints and border road blocks as illustrated in Figure 21 (p.160). According to *ComputerWeekly*, 'the (British) government was left in confusion after Sinn Féin published reportedly classified UK military information on the Internet' (28<sup>th</sup> March 1996). A senior government source told the *Belfast Telegraph* that although:

a lot of this information would already be in the public domain. Much of it has already appeared in Sinn Féin publications and is no longer accurate. But it emphasises again the difficulties in policing the Internet. There are a lot of concerns about what is accessible on it. (Grattan, 25<sup>th</sup> March 1996)



# An Phoblacht

## REPUBLICAN NEWS



Thursday 25 June, 1998

## Towards an era of change

**Sinn Féin will be a strong voice in  
government**

The votes cast for Sinn Féin in the election to the transitional Assembly in the Six Counties will ensure that a strong, committed team of activists will take their seats. They will be voices for change in the Assembly, the Executive and in the All-Ireland Ministerial Council.

This is an historic election from which republicanism emerges closer to our goal of a free Ireland and ready to engage in the many political battles ahead. These battles - for equality, for demilitarisation and for all-Ireland structures - will be fought from a position of strength.

### Flanagan's remarks fuel Garvaghy fears

In what appears to be a green light to loyalist extremists, RUC Chief Constable Ronnie Flanagan has said he will push the 5 July Orange parade through the nationalist Garvaghy Road if Orangemen repeat their mass intimidation

#### ▶ Editorial

Time for dialogue

Praise for campaign

#### ▶ New in Print

Rebels hold sway in  
Colombia

#### ▶ Gaeilge

Lón daonnachta ó  
dhuine d'fhilí móra  
an ghrá

Glór Bréagach

#### ▶ New in Print

Gardaí must make a  
choice

PD Harney wags the  
dog

#### ▶ Workers in Struggle

Blu flu in Croker,  
flowers in Lyons

Figure 19: An Phoblacht/Republican News (WWW)

Even if, according to British officials, there were a number of inaccuracies in the information provided, its inability to prevent its international disclosure was a matter of concern. It also warranted an RUC investigation to determine if any offence had been committed by Sinn Féin (Grattan, *Belfast Telegraph*, 25<sup>th</sup> March 1996). Moreover, as one British Army spokesmen commented to Grattan: ‘we do take note of material on the Internet which may have security or military references, but as a matter of policy we do not comment on Sinn Féin propaganda’ (*Belfast Telegraph*, 25<sup>th</sup> March 1996).

What was most disconcerting for the British government was the fact that the security information was made available through a medium that had the potential to reach millions of people. Unlike the printed version of the document, which would have achieved a more limited circulation, the size and the international element of the audience also concerned government officials. The Internet was proving to be one of the first media of mass communication that was not easy to regulate or censor, unlike broadcasting where republican voices were at the time directly censored by the Broadcasting Ban imposed by the British government.<sup>16</sup> Ultimately as Delaney commented ‘information online is automatically available everywhere by any of thousands of routes, so efforts to stem the flow are pretty much doomed to fail’ (*AP/RN* 18<sup>th</sup> December 1997). As Internet consultant, Mike Prettejohn, stated: ‘the practicalities of stopping information being published on the Internet are very difficult’ (in *Computer Weekly*, 28<sup>th</sup> March 1996).

Furthermore, the incredulity of the British government and its officials did not limit itself to the fact that security information on their military forces had been potentially exposed to millions of people. Instead, it was more generally concerned with the fact that Sinn Féin was using what was seen as an advanced form of communication that side-stepped traditional information gatekeepers. Andrew Hunter MP, the former chairperson of the Conservative Party Northern Ireland’s Committee, explained at the time that he intended to raise Sinn Féin’s use of the Internet with the government. He also commented, ‘it sounds horrifying. I had no idea Sinn Féin was using the Internet’ (in Wang, *Boardwatch*, 1996:1). On the other hand, Michael Nolan, a republican press officer, stated ‘this is not a terrorist crib sheet. It is all material that is in the public domain and is there to highlight the involvement of UK forces in Northern Ireland’ (*Computer Weekly*, 28<sup>th</sup> March 1996).

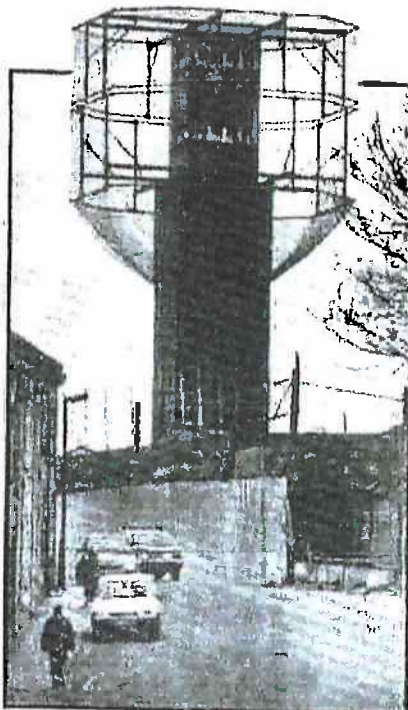
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<sup>16</sup> See Chapter One or Henderson *et al.* (1990) for a discussion of the censorship imposed upon the broadcasting of republican voices.



## The British Military Garrison in Ireland

[Clickable Map of British Forces](#) · [British Army Forces](#) · [RUC Forces](#)



*SINN FEIN  
PEACE ACTION MONITOR  
SEPTEMBER 1ST 1994*

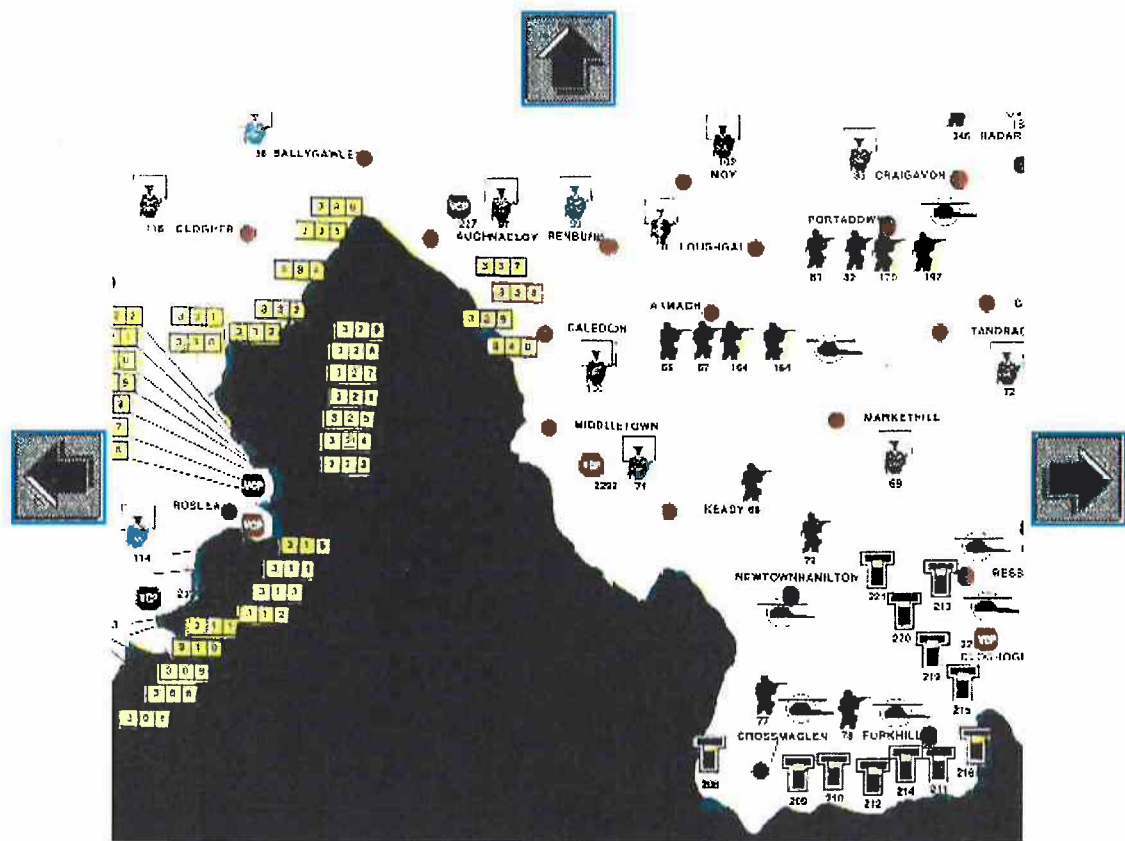
**SINCE THE British Government's enforced partition of Ireland in 1921, they have systematically created and sustained a military state in the six north-eastern counties of Ireland.**

**This garrison comprising the regular British army regiments, the locally recruited Royal Irish Regiment(RIR) and the militarised state police of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), currently hold the occupied area with a combined military strength of c.**










**32,085 personnel. The British army has a total of 135 installations within their control, while the RUC has a total of 161. In addition to these bases the British government have installed throughout the North a massive network of security restrictions, which affect every aspect of civilian life. Add to this the surveillance capacity of these forces and one arrives at an appreciation of the overpowering nature of this military presence. It is time for this garrison to go.**

**Clickable Map of the British Garrison in Ireland**

Figure 20: The British Military Garrison in Ireland (WWW)



**KEY TO MAP**

-  BRITISH ARMY BARRACKS
-  JOINT BRITISH ARMY/RUC BARRACKS
-  RUC BARRACKS
-  SPY POST
-  HELI-PORT FACILITY
-  NAVAL FACILITY
-  CHECKPOINT
-  BORDER ROAD CLOSURE
-  TOWN OR CITY

[British Military Garrison in Ireland](#)

Figure 21: Clickable Map of the British Garrison in Ireland (WWW)

Clearly, and to Andrew Hunter's amazement, Sinn Féin had succeeded in modernising its communicative efforts, thus effectively challenging the widespread control imposed by the British government upon republican information. It also signalled, perhaps to the dismay of some, that the republican communication machine had significantly evolved since the 1980s, becoming increasingly more professional and sophisticated. Yet, as Wang has commented:

"The British Military Garrison in Ireland" reveals that the British Army consists of 32,085 personnel scattered across 135 installations throughout Ireland. [ ] While the British probably aren't publishing this type of information in their tourist brochures, the threat seems to come simply from the fact that Sinn Féin organised and collected this information. If anyone but Sinn Féin displayed this same map of British military installations in Ireland, would the British government even care? If a web site in Iraq or Libya displayed a map of American military bases throughout the Middle East, we might be horrified that terrorists were plotting to blow one of them up. Yet, if this same map appeared in an article in *Time* or *Newsweek* (as it has), would the American public feel threatened? (*Boardwatch*, 1996:2)

As suggested by this quote, it is not so much the type of information which can now be made available to the public through the Internet that is of particular concern to the ruling elite and, to some extent, society. Instead, the focus lies on the fact that the Internet provides an ungoverned medium of mass communication which marginalised groups could not access previously. Thus, the Internet clearly offers a unique platform of communication unfettered by the same regulations of access as mainstream news is. Nor is it constrained by agreed or imposed rules on the content and information that can be disclosed. Equally, as reported in *Computer Weekly*, the British government was at the time largely unprepared to deal with this new medium of communication:

the Home Office, the DTI<sup>17</sup> and the Northern Ireland Office were all unclear as to who had responsibility for Internet questions, despite the potential threat of classified information being freely available. The Northern Ireland Office admitted that the very nature of the Internet meant the government had no control of the information available there. (28<sup>th</sup> March 1996)

Although the initial disclosure of this story was made in a London *Times* news report on 25<sup>th</sup> March 1996, as Williams noted in his article written the following day, the Internet address provided by the London *Times* was incorrect:

the pages detailed in the newspaper report on a World Wide Web server at the University of Texas, were all moved to a new non-University server in January of this year. As a result, the URL published by the newspaper [ ] returns a not found message when attempts to connect are made. (*Newsbytes*, 26<sup>th</sup> March 1996).

Williams also reported for *Newsbytes* that, 'as for the newspaper reports that potentially sensitive information was available online, much seems to have been removed. *Newsbytes* was unable to confirm that such information was available' (26<sup>th</sup> March 1996). Unlike Williams claimed, most of the controversial information on the British garrison had not been removed but

<sup>17</sup> Department of Trade and Industry.

had simply been relocated to a different server, meaning that the old hyper-links to the information no longer worked. A few months later, at the end of 1996 and the beginning of 1997, the Sinn Féin and *An Phoblacht/Republican News* web pages were moved again to another server, this time in the Republic of Ireland. Nevertheless, most of the archives where Sinn Féin publications and back issues of *An Phoblacht/Republican News* were retained continued to be held at the University of Texas server, alongside the information on the British military garrison.

### Virtual Republican Messages

The *An Phoblacht/Republican News* site is currently administered from Galway in the Republic of Ireland by Fergus O'Dea. For its production, he relies on the help of party officials, republican volunteers and sympathisers, as well as republican journalists. McKeown has suggested that '*AP* reputedly has one of the best sites on the Internet (you don't have to take my word for it but it's the opinion of Sue Denham of the Sunday Times among others on the matter is worth considering)' (*AP/RN*, 8<sup>th</sup> January 1997). The Sinn Féin site is now the party's responsibility, indicating that the Internet has been integrated into its communicative apparatus and strategy and is at present designed and maintained by an Internet consulting company based in Ireland, called IRLNET. The *An Phoblacht/Republican News* site, on the other hand, still remains outside of direct party control although it is also on the IRLNET server that current issues of *An Phoblacht/Republican News* are located.

A longitudinal examination of the party's web site from 1994 until the time of writing has shown that from a very early stage, republicans recognised that the WWW provided a unique chance to communicate their politics and ideas without fear of censorship, distortion or condemnation. Thus, it offered access to what was largely seen as an uncensored, unregulated and, most importantly, unmediated platform of communication. This lack of restrictions imposed upon the Internet meant that it was an ideal alternative form of communication, where messages did not have to be adapted to suit the mainstream media, as in the case of press releases, but only to suit the medium and audience.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the use of the new electronic media essentially provided, a further opportunity for the republican message to be publicised in an effective manner without having to depend on mainstream news. It has also meant that some of the stances that the party has taken on the Internet are not necessarily a mirror image of those advocated in other arenas of communication, such as in the mass media. This has been

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<sup>18</sup> This refers to the discussion in Chapter Six, where it was argued that the language used by republicans in their press releases had to be adapted to suit the news media. One particular example was examined where the same press release was issued via fax and was also placed on the WWW. It was noted that there had been an adaptation of the message, which was shortened, and the language had also been changed to suit the international character of the WWW audience. It was also apparent that the adaptation of the message to the medium was also evident in the contacts which were provided for Sinn Féin press offices.

particularly evident in the association made with the IRA on the party's WWW site. While in public Sinn Féin has repeatedly denied it is the IRA or that it speaks for the IRA, until recently, that is the end of 1999 and beginning of 2000, information on the IRA was prominently featured on the party's web page, as seen in Figure 22 (p.164).<sup>19</sup>

Whilst the use of the WWW as a non-mediated form of communication gives the party control over what information is included, when and in what format, further control can also be retained by the way in which information is displayed. Thus, the design of the party's web site can also effectively allow it to determine how visits to the site are conducted. Web site design can be used to ensure that regardless of what visitors are searching for, they will always have to read and view some specific material which has been highlighted by the party. In this particular case, although the site provides a number of features, as seen in Figure 23 (p.165), that allow the visitor to select the information they wish to access, the format used by Sinn Féin also means that visitors are 'forced' to read the general overview of the different documents. This ensures that an introduction to the party and its politics are always read by any visitor to the site. As one visitor to the site commented: 'I think the format they have is excellent at getting new users to understand SF's spin on things since the person needs to read through a general overview of Sinn Féin's philosophy to find specific pieces of information'.<sup>20</sup>

In terms of the information provided by the party's site, this has not changed much since 1994, although the amount of information has visibly increased, while access to its archives has become increasingly more restricted by outdated hyperlinks and URLs. At the time of writing, the party's site is organised into seven different categories, prominently located on the party's home page, and which function as the index to the site (Figure 23, p.165). The categories are: Introduction and Background; *An Phoblacht/Republican News*; Internet Mailing List; Election Headquarters; Documents and Press Releases; Supporting Sinn Féin and Related Resources. In an inventory of the site conducted in March 1998, which excluded those documents held in *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, it was determined that there were a total of 256 different documents.<sup>21</sup> The different types of messages which these documents conveyed, range from press releases to more extended policy documents, photographs and party speeches.

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<sup>19</sup> See Chapter Eight and Nine.

<sup>20</sup> John Sonnick, Sinn Féin Internet user, in e-mail, 21<sup>st</sup> July 1998.

<sup>21</sup> See Table 8, p.289.



# The Irish Republican Army

## and the armed struggle in Irish politics



**There has always been a tradition of armed resistance to the British military and political occupation of Ireland. This tradition generally only found effective expression when after a period of non-armed agitation, large sections of the Irish people, faced with the British government's denial of the legitimate demand for Irish independence, exercised the right to use armed struggle.**

This was the case with the organisation from which modern Irish republicans trace their origins - the United Irishmen of the 1790s. Inspired by the example of the American War of Independence and by the democratic ideals of the French Revolution, the United Irishmen sought to unite the people of Ireland in a common effort to achieve equality and freedom. Choosing initially non-violent means to win their aims, the United Irishmen quickly met with a repressive response from the British government. It was only then that they exercised their right as Irish people to defend their liberty by the use of arms. It was a pattern that was to be repeated several times in the next century and a half.

Armed uprisings against British rule took place in 1798, 1803, 1848 and 1867. The 45 years between 1803 and 1848 saw the Irish population mobilised in one of the first mass movements for political reform in the history of Europe. The demand for legislative independence for Ireland, though democratically expressed by the overwhelming majority of the people, was denied by the British government.

The Great Hunger of 1845-1852 saw a million people starve and a million more emigrate yet this catastrophe befell an unarmed people and there was only sporadic resistance. The ill-fated uprising of 1848 was localised and abortive.

The lessons of this period were not lost on succeeding generations of Irish patriots and the Fenian Movement of the late 1850s and 1860s won widespread support in Ireland and America for its programme of armed struggle to achieve an Irish Republic. The uprising of 1867 was crushed and another 49 years were to pass before Irish nationalists attempted an armed resistance.

Figure 22: The Irish Republican Army (WWW)



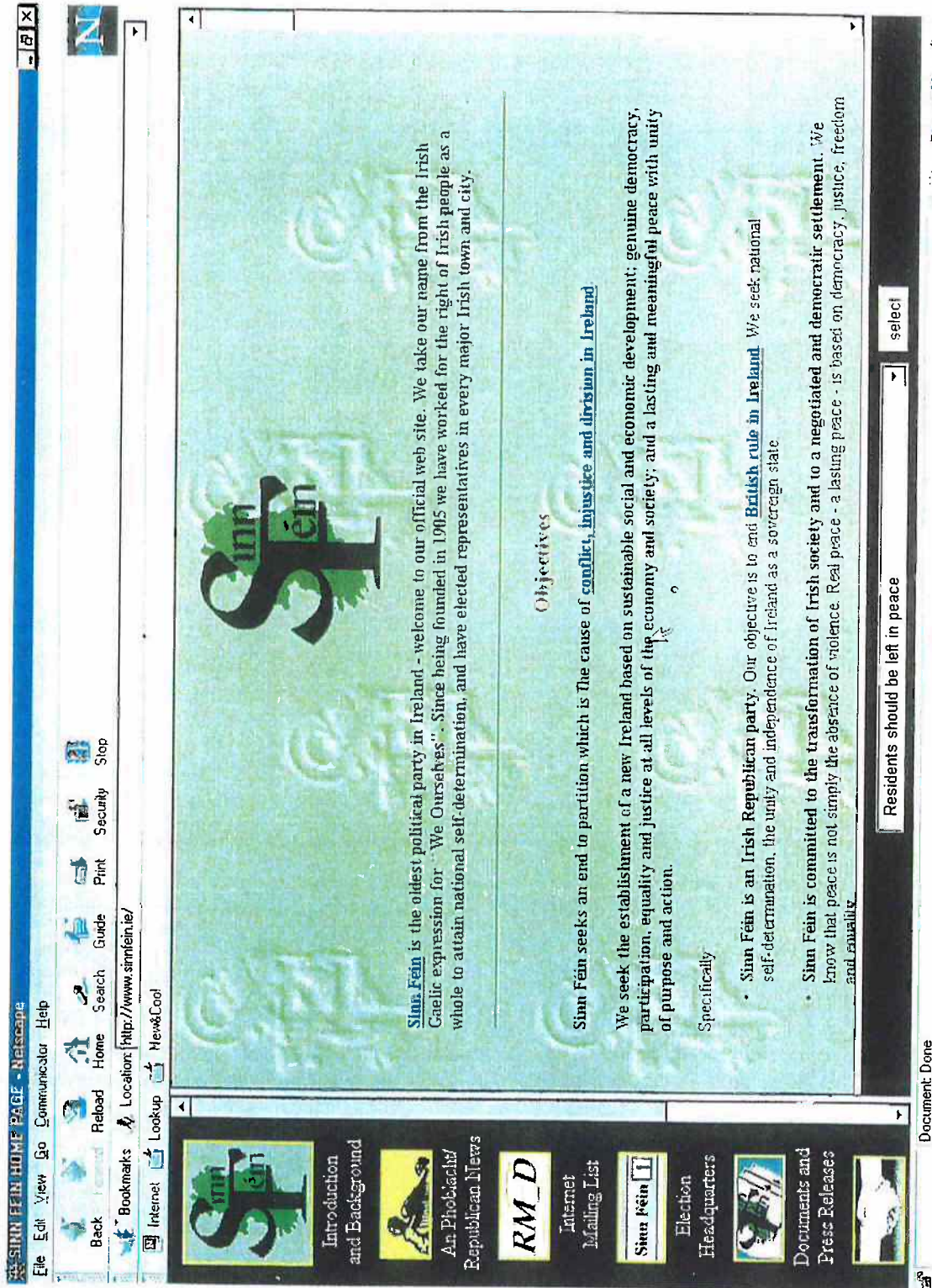


Figure 23: Sinn Féin's Home Page (WWW)

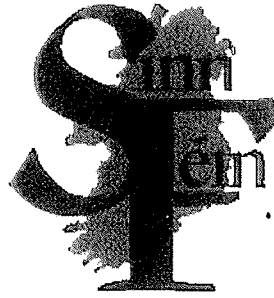
In terms of the roles that are awarded to the Internet in the communication of republicanism, firstly, it provides a platform where basic information can be made available to different audiences. With the aim of assisting potential visitors and republican supporters, the site contains information, for example, on how to join Sinn Féin or the republican discussion list, *RM\_D*. It also gives links to and information on other WWW resources and sites of republican interest. This fulfils the most basic communicative function, namely the provision of information. Its second role is of a venue for recycling existent messages and communication material. This mainly comprises information which is put online with little or no adaptation. The type of messages covered in this section ranges from the already mentioned reproduction of *An Phoblacht/Republican News* (Figure 19, p.157) and inclusion of major party documents, such as *Freedom* (1991); and the *British Military Garrison in Ireland* (1994) (Figure 20, p.159). In addition to this, the party also issues press releases<sup>22</sup> on the Internet on an almost daily basis, such as that illustrated in Figure 24 (p.167).

By making messages available on another platform of communication the party is extending the reach of its messages without incurring major added costs. This allows the repetition and publicising of the same message, which, as discussed in Chapter Five, is one of the main guiding principles in republican communication. At the same time, the provision of these documents in a single medium that is also relatively easy to access, such as the Internet, is a useful way of exposing the public to a diversity of republican publications. In this way, the Internet is seen as offering an extended longevity to print documents which might have otherwise disappeared from the public sphere or have been relegated to the shelves of a library collection.

This use of the Internet also ensures that certain types of communication activities are conducted in a more efficient manner. This is particularly evident in the case of press releases and of *An Phoblacht/Republican News*. Moreover, it also means that a particular message is publicised without having to depend on the news media taking an interest in it. In the case of *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, as mentioned earlier, this facilitates the consumption of the newspaper by those who live outside Northern Ireland. Additionally, because it is also available free of charge, it might attract readers who otherwise may not be willing or able to pay a subscription to what is a purely republican newspaper.

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<sup>22</sup> See Chapter Six for a discussion of the adaptation of press releases to the online medium of communication.



2 July 1998

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## Residents should be left in peace

**Sinn Féin Chairperson Mitchel McLaughlin to day called for Garvaghy Road residents to be left in peace.**

**Mr. McLaughlin said:**

“The residents of the Garvaghy Road are the victim community. Their rights should be upheld and defended. They should not be pressurised. They have been on the receiving end of much brutality and this year they should be left in peace.

“The Orange Order are threatening to turn this situation into a crisis. The unionist leadership should be using their influence to encourage the Orange Order to re-route.”

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[Sinn Féin Home Page](#) · [Sinn Féin Documents](#)

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*Web publication by [sfweb@irlnet.com](mailto:sfweb@irlnet.com)*

### The Limits of Sinn Féin on the Net

Although simply placing these republican productions on the Internet is useful in a number of ways, the method in which this is done is at times problematic. The main question and problem that this practice raises is the lack of adaptation of the message, not so much to the medium but to the audience. Such adaptation does occur in some instances, as in the case of press releases whereby, as discussed in Chapter Six, these are modified to suit the particular platform of communication by having their message shortened and some of the language altered. However, the same does not happen with other content, for instance with *An Phoblacht/Republican News*.

The main adaptation of *An Phoblacht/Republican News* from print to virtual version resides mainly in the exclusion of images and photographs, although some have been included on an almost regular basis since the end of 1999.<sup>23</sup> One reader of the electronic version of the newspaper stated, 'I hope their editing on the print is better than on the electronic. There are a lot of spelling/grammatical errors in the electronic'.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the lack of adaptation of stories in the newspaper to the medium frequently jeopardises their sense. For example, one story entitled 'Are you connected?' by Bill Delaney, was written for the original printed *An Phoblacht/Republican News* version, and was simply transposed onto an online format. In this article, Delaney examines the role of the Internet in society and how useful it is. He explains that:

you know you can't ignore them forever – those bizarre <http://WWW.acme.com/codes> are appearing, writ large and subliminally small, on everything, everywhere, even on your favourite political weekly. It's true – the Net is here and is out to get you connected. If – and it's no small if – you get all the software and hardware properly installed and get your Internet provider to behave, your first Internet sensation will be a dizzy feeling of directionlessness. (18<sup>th</sup> December 1998)

Of course, this article is available on the online version of *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, which means that the software was successfully installed and the Internet process has already commenced, regardless of what is written in the article. This shows one particular instance in which the non-adaptation of the message to the medium, limits the logic of the message.

Moreover, another drawback of this type of WWW usage is that Sinn Féin has predominantly focused on the re-cycling of information and has largely failed to exploit the true potential of the media, as Rash (1997) has accused all political web sites of doing. No matter how useful this information may be, it nevertheless fails to explore the unique offerings of the medium, as discussed in the introduction to this chapter. It is not so much that the re-cycled messages need to be radically modified, but that more attention needs to be given to the process of transferring

<sup>23</sup> This development is more related to the acquisition of the necessary technology, for example a scanner and appropriate software, rather than the actual practice of the adaptation of the message.

<sup>24</sup> John Sonnicks, in e-mail, 21<sup>st</sup> July 1998.

information from print to online form.

### Added Bonus of Virtual Messages

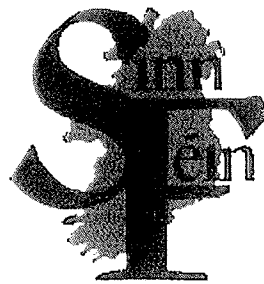
However, in some instances the unique characteristics of this platform of communication have been explored by the party. This is primarily the targeting of information to audiences; the combination of the features of print, broadcasting and interactivity; and the ability to up-date information frequently and easily.<sup>25</sup> This function is noticeable in the party's online Election Headquarters (Figure 25, p.170), which combines the provision of information and the recycling of existent material, such as election manifestos, but whose role also extends beyond these. This role is realised by targeting information to site visitors through the use of interactive features. Here, for example, visitors to the site can choose to access specific information about the party's electoral role in a particular region of Ireland or Northern Ireland. At the same time, it also offers, when applicable, online live election results as these are made available.

At the forefront of republican Internet usage is without any doubt the coverage of the party's annual *Árd Fheis* as seen in Figure 26 (p.171), in which not only is traditional information provided, such as the programme of events, text of speeches, but in addition, the visitor can access a gallery of photographs, listen to the main addresses on audio streams and even see video clips from the convention. The party has also created an online virtual democracy where visitors are invited to express support or opposition to motions to be presented at the conference. Additionally there has also been an online bookshop since at least 1996 but which has not always been available. This marks Sinn Féin's entrance into e-commerce, where visitors to the site can purchase by credit card, a variety of material such as t-shirt, badges, posters, mugs, key rings, books, music tapes and CDs and POW's handicrafts.

Thus, it can be suggested that the different types of information held in the party's web site illustrate the three main functions of its contemporary use. Nevertheless, the site also reflects the different audiences that are being targeted and the aims behind such efforts. It can therefore be suggested that there are two main audiences that Sinn Féin is trying to reach through the use of the Internet: its own supporters and a more general public. In terms of the former, at present this is limited to mainly American or international supporters who have access to the necessary technology. Its aim in reaching out to this audience is to highlight the latest developments while also trying to reinforce or maintain its support for Irish republicanism. As a predominantly working class party, traditional republican supporters still have limited access to the Internet, although the demographics of the medium are constantly changing.

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<sup>25</sup> See Gibson and Ward (1997) or Rash (1995).



# Election Headquarters

44 Parnell Square,  
Dublin 1

## Building a New Ireland



Sinn Féin's election candidates

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### Six County Assembly Election '98 Thursday, June 25

Get the results by [e-mail updates](#) or [online here](#) on Friday and Saturday

### *Ready for Change*

**Sinn Féin is presently contesting the election to the new 108-seat northern assembly. The choice now before the people of the Six Counties is to decide which party is more likely to deliver on the present opportunities and the promises contained in the Good Friday agreement. Sinn Féin is fielding thirty-eight candidates in seventeen constituencies to build on last year's vital gains for the party. Click below for our election manifesto and information about our candidates and campaign.**

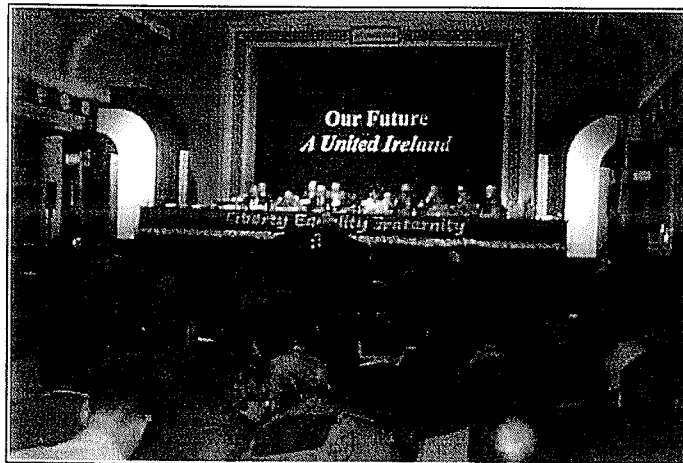
*[Election Manifesto](#) · [Maps and Profiles of Constituencies](#)*

### **Our Candidates**

Figure 25: Sinn Féin's Election Headquarters (WWW)



18/19 April 1998  
**Reconvened 10 May 1998**



A broad view of the conference hall

**The 1998 Sinn Féin Ard Fheis or annual conference was reconvened on 10 May for a special conference in the Royal Dublin Society (RDS) in Ballsbridge, Dublin. The original conference was held in the same location on the weekend of 18/19 April.**

The Ard Fheis marked a landmark development in the Irish peace process, as delegates backed the outcome of negotiations in Belfast between the North's political parties and the Irish and British governments, despite reservations. The party made over a hundred policy changes in all, including a decision to contest local elections to the new northern assembly on the basis of participation in that assembly and related all-Ireland structures.

You can still take part in the debate in a number of ways:

- Ballot papers are provided here for you to [express your support or opposition](#) to the motions by which the Sinn Féin policy changes will be decided.
- [Principal addresses](#) to the conference are available here, including the [Closing Address](#) by Gerry Adams, one of the [audio streams](#) recorded at the Ard Fheis.
- Sinn Féin party Chairman Mitchel McLaughlin briefly took part in an online conference with Republican supporters. A [transcript](#) of the brief session has been posted online.
- This site also brings you [a gallery of photographs](#) from the conference.

Figure 26: Sinn Féin's Árd Fheis (WWW)



As regards the general audience, who either consciously visit the party's web site or simply comes across it whilst navigating through the innards of the Internet, the aim is mainly to inform but also to raise an interest in the party. As discussed earlier, what the Internet ultimately offers Sinn Féin is the ability to hold different types of functions at the same time, without necessarily making this explicit. Moreover, its capacity to contain a vast array and range of information means that it can also cater for different audiences and communicative aims. In this way, the Internet and the republican use of it is multi-functional and multi-targeted. Thus, there is considerable potential for Internet usage and it is this that the party has explored. Ultimately, it is argued that 'the increased use of the Internet has advanced the party's recognition and goals. Sinn Féin and its supporter groups have home pages on the WWW, making party documents and support information available to millions'. (Mac an Bhaird, *AP/RN*, 18<sup>th</sup> December 1997)

However, there are still some problems with republican Internet usage, other than its failure to adapt the re-cycled messages. Currently, the main limitation with the party's web site is that whilst information is placed on a daily basis, such as new press releases, other features of the party's site become obsolete because of a lack of attention. Thus, the *An Phoblacht/Republican News* archives are frequently not accessible to the public because the hyper-links included are not up-dated to reflect the changed location of the material. In addition, on numerous occasions the more advanced features of the site, such as video clips and audio streams, simply do not work.

At another level, while new press releases are made available on a daily basis, after around 30 days these are simply removed from the site and not placed in the existing archives. This means that, for example at time of writing, the archives of Sinn Féin press releases cover only the period of 1995 and part of 1996, although again the links to this are frequently not operational. Another example is that while the controversial document on the British Garrison is available on the Internet, it is no longer possible to access the map detailing the British forces as this was removed during 1999, along with information on the IRA.

Overall, the republican use of the Internet, is at present providing a platform to extend the republican message. This means that while the party revolutionised Northern Irish political communication in 1994, it has nevertheless not been able to subsequently complement this with a sophisticated or simply largely operational web page. Moreover, although the characteristics of the medium gave the party control over the message, the vast majority of the content incorporated in this site over the years has failed to be explored and exploited. Despite the fact that placing information relating to the British garrison in Northern Ireland indicated what the



Internet could offer to Sinn Féin as an uncensored form of communication, other uses have simply centred around extending the audience of republican messages. The actual information and message is not particularly new, innovative or drastically different in most cases from that communicated via other means. In this way, Sinn Féin's use of the WWW is an extension of its existent communication apparatus.

Nevertheless, the evolution of the party's site since 1994 has, in some areas, been important in terms of new interactive features. For example, there were clear changes in these between 1996 and 1997, whereby visitors were for the first time invited to vote online on forthcoming motions at the party's annual meeting. Yet, beyond this little has changed. The technological 'know how' has not improved dramatically and in this sense, Sinn Féin's use of online media is amateurish and lacks the professionalisation and sophistication of its other modes of communication.

Moreover, as Gibson and Ward (1997) point out, Sinn Féin's site does not even have a special online section, aimed at the younger generations. Not only is this generation more computer literate than the former, but also they are the future electorate that Sinn Féin should try to attract. Although the need to attract a young generation of voters has been stressed at the party's Árd Fheis and 'that Sinn Féin, as a matter of considerable urgency, seeks in a proactive manner the increased participation and involvement of young people' (Árd Fheis 1996 motion 91, 23<sup>rd</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> March 1996 in Sinn Féin, 1996b), this has nevertheless not been mirrored on the WWW. Thus, there seems to be a lack of co-ordination between Sinn Féin mainstream policies and messages and those that are reciprocated in its use of the WWW. As is discussed in the subsequent section, this is further reinforced by the kinds of messages conveyed in republican e-mail.

### ***Communicating by Electronic Mail***<sup>26</sup>

Republican use of the new electronic media has extended itself beyond the creation and maintenance of a party WWW site and one for *An Phoblacht/Republican News*. The first republican use of online forms of communication centred around electronic mail, and occurred in 1994, when the party opted to develop first a web site for *An Phoblacht/Republican News* and soon after, one for the party itself. The development in the first instance of two WWW sites signalled that Sinn Féin's preferred use of computer-mediated communication was based on

<sup>26</sup> For the purposes of determining how electronic mail, in particular the *RM D* list, was used by Sinn Féin, a paid subscription to the service was taken out in January 1997 which at time of writing is still active. This subscription provided background and detailed knowledge on the service. In order to obtain more specific data, a two month random sample was selected covering April and May 1997. For a more detailed examination of the contents of the list, a sub-sample of four weeks was also selected covering the first two weeks of April 1997 and the last two weeks of May 1997.

what it could offer in contrast to what e-mail was able to provide. Primarily, this related to the fact that as a medium of communication, the web had the potential to target a much broader audience than e-mail could initially, and realistically ever do. Furthermore, the characteristics of the web versus e-mail also enabled the party to publicise itself in a more efficient manner. This has clearly meant that the WWW has so far been the most important feature of Sinn Féin's virtual communication efforts, although the use of electronic mail has also become a meaningful component. The other main difference between the republican use of electronic mail and its use of the WWW is that the latter is a component of the party's communicative strategies and is officially integrated into the party's political communication. The former, as will be discussed, remains largely a popular form of republican communication and finds itself situated somewhat at the margins of party control.

Contemporary republican use of e-mail has, until now, centred around two distinct functions: the provision of republican news via an online mailing service; and the creation of a virtual republican discussion forum. While these appear to be two separate uses of virtual communication, they are nevertheless deeply interconnected as they are aimed at and used by the same audience. As discussed in the previous section, the first known use of the Internet in communicating republicanism started when political activists placed messages on an Irish political science mailing list in the USA in the early 1990s. Thus, online republican communication first appeared in the form of e-mail messages that were being exchanged between different republican supporters in the United States. However, it was only in 1996 that electronic mail was deployed as part of the republican movement's communicative efforts.

Moreover, the employment of electronic mail as a platform for republican communication was not the result of a strategic decision by the party to embrace this technique. Instead, it was integrated into the movement's communication apparatus for two distinct, yet complementary reasons. Firstly, visitors to the party's web site repeatedly requested the creation of some form of republican mailing list which would cover republican related issues.<sup>27</sup> It would also allow those republicans not based in Ireland to access information on what was happening in the province more easily. Secondly, a republican mailing list would act as an alternative form of communication and 'balance the mainstream media's generally anti-Republican views'.<sup>28</sup> In this sense, the emergence of electronic mail shares a number of similarities with the use of mural painting as both were developed as a popular form of communication and not as an organised

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<sup>27</sup> Fergus O'Dea, *RM\_D* administrator, in e-mail, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1998.

<sup>28</sup> Fergus O'Dea, *RM\_D* administrator, in e-mail, 14<sup>th</sup> October 1998.

means of party communication.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, having emerged as an alternative form of communication parallels can also be drawn with the 1980s the upsurge in party print publications, which provided non-mediated and uncensored avenues for the communication of republican messages. Just like the development of many other forms of republican communication, electronic mail also evaded the traditional information gatekeepers.

Nevertheless, the expansion of electronic mail as an alternative form of communication highlights an inconsistency in Sinn Féin's argument. Mark Leron, a Sinn Féin press officer, suggested that alternative forms of communication have not been deemed necessary by the party since the early 1990s.<sup>30</sup> The mailing list administrator, Fergus O'Dea, on the other hand, commented that e-mail emerged as a way to communicate and circumvent the biased media. However, it can still be argued that since the mailing list remains outside party control and is not an official outlet for republican messages, it has in fact evolved and remained as an alternative form of communication.

### **A Republican Sphere of Discussion**

Of the two republican uses of e-mail - as a news service and a discussion forum - the first one to be manifest was the republican discussion board. Known as the Republican Bulletin Board or the Republican Discussion Forum, its contributions take place on the party's WWW site via e-mail. In essence, this represents a virtual public sphere where individuals are allowed to exchange ideas and debate can take place. However, just as Habermas (1989) limited the access to the public arena by calling it a bourgeoisie male sphere,<sup>31</sup> the republican movement has also limited theirs. Access to the Republican Discussion Board is not confined by gender, although O'Docherty noted that there was a predominance of women participating in the forum (*Belfast Telegraph*, 21<sup>st</sup> January 1997). Instead, it is available only to those who have subscribed to the republican news mailing list.

In addition, there is a moderator for the forum who can also invite guest participants to join the discussion. The role of the moderator 'is to facilitate exchanges on this board by maintaining a suitable environment for open debate and discussion' (Sinn Féin 2000a). Although there are no exact numbers of how many people participate in this forum, the monitoring of 15 days of discussions (28<sup>th</sup> April - 11<sup>th</sup> May 2000) saw a total of 576 messages posted by 69 different people. This gives an indication of the activity of the discussion board whereby, on average,

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<sup>29</sup> See Chapter Six.

<sup>30</sup> In interview, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2000.

<sup>31</sup> See Chapter Three.

more than 38 messages are posted on a daily basis. Unlike the republican news list, which O'Dea claims supports the republican movement:

opinions expressed in a bulletin on the board reflect only those of the individual posting the bulletin and do not necessarily reflect those of the moderator, IRLnet or *RM\_Distribution*. Neither the moderator, IRLnet nor *RM\_Distribution* shall be held liable for the content of users' bulletins. This bulletin board is a private forum and is not operated or authorised by Sinn Féin or any other organisation. (Sinn Féin, 2000a)

Although the opinions expressed in the forum are individual and the discussions are not sanctioned by Sinn Féin, its prominent inclusion in the party's WWW site means that it is associated with the party. Whilst it is possible for other sites to include links to Sinn Féin's site, as one German neo-fascist organisation did in 1997 (O'Docherty, *Belfast Telegraph*, 21<sup>st</sup> January 1997), it is not easy to incorporate material into someone else's site, without their permission. This means that even if Fergus O'Dea claims that the discussion board is not a Sinn Féin online discussion forum, there is nevertheless a degree of complicity between them.

### **On-line Republican News**

The second and main use of electronic mail is the *RM\_D* list or the republican mailing list, which is described as follows:

an electronic news service carrying current Irish Republican news updates and information, the service features reliable news coverage from Ireland including Irish activist bulletins and feature articles. Distribution generally consists of one post per day with additional posts for breaking news or other material. Subscribers are asked to pay a small annual subscription fee toward expenses for the service. (Sinn Féin, 2000)

Currently, it is administered by Fergus O'Dea, a republican activist responsible for the *An Phoblacht/Republican News* WWW site, who does not consider the mailing list to be a party publication. Nevertheless, it is 'certainly supportive and campaigning on behalf of the republican movement'.<sup>32</sup> O'Dea also suggested that 'like *AP/RN*, *RM\_D* is not a Sinn Féin publication as such'. Yet, as is well known, *An Phoblacht/Republican News* is one of the party's principle communicative efforts. Equally, information on both can be found prominently on the party's WWW home page, and whilst the list might not be controlled by Sinn Féin, it is nevertheless part of its wider communicative efforts.

The service, which consists of the same messages being sent to the e-mail address of each subscriber, is currently available to anyone who is willing to pay a fee of between £15 and £35 per year. This varies according to the social status of the subscriber, specifically, whether he or she is a student, unemployed, employed, or wishes to be a sponsor. In exchange, subscribers receive an almost daily supply of mailings. However, current subscription prices have dramatically decreased in comparison to those established in 1996 and 1997. At that time, subscriptions also started at £15 but reached a maximum value of £65, and prices varied

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<sup>32</sup> In e-mail, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1998.

according to the subscribers social status and country of origin. However, for computer-mediated communication, the country in which the subscriber is based is completely irrelevant since it does not alter the price of sending electronic messages, which are charged at the flat rate of a local call.

Whilst catering both for the needs of a particular audience which requested the service and acting as an alternative form of communication, the list was originally set up 'to educate and inform. Its concerns? The objective of a just and lasting peace in Ireland.'<sup>33</sup> With no permanent staff, it depends largely on voluntary contributions from republican journalists and sympathisers, as well as extended contributions from the administrator. As O'Dea puts it, 'it is a self-supporting republican news service provided by online republican activists supportive of Sinn Féin'.<sup>34</sup> Although there is no exact record of the number of subscribers to the list, these were estimated in 1997 as numbering 'several hundred', thus making this a relatively small online 'news' service. The administrator does not have information on the demographics of its subscribers, but he states that the United States constitutes the biggest audience for the service, followed by Britain and then Ireland, although it is aimed at 'everyone on the Internet with some interest in Ireland'.<sup>35</sup>

The service was first deployed in the United States to facilitate an exchange of ideas amongst Irish-American republicans, but also it was developed to minimise the distance between international audiences, in particular the USA and the republican movement. At the same time, as argued, the most important target audience for republican online political communication is also based in America. Equally, as the grassroots of the republican movement are predominantly working class and do not have an extended access to online technology, the republican mailing list is not aimed in the first instance at the traditional republican grassroots, unlike print communication.

### Electronic Content

As an alternative news service, the main aim of the republican mailing list is the distribution of 'news' related to the republican movement, Northern Ireland or that which is of interest to Irish republicans. For this purpose, the mailing list regularly sends out e-mails to its subscribers on a daily basis, with the exception of weekends, when a single digest is compiled. These e-mails normally include multiple news reports and other items. When deemed necessary, the service is used to release single news stories which might cover events as these unfold, or to convey

<sup>33</sup> Fergus O'Dea, *RM\_D* administrator, in e-mail, 14<sup>th</sup> October 1997.

<sup>34</sup> Fergus O'Dea, *RM\_D* administrator, in e-mail, 12<sup>th</sup> November 1997.

<sup>35</sup> Fergus O'Dea, *RM\_D* administrator, in e-mail, 14<sup>th</sup> October 1997.

letters from Gerry Adams or party statements, for example. Thus, although the list is not officially integrated into the party's communicative apparatus, it is nevertheless used to release party documentation, commentary or messages.

In terms of the type of information conveyed in the service, each mail digest is divided into two or three, separate categories; these are: Irish news round-up; activist bulletins and one which has been termed here as 'other'. As can be seen from these titles, not only is the service meant to provide 'news', but also it covers issues related to republican activism or support. Thus, the Irish news round-up section would include a series of reports on the most pertinent issues of the time, such as 'Tension in Unionism highlighted at Belfast Parade' (*RM\_D*, 1<sup>st</sup> April 1998), or 'Sinn Féin office attacked' (*RM\_D*, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1997). Included in the Activist Bulletins, is information related to forthcoming events and the organisation of petitions, for instance. Less frequent is the inclusion of other types of messages in the third category, usually special and infrequent topics, such as election results. During the period examined (April and May 1997), 81% of the mailings items were 'news', 14% related to supporting activities, and the remaining 5% concerned other activities. Thus, while primarily functioning as a republican news service, the choice of news items reflects the particular audience it is aimed at. Also, it is utilised to maintain and reinforce republican support of those who receive the service.

Rather than being an actual news service *per se*, the republican mailing list could be described as an amateurish news and republican action list, which seeks to promote and publicise republicanism amongst its audience and to organise its support. This is reflected in the type of stories covered in the bulletins which tend to focus on issues relating to prisoners of war, law and order matters, the RUC and the British Army or are directly related to Sinn Féin. The mailing list is a 'news' service focusing on issues relevant to republicanism or from a republican point of view. In this way, the use of e-mail, as an alternative form of communication also shares similarities with the use of print, whereby issues are covered and adapted to a republican perspective.<sup>36</sup> One subscriber to the list explained that:

on the surface it appears to be a very partial news service because very little of what appears in these news is seen in any mainstream media [ ] I think it has to be partial because there are very few ways to actually get the truth about life in the North of Ireland for nationalists, so much effort has gone into hiding much of the truth by British media that it is essential to get this news out.<sup>37</sup>

Additionally, the list also tries to establish connections with its subscribers and include them in the activities of the republican movement, as can be seen in the following extract:

as part of a larger action, Friends of Roisin McAliskey in NY are initially calling for all

<sup>36</sup> See Chapter Six.

<sup>37</sup> Ken Wake, in e-mail, 10<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

supporters of Roisin McAliskey nation-wide (and indeed world-wide) to go to your local bar, and request that they stop selling Beck's beer to their customers, as a statement of support for The Campaign to Free Roisin McAliskey. [ ] This is part of a call to boycott all German goods, but the focus right now is to boycott the popular, ubiquitous Beck's, at your neighbourhood bar, which is something that can be done easily by everyone everywhere. (*RM\_D*, 27<sup>th</sup> May 1997)

The intimacy that the medium attempts to create with its audience is also visible in the following extract from a report entitled 'A New Home for Feile', where it is stated that, 'Gerry was there to officially open 'Teach Feile', on a day which also celebrated 10 years of the famous West Belfast Festival. [ ] So a big thanks to big Jack and Paddy in Making Belfast Work' (*RM\_D*, 1<sup>st</sup> April 1997). Whilst, another way in which the character of the list is further revealed is in the type of language used. Here, more positive forms of expression are used to describe republican deeds whilst pejorative and negative phrases describe those of the perceived enemy. This is seen in the following two examples: 'the ease with which a masked and uniformed IRA volunteer moved along the republican crowd was again in complete contrast to the nervous British soldiers moving around the town' (*RM\_D*, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1997), in comparison to 'loyalist gangs went on rampage in Ballymena [ ] intimidation and thuggery against mass goers' (*RM\_D*, 26<sup>th</sup> May 1997).

### Conflicting Messages

Although these instances illustrate the type of service provided by *RM\_D*, also highlighted are some of the significant differences between the republican messages conveyed online and those conveyed through other forms of communication. As discussed in Chapter Five, the start of the 1990s, and in particular of the peace process, forced Sinn Féin to re-address how it dealt with what it perceived as its enemies. This resulted in a moderation of the republican language when referring to unionism, loyalism and the British, and is reflected in *An Phoblacht/Republican News* as well as in press releases. In particular, more positive and neutral descriptions began to be used to refer to the 'enemy', and thus mirror Sinn Féin's willingness to negotiate with these groups and find a peaceful solution to the Troubles. However, the same cannot be said of the language and messages that the *RM\_D* list has conveyed. Instead, it continues to describe unionists, loyalists and the British as the cause of the Troubles and does not reflect the party's changed attitude to these. Furthermore, as O'Docherty argued:

when Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams was carefully choosing the terms for his regret at the IRA's mortar attack on the court house in Belfast, earlier this month, a Sinn Féin information staff member was casting the party's line into cyberspace in more celebratory terms: "IRA volunteers carried out an audacious daylight missile attack on Britain's main court-house in occupied Ireland, their most spectacular strike since October!!! their most spectacular since they penetrated the heart of the Britains<sup>38</sup> military apparatus". Even *An Phoblacht* was more guarded in its language than that. (*Belfast Telegraph*, 21<sup>st</sup> January 1997)

<sup>38</sup> Should say British instead of Britain's, mistake in original.

What this shows is that there is a clear disparity in terms of the messages posted on the republican mailing list and those that are made available via other forms of communication and ‘when Northern Ireland political activists broadcast their ideological wares on the Internet they seem to lose the discretion’s they cloak themselves with in any other mass medium. Perhaps it is because of the nature of the medium itself’ (O’Docherty, *Belfast Telegraph*, 21<sup>st</sup> January 1997). The reason for this can be two-fold. Firstly, since these messages are being placed on a republican subscription service, they need to be written in a way which suits that particular audience, and thus, this would have to reflect the interests and opinions of republican supporters. Secondly, as only a limited audience receives these messages, this allows for a less guarded and politically correct content to be publicised. Unlike *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, which can be reached by a more extended audience and, as discussed in Chapter Six, has reflected the political re-alignment of the party, the *RM\_D* has only a few hundred subscribers.

Furthermore as suggested in Chapters Five and Six, control of the message is a crucial facet of the movement’s political communication, yet this seems to be less evident in the case of electronic communication via e-mail. The lack of control over the list has already proved to be one difficulty that Sinn Féin will have to address sometime in the near future. Following a meeting between senior Sinn Féin figure Martin Ferris and republican supporters in the USA in November 1999, a message relaying the events was placed on the republican Discussion Board. The report posted by Jennifer Furey, indicated that Martin Ferris did not believe that the IRA would decommission. She stated on the board that Martin Ferris explained that:

there was a strong possibility the unionism will try to bring down the executive if decom (sic) does not occur. He felt that this would be political suicide for Trimble as the rejectionists already don’t trust him and those few unionists who support the peace process would then be against him as well. (Carroll, *Irish Times*, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1999)

Although Jennifer Furey prefaced her report of Martin Ferris’ address to a group of republican supporters in St. Louis, Missouri US, stating that she did not have her tape recorder with her and was basing the story on notes, the content of her report ‘intimated a republican belief that the executive would continue with two Sinn Féin ministers even if the IRA did not carry out some form of decommissioning’ (Moriarty, *Irish Times*, 20<sup>th</sup> November 1999).

The message was quickly picked up by unionists and the press. Peter Weir, an Anti-Agreement member of the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), claimed that Mr Ferris ‘has truly let the cat out of the bag’ in terms of decommissioning and that ‘Sinn Féin’s anger over the release of the statement is surely the first break in the carefully-planned con job which is being presented to the Ulster people. Their anger is that the truth has been inadvertently revealed’ (Moriarty, *Irish Times*, 20<sup>th</sup> November 1999). The *Daily Telegraph* also reported on the 19<sup>th</sup> November 1999 that the ‘Conflict Goes On, Says IRA Hardliner’ (Harden, 19<sup>th</sup> November 1999). And a British



diplomatic source told the paper that 'his unyielding message was probably designed to appease American hard-liners and did not represent republican policy' (Harnden, 19<sup>th</sup> November 1999:3). The report was later described by Martin Ferris as 'inaccurate and misleading' (Moriarty, *Irish Times*, 20<sup>th</sup> November 1999).

What this instance shows is how the lack of control over republican messages and the way in which these are released can be deeply problematic at times. In this sense, the intense control that Sinn Féin wants to have over the messages it produces and releases, as discussed in Chapter Five, is an attempt to avoid misunderstandings such as these as well as reflect the changed atmosphere in Northern Ireland and republican politics. At the same time, while electronic mail can be a useful feature in communicating politics, for the time being at least, its use is limited and simplistic. Moreover, for as long as communication via electronic mail remains outside the control of the party, it will not be possible to develop a more efficient and secure use for this mode of communication.

### **Overview**

In an era where computer-mediated communication is becoming increasingly more popular Rash claims that:

while traditional politics is still learning how to use the new media of the nets effectively, the indications are clear that the lessons are already starting to take hold. The staffs at political parties are making their online operations a permanent part of their planning, and fewer politicians would consider running a state wide or national campaign that did not include active use of the nets (1997:69).

Within this context, the use of the Internet by Sinn Féin is typical of modern trends in communicating politics. This is also true of the ways in which the party employs the Internet. For example, as Rash notes, most political parties have yet to fully embrace the medium's potential, and are instead, like Sinn Féin, using it in very similar ways to traditional forms of communication by simply placing print documentation on the WWW.

Furthermore, what the Internet can provide for the party is essentially control over the message. In this case, it is not so much that the Internet gives unfiltered access to voters, as most Sinn Féin voters do not have access to the necessary facilities, but that it allows the message to reach more distant audiences and to convey the republican viewpoint more easily to these audiences. In this way, the use of this platform of communication in its WWW version as well as e-mail is predominantly a propaganda tool, whereby a republican message is relayed in the best possible way.

In parallel, a continual bid to ensure that the voice of Irish republicanism and Sinn Féin is

uncensored and free from interference has also brought important considerations to the designing of its pages and, more importantly, to its content and language. Nevertheless, by playing an important role in ensuring that the perceived bias of the mainstream media is overturned, it operates by reinforcing the principles of Irish republicanism, maintaining and strengthening the support and interest of its members. Thus, while the republican use of the Internet has improved, albeit undramatically, since its inception in 1994, it is also illustrative of the increased sophistication of the approach to communicating politics. Moreover, it demonstrates an understanding of what the widening of communication strategies, messages and audiences can bring to the success of a political party, as evident in the examination of other republican communicative efforts. Bill Harp from the Northern Aid Group in Chicago comments that:

the Internet has made it much easier to disseminate information quickly and to organise letter writing, fax and e-mail campaigns – to publicise events with little notice. It's mainly the speed of access to news and to people with similar interests. Mainly people do research on the web and then post their news analysis on the bulletin boards, which is a great way of keeping everyone up to date.<sup>39</sup>

However, republican use of electronic mail has raised a number of problems for the party. Despite the usefulness of having a variety of forms of communication which are all focused in conveying and repeating the republican message, these can only be beneficial for the movement as long as they also reflect party policy and changed strategies. This means that in order for Sinn Féin's political communication to succeed, it is essential that it conveys a coherent message that has been carefully crafted and controlled, unlike the republican use of e-mail. Clearly, the new electronic media have become an integral part of republican communication efforts. However, to develop and maintain the image of an organised and professional party that is now prepared to engage in meaningful and peaceful negotiations, it is also vital that the messages conveyed fully and repeatedly replicate this. The failure to do so can potentially mean that incoherent republican policy is exposed both by other politicians as well as by the media, and can ultimately challenge the success of republican communicative efforts and its politics.

Moreover, whilst Chapters Five, Six and Seven, looked at a variety of communicative examples covering a number of different techniques and platforms of communication, similar tendencies for each emerged. The predominant trend is undoubtedly the improving level of professionalisation and sophistication of republican communicative efforts and its practices of communicating politics. This has been noted at a variety of levels, not just in terms of the diversity of its communicative practices but also in the quality of such endeavours. At the same time, although the party has had to operate at the margins of society, with limited resources and

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<sup>39</sup> Bill Harp, Northern Aid Group, Chicago, in e-mail 13<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

a restricted freedom imposed by the government's attempts to subvert the republican movement, it has nevertheless successfully overcome some of these restrictions and developed sophisticated communication practices.

However, the party's move away from the armed campaign towards more constitutional forms of politics from the late 1980s onwards, culminated with a new approach to the Northern Irish conflict and a willingness to search for a solution through peaceful means. Such a transformation in party policy and strategy was also reflected in its communicative efforts, whereby messages from the 1990s clearly emphasised the party's political role and its place in the peace process. Nevertheless, there is an added dimension to the development of its communicative practices in response to the modified position it occupies in society. The party's integration in the peace process and mainstream politics has crucially meant that it no longer sees the need to use some of the alternative forms of communication it explored in the 1980s, namely the different print publications it produced. Instead, the combination of *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, the Internet and, more importantly, the mainstream media are now seen as effective ways to convey the republican message. This is clearly a sign that from a republican perspective there have been dramatic changes in Northern Ireland and in Sinn Féin's position within the province. Significantly, the shift by the party away from military tactics to political tactics has meant that to some extent it now 'trusts' what used to be a highly biased media responsible for reproducing dominant British ideology.

Ultimately, as Peter Snow has suggested, Sinn Féin is 'a thoroughly professional organisation in terms of PR',<sup>40</sup> which has recognised the modified environment in which it finds itself and the need to re-think its communicative efforts. These now reflect Sinn Féin's new political strategy and positioning, and the vital role it plays in the peace process. Nevertheless, its efforts in communicating politics, either in the 1980s or in the 1990s, have always shown an intrinsic relationship between republican messages and party strategy. In particular, this has been perceptible through the multiple uses and roles that have been awarded over time to identical forms of communication, as well as a careful targeting and adaptation of the message to suit the audience and medium. In this sense, the evolution of the party's communicative practices have been dovetailed with the party's own development.

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<sup>40</sup> From the *BBC*, in letter, 26<sup>th</sup> January 1996.

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## ***Part III: Reporting Sinn Féin***

## Chapter Eight: Three Years of News

Politics as we know it is inconceivable without the news media. They are the central forum of political communication in modern liberal democracies. Battles for favourable news coverage are a major arena in political conflicts. (Tiffen, 1989:178)

Whilst political communication has become crucial to the success of political parties, equally relevant is their presence in the news media and in particular, their communication with the public. This means that in order to succeed politically, and to become prominent and influential political actors, it is not sufficient for parties to communicate their politics or to develop a professional communication strategy although, as already discussed, this is an important starting point. It is equally crucial to access the news agenda and to feature prominently across newspapers, television and radio. Thus, one of the main aims of the sophisticated communication of politics has been to assist parties and politicians to access the news agenda and appear on the news. Yet, the ability to do so also hinges on whether or not these organisations are deemed sufficiently relevant to be included in the news. As Miller has argued:

it is evident that the media are regarded as a very important element in the struggle for power and resources in Northern Ireland by most if not all of the participants in the conflict. That is why public relations are central parts of the campaigning and legitimating strategies of those organisations. (1994:246)

Consequently, once access is secured, party strategists can then attempt to influence the way in which their organisation and its representatives are portrayed in the news through so-called public relations strategies.<sup>1</sup>

### Framework of Analysis

It has already been argued in this thesis that Sinn Féin has, over the years, developed a professional and sophisticated approach to communication, and that this was particularly noticeable from the early 1990s onwards with the start of the peace process.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the professionalisation of its communicative practices has been visible at a number of different levels, namely in changes in the structure and role of the republican press office and in the growth of the number of press officers. In addition, it has been suggested that underpinning republican communication strategies is an understanding of the different target audiences for republican messages and the different platforms of communication through which these can be expressed. Equally important are the aims behind such communicative efforts, which can range from the provision of basic information, to the manipulation and persuasion of the audience.

Other developments have also been noted in the actual republican communicative efforts and

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter Three.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter Five.

practices, such as enhancing the quality of press releases and print communication.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Sinn Féin has recently demonstrated a commitment to computer-mediated communication as an added avenue to publicise the republican message.<sup>4</sup> Underlying these changes in the party's communicative practices have been more deep-seated transformations not only within the party but also in the national and international political arena, as discussed in detail in Chapter Four. Indeed, Ruane and Todd have recently alluded to this evolution within the republican movement:

the success of an electoral strategy after the hunger strikes of 1981, the increasing influence of the Irish government in Northern Ireland, the threatened marginalisation of republicans after the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 and stalemate in the armed struggle, made for changes in both strategy and in ideology. With the Peace Process of the 1990s, these changes accelerated. (1999:56)

Ultimately, the outcome has been a departure from former methods and approaches in the quest for a united Ireland. The party has largely committed itself to more constitutional and democratic avenues and engaged in debate with the different communities and politicians. However, the sporadic recourse to violence was described by a republican supporter as the use of 'strictly modulated military activity' (McKittrick, *Independent*, 10<sup>th</sup> April 1998), and not a continued use of the armed struggle. As Sinn Féin's leader, Gerry Adams, has suggested:

what is required is an approach which creates political conditions in which, for the first time, the Irish people can reach a democratic accommodation, in which the consent and agreement of both nationalists and unionists can be achieved, in which a process of nationalist reconciliation and healing can begin. (20<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> April 1994 in 1997:51)

The question that remains is whether this political re-directioning and increased professionalisation has resulted in a *de facto* improved media coverage. In addition, it is also important to consider the extent to which media coverage has been influenced by Sinn Féin's move away from the armed struggle and the implications this might have had upon how other political actors, such as the British government, regard the party. The answers to these questions are particularly important for two reasons: firstly, because there has been a traditional tendency to dismiss republicans from the news agenda, or to portray them in a negative and biased manner.<sup>5</sup> In fact, Niall O'Dowd, editor of the American newspaper the *Irish Voice*, has argued that a 'self-censorship mentality' has 'permeated much of the media' (in Adams, 1997:1). Furthermore, media coverage of Northern Ireland has also tended to award preferential treatment to unionists, repeatedly emphasising Sinn Féin's association with the IRA. As Vincent Browne from the *Irish Times* commented, 'media coverage of Sinn Féin is generally hopelessly biased against them',<sup>6</sup> whilst another journalist suggested that Sinn Féin has always received

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter Six.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter Seven.

<sup>5</sup> See Curtis (1984); Henderson *et al.* (1990); Lago (1998), Miller (1994); Rolston and Miller (1996).

<sup>6</sup> In survey, 7<sup>th</sup> April 1998.

'largely hostile coverage in all national press'.<sup>7</sup>

This means that to further understand and assess republican communicative efforts,<sup>8</sup> it is also necessary to examine the party's news coverage. Such an examination will help to determine some of the effects that the professionalisation and sophistication of Sinn Féin's communicative apparatus and strategies has had upon the news. However, whilst media strategies play an important role in influencing the media coverage of political parties, there are other factors which must be considered. In assessing the party's portrayal in the news, it is therefore important to account the communication strategies employed, but also the political situation.

### The Study of News

The aim of this chapter is then to determine Sinn Féin's media coverage and to relate this to its media strategies and its changed position in Northern Irish politics. To do this, the chapter looks at news coverage of both Sinn Féin and its leader Gerry Adams over a three-year period, 1996-1998, concentrating solely on quantitative data for print news. Television news was excluded from this study, as it was not possible to access a reliable database that would provide the necessary quantitative figures for republican appearances on television news over the period examined.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the chapter determines and analyses the quantitative republican presence in print news, whilst qualitative contextualisation is also provided. The focus lies on republican coverage, although comparative analysis was also drawn with the three other main Northern Irish political parties and their respective leaders (UUP, SDLP and Democratic Unionist Party - DUP; David Trimble, John Hume and Ian Paisley).

The quantitative data on media coverage of the different parties and leaders was obtained from the *FT* (Financial Times) *Profile* database,<sup>10</sup> which included the newspapers used in this study in full text complete format, including the entire newspapers rather than only particular sections of them. Twelve newspapers were selected on the basis of their availability in the database, as well as their suitability for the study.<sup>11</sup> Thus, of the 12 newspapers examined, eight were British

<sup>7</sup> Unknown journalistic source, in survey, 1998.

<sup>8</sup> See Chapters Five, Six and Seven.

<sup>9</sup> For example, information on the content of *BBC* news bulletins has to be purchased at extremely high prices, and in 1996, I paid £100 for access to 6 months of news data in print format. Also, as far as could be ascertained, there is not a single database which can provide quantitative information on the news coverage for the major news bulletins for British terrestrial television.

<sup>10</sup> This is the largest on-line information library/database, covering over 6000 sources and was accessed on-line from the library at the University of Stirling on a one-week free trial basis. At time of writing there are very few databases which can provide accurate and comprehensive data for British newspapers, and some like *Profound* or *FT Discovery* are not sufficiently comprehensive nor do they cover extended periods of time or samples of papers. In addition, it is important to realise that even existent databases do not necessarily provide identical results. This is related to whether they cover the entire newspaper or simply some sections of it, but also to the system of indexing the information and the search system used. The current existing limitations on sources of data for British newspapers should be noted, as well as the differences in results that can be obtained from these. This means that similar attempts to determine print news coverage are fraught with difficulties. Thus, current database provision for information of this nature is insufficient for the needs of communication and media researchers.

<sup>11</sup> The selection of newspapers from the database started by determining, in the first instance, those which were English, Northern Irish or Scottish newspapers and were held in full text format. This process drastically reduced the number of newspapers that could

national papers, three were Scottish and one was Irish.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, the sample also included broadsheet and tabloid newspapers in their daily and Sunday editions, as seen in Table 3.

The database was used to conduct automatic searches to determine the number of stories in which each political party and their respective leader was mentioned in the different newspapers over the three years. In addition, searches were conducted for the term 'IRA' and for the number of times the term 'Sinn Féin' appeared in the same story as the term 'IRA'. These results are particularly important since, historically, media coverage of republicanism has tended to focus on the military activities of the IRA and has neglected examination of Sinn Féin other than in a context related to the IRA. This meant that 360<sup>13</sup> searches<sup>14</sup> were individually performed and their respective results are presented in Table 10 (Appendix Five, p.297). For example, the figures obtained from searching the *FT* database indicated the number of stories in which Sinn Féin appeared in the *Irish Times* in the year of 1998.

	Edition		Type		Origin		
	Daily	Sunday	Broadsheet	Tabloid	British	Scottish	Irish
the <i>Daily Record</i>	√			√		√	
the <i>Guardian</i>	√		√		√		
the <i>Herald</i>	√		√			√	
the <i>Irish Times</i>	√		√				√
the <i>Mirror</i>	√			√	√		
the <i>Observer</i>		√	√		√		
<i>Scotland on Sunday</i>		√	√			√	
the <i>Sunday Mirror</i>		√		√	√		
the <i>Sunday Telegraph</i>		√	√		√		
the <i>Sunday Times</i>		√	√		√		
the <i>Telegraph</i>	√		√		√		
the <i>Times</i>	√		√		√		

**Table 3: Newspaper Sample**

This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, an historical overview of the period from 1996 to 1998 is outlined, whilst section two focuses on presenting and analysing the findings that emerged from the database searches and contextualising these with qualitative evidence. The chapter ends with a brief overview of the main findings and considers future developments of news coverage of Sinn Féin.

be used in the study, as very few of them are held in full text format.

<sup>12</sup> Although the research concentrated on examining the party's presence in the British print news, for comparative purposes the analysis also included the *Irish Times*.

<sup>13</sup> This number results from the combination of searches for each party and leader across each newspaper and in each of the three different years.

<sup>14</sup> Simple search methods were used for Sinn Féin, Gerry Adams, David Trimble, John Hume and Ian Paisley. Combined search methods were used for the remaining as follows: IRA or Irish Republican Army; SDLP or Social Democratic Labour Party; UUP or Ulster Unionist Party or Ulster Unionists or Ulster Unionist; DUP or Democratic Unionist Party or Democratic Unionists or Democratic Unionist; Sinn Féin and IRA or Irish Republican Army. The different ways in which these searches were conducted reflect the terminology which the newspapers themselves use in referring to the various organisations.



## **Historical Overview** <sup>15</sup>

At both the political and the social levels, 1996, 1997 and 1998 were characterised by a mixture of intense turmoil, political frustration and long delays for Northern Irish politics. As the content of journalism is but a mediated and negotiated response to events, where, alongside personal and organisational influences, output is also determined by political and social circumstances,<sup>16</sup> inevitably, the events of the three years, also influenced the content of the news. This means that there is little to gain from looking at media coverage and trying to understand what it represents in an isolated manner without first considering the political process taking place at the same time. Moreover, this brief historical background also serves as a starting point to contextualise the quantitative and qualitative findings on Sinn Féin's presence in the news, which are subsequently presented and discussed.

## **The Legacy of the Early 1990s**

Underlying the main political and social events that occurred between 1996 and 1998 was the impasse that emerged during 1995, when the British government, then a Conservative administration, blocked the development of the peace process.<sup>17</sup> A few years earlier, on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1993, the British and Irish governments issued the *Downing Street Declaration*, which acknowledged the concerns of both unionists and loyalists, as well as nationalists and republicans. The declaration, signalling a dramatic departure from the government's historic view of the conflict and its approach to the issue, outlined the main principles underpinning a possible settlement (Ruane and Todd, 1999). Sinn Féin's view of the document, was expressed by its leader Gerry Adams as follows:

there is nationalist rhetoric in the document, but even here have the British merely conceded the wording of certain irresistible concepts, and then, by qualification, rendered them meaningless? Can these generalities be reduced to practicalities? One commentator called the Declaration a masterful piece of ambiguity, which would be fair enough if we are dealing only with words, but we are dealing with a life and death situation that affects all of the people of Ireland. Do these words signal a process? If so, what is it? (22<sup>nd</sup> December 1993 – 4<sup>th</sup> January 1994 in 1997:38-39)

Despite Sinn Féin's somewhat guarded reception of the declaration, republicans nevertheless decided to consider what the document offered in their quest for Irish unity, in particular, since they argued that politicians from all the different parties had to concentrate their efforts in creating the necessary conditions which would bring an end to the conflict (Adams, 1997).

Subsequently, at the 1994 party's Árd Fheis, Martin McGuinness stated that 'our message today is clear. Republicans want peace. Republicans demand peace. Republicans are united, determined, and strong and looking into the future' (24<sup>th</sup> July 1994 in Adams, 1997:87). This

<sup>15</sup> This is but a very brief overview of events between 1996 and 1998, see also Chapters Four and Nine and the Chronology in Appendix Two, p.279.

<sup>16</sup> See Eldridge (1993); Eittema *et al.* (1997); McNair (1998); Schudson (1997); Tiffen (1989) or Tumber (1999).

<sup>17</sup> See Mallie and McKittrick (1996) or Ruane and Todd (1999).

indicated that Sinn Féin recognised the new and emerging opportunities to bring peace to Northern Ireland, whilst stressing their changed political stance. A few days after the publication of the declaration, Gerry Adams wrote in his regular *Irish Voice* column what can essentially be seen as a response to the joint government's proposals. Here, he stated:

the Peace Process is on course, and we are determined to move it forward. Sinn Féin's position on the Downing Street Declaration is a balanced assessment. The two governments never said that the Declaration was a solution. The governments acknowledged that the right of any party to take whatever views it wanted, and our approach has been to identify the positive elements which can be built upon and to isolate the areas of concern which need to be overcome. This is a positive and considered approach. (27<sup>th</sup> July – 9<sup>th</sup> August 1994 in 1997:88)

As any republican participation in the peace talks would require a cessation of violence, the IRA declared a cease-fire on the 31<sup>st</sup> August 1994, following an extensive period of clarification.<sup>18</sup> According to Gerry Adams (1997), this was welcomed throughout the world as offering a unique opportunity for a lasting solution to the Troubles. A few months later, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 1995, the British and Irish governments outlined in the *Joint Framework Document* a series of proposals for a constitutional and institutional settlement for Northern Ireland. For Sinn Féin and Gerry Adams, this 'heralds(ed) the beginning of a new phase' (1<sup>st</sup> - 7<sup>th</sup> March 1995 in 1997:124).

Issued primarily as a discussion document which would form the basis of the peace talks, according to Sinn Féin it also outlined the recognition by both governments that the partition of Ireland had failed and the political framework for the future pointed towards a united Ireland (Adams, 1997). Since the document stressed the importance of co-operation and integration between the North and South of Ireland, it was later rejected by unionists who saw it as being pro-republican and as threatening the continuation of Northern Ireland in the British Union. Unionists had, from the start of the peace process, been deeply sceptical about any negotiation on the status of the Province and doubted republican commitment to peaceful means. Yet, there were also other issues at stake. Of particular concern was the emphasis placed on North-South co-operation and what unionists saw as the meddling of the Irish government in Northern Ireland's affairs. Such suspicion ultimately resulted in the resignation of James Molyneux as the leader of the UUP, as he was considered to be too lenient. He was replaced on the 8<sup>th</sup> September 1995, by the current party leader, David Trimble, a hard-line unionist who had contributed to bringing down the Sunningdale Agreement of 1973 (Ruane and Todd, 1999).

### **The End of the IRA Cease-Fire**

Meanwhile, despite an IRA cease-fire, the British government continued to prevent the talks from moving forward, on the justification that Sinn Féin's participation in any peace process

<sup>18</sup> See Mallie and McKittrick (1996).

was dependent on the prior-decommissioning of IRA weapons. In raising the demands for Sinn Féin's entry into the negotiating process, it repeatedly stalled the start of the talks whilst ensuring continued unionist support for its fragile majority.<sup>19</sup> From a republican perspective, the British government's reluctance and continued insistence on prior-decommissioning also indicated a lack of understanding for the movement and the difficult position in which it found itself, having to carefully balance constitutional politics with an armed strategy, without alienating the IRA:

the British government and others may be miscalculating the IRA's position on decommissioning, or the Sinn Féin leadership's room to manoeuvre on this issue. If this is so, they do so with the benefit of having heard at first hand from Sinn Féin that the IRA will not decommission or surrender its weapons to anyone as a pre-condition for all-party talks. This is not a negotiating position. The reality is that Sinn Féin has no room to manoeuvre on this issue. (Adams, 9<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> August 1995 in 1997:171)

By the end of August 1995, Adams was still warning that the British government's continued stalling of the peace process, and its failure to respond to the IRA's 1994 cease-fire could have dramatic consequences since the 'widespread optimism that there would be a peace settlement has been replaced by an increasing dismay at London's negative and minimalist response and the allied intransigence of the unionist leadership' (20<sup>th</sup> August – 5<sup>th</sup> September 1995 in 1997:178). From a republican perspective, the difficulties that the peace process was facing were the responsibility of the British government, aggravated by unionist intransigence. The frustration and dismay within the republican movement eventually incited the IRA to detonate a massive bomb in Canary Wharf, the heart of London's financial district, on the 9<sup>th</sup> February 1996. Marking the end of the IRA's 17-month cease-fire, it killed two people, caused widespread destruction and millions of pounds worth of damage. In the statement following the attack, the IRA said that 'instead of embracing the Peace Process, the British government acted in bad faith with Mr. Major and the unionist leaders squandering this unprecedented opportunity to resolve the conflict' (in Sinn Féin, 1998).

During an emergency meeting between John Hume, Gerry Adams and the IRA on the 28<sup>th</sup> February 1996, the two leaders emphasised to the IRA leadership that despite the failures of the British government, it was important to restore the cease-fire if any progress was to be made. As Adams subsequently noted, whilst the British government's reluctance was an important factor in ending the cease-fire, there were also other issues at stake:

what then had ended the cessation, we asked. The consistent bad faith of the British government and the placing of new preconditions were seen as evidence that the British were waging war by other means and that they were seeking to fracture Irish republicanism and to split the IRA. The open provocation of the punitive attitude to

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<sup>19</sup> In the later stages of ruling, the Conservative government was only able to maintain a majority in Westminster with the votes of the unionist MP's. This meant that the government found itself in a very difficult position whereby in order to survive it had to ensure it did not alienate unionists.

Irish prisoners alongside the release of the British paratrooper Lee Clegg and the attitude of the RUC on the ground were all irritants. However, it was the absence of real negotiations that crucially undermined the cessation because this undermined one of the two essential elements that had led to the cessation in the first place. (6<sup>th</sup> –12<sup>th</sup> March 1996 in 1997:209-210)

Ultimately, Sinn Féin suggested that the resumption of military activities was a direct consequence of the British ineptitude in responding ‘imaginatively and generously’ to the cease-fire and instead, giving in to unionist concerns’ (Sinn Féin, 1998). According to the Sinn Féin leader, for the peace process to advance it was necessary to overcome the existent republican lack of trust in the government. It also suggested that the peace talks had to start immediately and so-called confidence-building measures had to be introduced speedily (Adams, 1997).

Adams also commented that:

we need a new approach by the British government that is positive and in good faith, an approach that enables, facilitates and encourages agreement among all the Irish people. If the mistrust of generations, deepened by eighteen months of bad faith, is to be overcome, the Irish government, supported by international opinion, must guarantee that the British are no longer allowed to abuse and manipulate any reconstructed Peace Process for their own selfish political interests. Without clear and firm guidance at government level there is no prospect of resolving these problems. A proper structure and process of negotiations must be created and used in the most constructive manner. (10<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> April 1996 in 1997:213)

Although the re-instatement of the IRA’s campaign was one of many bleak moments in the troubled history of Northern Ireland, it nevertheless placed a new impetus on the search for peace (Ruane and Todd, 1999:7). On February 28<sup>th</sup> 1996, John Major and the Irish Taoiseach announced the date for the start of the all-party talks as June 10<sup>th</sup> 1996. Although this signalled that some progress had finally been made and that the resumption of the IRA’s military campaign had forced the process to move forwards, to satisfy growing unionists demands and suspicion, participation in the talks would be determined by an election, that would take place later that year. For *Irish Times* journalist, Deáglan de Bréadún, this ‘insistence of the British government, egged on by unionists’ was the second difficulty in the birth of the talks<sup>20</sup> (1998).

### **The Start of the Talks Process**

In the elections to the Northern Ireland Forum, which took place in May 1996, Sinn Féin polled a record vote with 15%, securing 17 seats at the Assembly. These results suggested that despite the renewed IRA campaign, Sinn Féin was clearly one of the election winners, having increased its local election results by 3% since the 1993 local elections. This success was further enhanced by a poor unionist vote which splintered at the polling booth, as well as disappointing individual results for the SDLP and the UUP with 21% and 24%, respectively. Despite Sinn Féin’s electoral success, republicans were still not allowed to join the negotiating table, as the pre-

<sup>20</sup> The first was the longstanding issue of IRA decommissioning before Sinn Féin’s entry into the talks process.

condition of decommissioning by the IRA was maintained by an increasingly weak government, although 'on the nationalist and Irish government side, the general view echoed that of a government adviser, that talks were 'not worth a penny candle' without Sinn Féin' (Ruane and Todd, 1999:7).

As Deáglan de Bréadún suggested, 'the talks had a difficult birth and emerged under peculiar and contradictory circumstances. For some time, Sinn Féin was pressing the slogan: "All-party talks now", but ironically, when the demand was granted, Sinn Féin was kept out' (1998). Although Sinn Féin was not included in the initial negotiating process, this was not sufficient to appease unionist discontent, principally surrounding the nomination of what they saw as an Irish-American agent, Senator George Mitchell, as Chairman of the talks. Moreover, the shape in which the talks were to proceed also started to become obvious, with unionists constantly rejecting proposals and continuing to refuse to talk directly with Sinn Féin. Yet, it was not just the UUP which was dissatisfied with the need to negotiate what they saw as being un-negotiable - British sovereignty of Northern Ireland - as this also extended to the DUP which decided to abandon the talks.

The rest of 1996 saw 'reporters and camera crews whiled away perfectly good summer and autumn evenings covering the futile endeavour' (Deáglan de Bréadún, 1998), while the threat of violence continued to lurk in the background. Of particular importance and extreme sensitivity were the annual Orange Order marches and nationalist objections to these,<sup>21</sup> as well as the continued paramilitary activity by both republican and loyalist groups. It was also during the summer of 1996 that some of the most violent clashes between loyalist groups and the security forces were witnessed. The main reason for loyalist discontent was linked to the RUC's refusal to allow the Orange Order to march down the nationalist Garvachy Road in Portadown. As Bew and Gillespie (1996) have suggested, the RUC's refusal to allow the Orange Order to march through their traditional routes via nationalist communities was seen by the unionist community as a direct threat to their identity. Such decisions were also seen as deliberate attempts to pacify the republican movement.

However, following three days of loyalist rioting at Drumcree, and unable to contain the violence which was spreading throughout the Province, the RUC was forced to allow the Orange Order to march along the Garvachy Road, to the dismay of the nationalist community, signalling that loyalist/unionist intransigence would ultimately be rewarded. By then, the

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<sup>21</sup> Republican objections to Orange Order marches are not so much focused upon the marches themselves, but on the fact that these should not take place in nationalist areas. Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams has stated that 'I have no problem with orange parades. I have problems at their incursions into sensitive areas, and I have no time for the sectarian overtones of their cheerleaders, but I have defended their right to march, and I will do so again, provided that they are not involved in coat-trailing exercises' (12<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> July 1994 in 1997:79).

impasse of the talks process and the continued exclusion of Sinn Féin from the Northern Ireland's Forum first meeting, on the 14<sup>th</sup> June 1996, had already resulted in further IRA activities. More specifically, another two bombs exploded on the 15<sup>th</sup> of June, one in the heart of Manchester, which destroyed a large part of the city centre and injured over 200 people, and a smaller one in Germany. A few months later, on the 7<sup>th</sup> October, the IRA detonated two further bombs at the British Army headquarters in Lisburn, County Antrim, killing one soldier. Although the start of the Northern Ireland Forum indicated a renewed commitment by the British government, its increasingly weak majority meant that the negotiation process would continue to be plagued by the same outstanding issue - the decommissioning of IRA weapons.

### **A New Attempt for 1997**

In a bid to salvage the peace process, Gerry Adams and John Hume presented a document at the end of 1996 to the British Prime Minister, John Major. In it, they outlined what they saw as the only way to resume the 'path to peace': by seriously addressing a number of crucial issues which blocked developments and by making a commitment to find an acceptable solution to both communities through an inclusive and egalitarian process. More specifically, the nationalist leaders proposed the removal of decommissioning as a precondition to Sinn Féin's entry into the talks on the grounds that without Sinn Féin's presence, a lasting solution to the Troubles could not be found. They also argued that the party should be allowed entry into the talks on the same basis as all other parties, guaranteed through their electoral mandate. Other important demands were the need to create a realistic time-frame for the development of the talks, with pre-determined phases for the different stages of the process, and that a commitment should be made to implement immediate confidence-building measures (Adams, 1997). However, despite this concerted nationalist effort, as Adams subsequently stressed in his regular *Irish Voice* column:

John Major has taken considerable time to respond. Six weeks is a very long time in politics. If and when he does respond, there is real worry that his response will be aimed more at Tory public opinion [ ] Mr. Major must respond adequately, in the spirit of what is required, and in good faith. That's the only way to do business. (27<sup>th</sup> November - 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1997 in 1997:233)

Notwithstanding renewed nationalist efforts to inject a new life into the stale peace process, the IRA bombing campaign or its threat continued throughout the first half of 1997, in a bid to force the government to rethink its policy on Northern Ireland. However, what the republican movement could not control or influence was the weakened position of John Major's government in Westminster that had 'forced' it to ally with the unionists. The fast approaching general election, which the Tories look set to lose, put further pressure upon the British government and largely shifted its attention away from Northern Ireland.

Although there was still some occasional IRA activity throughout the earlier part of 1997, the IRA opted to change its tactics in the period leading up to the general election, and on 3<sup>rd</sup> April, it caused widespread disruption on a number of English motorways when it issued a warning that it had placed a number of bombs on the M1, M5 and M6. This resulted in the closure of sections of these three major motorways whilst extensive police searches were conducted, although no devices were found. Rather than engage in an active military campaign, which could cause widespread destruction and casualties and alienate potential Sinn Féin voters, the IRA instead opted to use the threat of violence, causing extensive disruption and catapulting the republican movement onto the news. A more carefully planned stunt was the threat of an IRA bomb at the Aintree Grand National on the 5<sup>th</sup> April 1997, only a few days after the motorways incident. In jeopardising a major sporting event, covered live on television, less than one month before the British general election the IRA timed this operation to raise maximum publicity without causing any damage or casualties. Journalist To Harden, from the *Telegraph*, commented that:

this new tactic of disrupting a major mainland sporting event straddles the divide between the two elements of the Armalite and Ballot Box strategy. The growing sophistication of Sinn Féin's political strategy has meant that violence has become selective and carefully timed. The "Tactical Use of the Armed Struggle" is like two taps – one on the mainland and the other in Northern Ireland – to be turned on and off at will. It is a delicate balancing act, however, because too much politics leads to dissent from unreconstructed militarists in the IRA, while a terrorist outrage loses Sinn Féin friends in the Irish Republic and America. (7<sup>th</sup> April, 1997)

Whilst Conservatives continued to wallow in their fragile minority, the Labour Party, confident of winning the imminent elections, began to signal that if elected, it would adopt a new approach to the peace process. More importantly, it indicated that unlike the Tories, they would be prepared to offer Sinn Féin a swift entry into the negotiating process without any preconditions other than the re-establishment of the 1994 IRA cease-fire. For the electoral contest itself, in a continual bid to pursue a pan-nationalist agenda and to put more pressure on its main electoral rival, the SDLP, Sinn Féin tried to forge an electoral pact with the SDLP in the search for a reinforced nationalist performance. Although the SDLP was unwilling to even consider such a deal as it feared alienating some of its more traditional voters, for Adams it 'would change the face of electoral politics here forever' (26<sup>th</sup> March – 1<sup>st</sup> April 1997 in Adams, 1997:238). Although the SDLP, and John Hume, had assisted and accompanied Sinn Féin's progressive move into the realm of constitutional politics and had jointly initiated the peace process, the possibility of an electoral pact between the two parties still remained highly improbable.

### **A Promising Future With a New British Government**

The main event which was to change the course of Northern Irish history came in May 1997

with the election of the Labour Party to government. Unlike its Conservative predecessors it was supported by a substantial majority and saw the election of a new Prime Minister, Tony Blair, and a new Northern Irish Secretary of State, Mo Mowlam. As the new government was committed to ending the Troubles and bringing peace to Northern Ireland, 'the condition of prior IRA decommissioning was waived and it was stated that Sinn Féin would be admitted to a new round of talks in September if a cease-fire took place some weeks earlier' (Ruane and Todd, 1999:8).

This indicated a new departure from John Major's approach whereby the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons was a prerequisite to the start of negotiations. Equally important in changing the mood within Northern Irish politics was Sinn Féin's own electoral results, where it became the third largest party in the Province, overtaking the DUP, despite the IRA's continued campaign.<sup>22</sup> At the polling booths, Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness were also elected to Westminster Parliament, reinforcing the calls that the party should be included in the negotiation process because of their strengthened electoral mandate. In addition to this, the nationalist turnout at the election was also the biggest since the partition of Ireland and saw the SDLP's best election results ever. The commitments that both the SDLP and Sinn Féin had made to peace, had been rewarded. Sinn Féin were particularly gratified by seeing their electoral results increase by 6%. The combined votes of the two major unionist parties, the UUP and the DUP, had decreased by 1%,<sup>23</sup> whilst the combined 'vote of Sinn Féin and the SDLP had increased by 7% since the 1992 general election.

The IRA responded to the changing circumstances with the reinstatement of the 1994 cease-fire, on 20<sup>th</sup> July 1997. Even so, To Harden from the *Telegraph* criticised this as 'designed to shore up the "pan-nationalist front" and exert maximum pressure on a new British government to admit Sinn Féin into talks on its own terms' (7<sup>th</sup> April, 1997). Nevertheless, as Gerry Adams (1997) himself suggested, although its peace strategy aimed to end the conflict and the existent inequalities and divisions between the different people of Northern Ireland, Sinn Féin's ultimate aims in the talks were to secure maximum constitutional change and end British sovereignty of Ireland. At the same time, regarding the prospects of reaching an agreement, he commented:

am I optimistic? I am a realist. These are difficult and dangerous but challenging times. Making peace is not easy. But I have learned that sometimes the optimism of the will must overcome the pessimism of the intellect. That is how we got to this point. So this can be the beginning of the end to conflict in our country. If the political will exists to make it happen. (23<sup>rd</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> July 1997 in 1997:263)

<sup>22</sup> See Table 2, p.66.

<sup>23</sup> In the 1992 general election, the UUP polled 35% and the DUP 13%. In the 1997 election, the parties polled 33% and 14%, respectively. On the other hand, in the 1992 election the SDLP polled 23% and in the 1997, 24%, whilst Sinn Féin polled 10% and 16%, respectively.



Despite the commitment of Sinn Féin and the IRA to the peace process, the UUP continued to refuse to negotiate directly with Sinn Féin although the latter commented that:

Sinn Féin wants to see the unionist parties at the negotiating table in September. We want unionists there because peace in Ireland and a genuine peace settlement is best and most speedily achieved by unionists playing a full and active part in bringing that about. We urge the leaders of Unionism to open their minds to the possibilities created by the new situation we are in. We are asking them to negotiate with us. Sinn Féin is not threatening the unionists' heritage or identity. (Adams, 1997:265)

On the 9<sup>th</sup> September 1997, Sinn Féin finally entered the all-party talks when these resumed after the summer break. Chaired by Senator George Mitchell, the main parties attending the process were the UUP, the PUP and the UDP, which together held just over 56% of the unionist vote, whilst Sinn Féin and the SDLP represented most of the nationalist community, and thus had a much stronger mandate at the negotiating table. Moreover, although nationalists seemed to be willing to participate and engage in the peace process, unionists on the other hand were split on its benefits, with the DUP and the UKUP abandoning the negotiating table. Although some of the initial obstacles had been overcome, the first few months of the talks were still fraught with difficulties. Particularly noticeable was the lack of meaningful negotiation amongst the parties and the continued unionist refusal to talk directly with Sinn Féin.

At the same time, the deep-seated suspicion between nationalists and unionists was still evident, despite signs of a dramatic departure from traditional British government policy towards the republican movement. In December 1997, to the dismay of unionists, who continued to see Sinn Féin as nothing more than a 'mouthpiece' for a 'terrorist' organisation, republican leaders visited number 10 Downing Street for the first time in 75 years, an event that accorded Sinn Féin and its representatives the status of a legitimate party. Overall, even if 1997 had somewhat of a bleak start, the election of the Labour government was a strong indication that, finally, significant progress could be made.

### **An Agreement in Sight**

As Ruane and Todd (1999) have stressed, during the initial period of the talks, the parties were polarised, yet agreement was still reached in April 1998 after a painstakingly slow process, during which 'the cliché in the early days of the Stormont talks was that it was like watching paint dry. But a dark eminence from one of the government teams rephrased it to the more accurate: "It's like listening to paint dry" (de Bréadún, 1998). From January until mid-April, the pace of the talks was slow and described as tediously boring by some of the attending journalists (de Bréadún, 1998.). Underlying the process was the principle of 'sufficient consensus', whereby progress would be made on the basis of a joint unionist and nationalist majority, not in terms of an overall majority of one single party or political inclination.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> This meant that any decisions taken had to be supported both by unionists and nationalists, thus decisions would have to be

Throughout the period, although substantial differences remained between unionists and nationalists, there was nevertheless one shared common feeling: a perception by both that the other was being favoured in the negotiating process. This was particularly evident when the talks resumed after the Christmas break, on the 12<sup>th</sup> January 1998, and the two heads of government launched what is known as the *Propositions of Heads of Agreement*. The document outlined the areas of consent between the Irish and British, which would serve as a basis for discussion between the different parties and for an agreement on the future of Northern Ireland. However, Sinn Féin rejected this document on the 17<sup>th</sup> of January, only days after it was released, outraged at what it perceived as its pro-unionist content.

In effect, between January and April 1998, the talks moved from Stormont, to London, to Dublin and back to Northern Ireland, without the UUP ever agreeing to talk to or even acknowledge Sinn Féin and its negotiating team. While Sinn Féin would have welcomed a particular document or proposal, it was almost guaranteed that unionists would reject it, or the other way round. Following a number of renewed acts of violence, both the UDP and Sinn Féin were briefly expelled from the talks on the suspicion that ‘their’ paramilitary groups, the UFF and the IRA had breached their cease-fires. This further fuelled even more unionist suspicions, in particular the UUP’s, that Sinn Féin was not seriously committed to the peace process and that the British government was being too lenient with the so-called ‘terrorists’. Nevertheless, an agreement was finally reached, albeit some hours after the deadline, on the 10<sup>th</sup> April 1998.<sup>25</sup>

From then on, the rest of the year saw attempts by both unionists and Sinn Féin to sell the deal to their parties and grassroots. Promoted as the only way forward, the parties that had contributed to the process, the British and Irish governments emphasised that it offered the most promising opportunity to bring peace to Northern Ireland. In the referendum on the agreement on 22<sup>nd</sup> May, in which the people of Northern Ireland were asked to vote yes or no to the proposals, 71% voted yes. However, there was still continued violence by splinter groups in the background. Of particular prominence and with dramatic consequences was the Omagh bomb, in County Tyrone, perpetrated by the Continuity IRA on the 15<sup>th</sup> August. Causing widespread destruction of the town centre and the death of 29 people, it was the single biggest loss of life since the beginning of the Troubles. Although a peace agreement had been reached, there was still serious division within Northern Irish politics that needed to be overcome. The Omagh bomb also refuelled unionist worries over the British government’s failure to impose paramilitary decommissioning, and forced Sinn Féin once again to reiterate its commitment to the peace process.

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acceptable to both sides of the political spectrum and their respective communities.

<sup>25</sup> See Chapter Nine.

Nevertheless, the process of establishing the Northern Ireland Assembly was already underway, with elections to the Assembly taking place on the 25<sup>th</sup> June. In these, the UUP gained 28 seats, the SDLP 24, the DUP 20 and Sinn Féin 18 seats. The assembly met for the first time on the 1<sup>st</sup> July 1998, with David Trimble as First Minister and Seamus Mallon from the SDLP as Deputy Minister whilst Sinn Féin was awarded two ministerial posts with the appointment of Martin McGuinness as the Minister for Education and Bairbre de Brún as Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

Although from 1996 to 1998 there was intense political activity and major disruptions to the peace process because of a lack of political willingness by some quarters to move it forward, substantial progress was finally made. As with any negotiating process searching for a compromise and peaceful solution to a conflict between two communities, this was no simple task, and demanded not only concessions from both sides but also a joint governmental commitment. What now needs to be determined is how the developments of 1996, 1997 and 1998 affected media coverage of Sinn Féin, namely its quantitative coverage in the print news.

### ***News and Sinn Féin***

The history of media coverage of Northern Ireland and the republican movement is one which is as troubled as that of the Province itself. Underpinning its complexities has been the intimate and complex relationship between the British government and the British media, in particular broadcasting. At times, this relationship has been a casual one, not governed by any formal parameters to define the interaction between both, or more accurately, to determine the government's control over the media. On other occasions, the freedom of the media, or otherwise, has been enshrined in the law of the land.<sup>26</sup> In a number of ways the case of Northern Ireland and its news coverage, as in many other situations of war and conflict where national defence and legitimacy are at stake, epitomises how extreme situations bind the relationship between government and media.

As Schlesinger<sup>27</sup> suggested in 1978, the case of Northern Ireland challenges the validity of two commonly held perceptions on the relationship between media and state and the rules of conduct which determine their interaction. Whilst focusing on the case of public service broadcasting, he suggested that to consider the *BBC* as independent of governmental interference is as misleading as to regard it as a tool of the state (1992). Instead, he proposed that the relationship between the *BBC* and the British government, and indeed the entire media, oscillates between and is a combination of these two extreme and opposite positions. This has

<sup>26</sup> Examples of this are for example, the 1988 Broadcasting Ban, or even the restrictions imposed on journalists and the reporting of Northern Ireland under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. See, for example, Robertson and Nicol (1992).

<sup>27</sup> This book is referenced as Schlesinger (1992) as this was the edition from which the quotes were obtained.

meant that over the years, in covering the Northern Irish Troubles, the media have at times adopted an independent position from that held by the government, as in the case of the *BBC* programme *The Question of Ulster*, broadcast against the government's wishes in 1972.<sup>28</sup> However, as Curtis (1996a) has noted, the 'catalogue of censorship' on media coverage of Northern Ireland,<sup>29</sup> is far more extensive than the occasions when broadcasters and the media in general refused to 'knuckle under' (Schlesinger, 1992:217).

More important has been the generalised apathy amongst the British media to challenge the so-called primary-definition of the Troubles, as established by the British, and journalists tendency pursue an agenda of bias, disinformation and, at times, blatant lies.<sup>30</sup> This has meant that the conflict, which has taken place in Northern Ireland has been obliterated by the news media:

in general, broadcasting presents us with a series of decontextualized reports of violence, and fails to analyse and re-analyse the historical roots of the Irish conflict. Such an approach is largely shared by the rest of the British media, and this cannot contribute to the dominant public view of Northern Ireland's present troubles as largely incomprehensible and irrational. (Schlesinger, 1992:243)

Curtis (1984) has in fact argued that media coverage of Northern Ireland has tended to favour the views of the British government, thereby marginalising and criminalising those who challenge the government's approach to the conflict, thus:

down the years, the media, along with the politicians, have obscured not only the political rationale of the IRA but also its relationship with the nationalist community. The anti-British sentiments of nationalists were as taboo as those of Sinn Féin and the IRA. To air their views and experiences would implicitly provide an understanding of why the IRA existed and acted as it did. It would<sup>1</sup> also throw an uncomfortable light on the workings of the Six Counties regime, and on Britain's role, past and present. (Curtis, 1984:197)

What should also be noted is that the so-called decontextualised reporting of the Northern Irish conflict, suggested by Schlesinger (1992), is also directly related to the views and positions held by the government on the Troubles. This means that in the intrinsic relationship between the government and the media the perspectives of the state have been absorbed by journalists and are thus reflected in their news output. Furthermore, as Miller (1993) has commented, the government's ability to impose a primary-definition<sup>31</sup> on the Northern Irish Troubles has changed over the years.<sup>32</sup> Hence, any change in the coverage of republicanism is also implicitly connected with an evolution of the government's own politics and the approaches adopted by its officials, thus showing the degree of complicity between the state and the media.

<sup>28</sup> See Schlesinger (1992).

<sup>29</sup> This includes both factual and fictional programming.

<sup>30</sup> See Curtis (1984).

<sup>31</sup> This was a concept first developed by Stuart Hall *et al.* in 1978, and refers to the ability of official sources to determine and implement what has been described as the 'primary interpretation' of events.

<sup>32</sup> The example given by Miller were the cases of the Guilford Four and Birmingham Six. The media originally supported their convictions in the 1970s, but later played a determining role in exposing the weakness of their convictions for two IRA bombs.

## Reporting Northern Ireland

At the crux of the matter is the fact that, historically, the content of news on Northern Ireland has been the result of direct and indirect governmental attempts to delineate the parameters of coverage and to attempt to influence the media's rhetoric. For example, Schlesinger has suggested that:

in recent years, the social and political conflict in Northern Ireland has illustrated the power of the state to circumscribe the broadcast media's coverage of events, issues and points of view there. This has been handled not through overt censorship, but rather through mediated intervention, in which spokesmen in the sphere of politics have defined the permissible limits, and these conceptual orientations have been picked up and reproduced within the media. (1992:205)

These attempts to set the parameters of coverage have meant that for a considerable period, nationalist predicaments, beliefs and politics were largely ignored by the news media, as they were by the politicians (Curtis, 1984). Curtis also observed that as early as 1971, there was an obvious exclusion of explanatory coverage in television news, and that most tended to focus on the violence which was taking place yet devoiding it of any logic or contextualisation. This resulted from deliberate governmental attempts to eradicate Irish republicanism from the public sphere and consequently avoid having to deal with the causes of the Troubles and the rationale underpinning the republican movement.<sup>33</sup> In practical terms, for the majority of the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s, republicans were simply obliterated from the news or were relegated to the condition of 'mad bombers and murderers'. At the other extreme, the government and its security forces were largely portrayed as up-holding democracy, law and order and protecting Northern Ireland from republican insanity.

Thus, Irish republicans and Sinn Féin simply did not make it onto the news agenda,<sup>34</sup> or if they did, they were discriminated against and depicted in a way which suited the government's approach to the conflict: either outrightly dismissing it or portraying it as a problem of law and order.<sup>35</sup> As Sean Mac Bradaigh wrote in *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 'as has been the case for almost three decades, sections of the Irish and British media will consistently misinterpret and misrepresent both the intentions and (the) actions of republican leaders' (2<sup>nd</sup> October 1997).

However, as Miller (1994) has explained, there are two sides to the conflict in Northern Ireland: a more bloody one fought on the streets of Northern Ireland and beyond; and an equally aggressive but less sanguinary side, which he termed the 'propaganda war', in which the British and others, including the republican movement, have taken their places on the battlefield. Whilst this side of the conflict has played an important role in influencing media coverage of the Troubles, it has only really been since the late 1980s that a true battle for the 'hearts and minds'

<sup>33</sup> See Miller (1994) or Rolston and Miller (1996).

<sup>34</sup> See Chapter One.

<sup>35</sup> See Curtis (1984); Henderson *et al.* (1990) or Schlesinger *et al.* (1983).

has been fought on a more level field.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, Miller (1993) also suggested that one of the factors which has determined the ability of the British government to act as the primary-definer has been the increasing capacity of other groups and organisations, such as Sinn Féin, to challenge the state's primary-definition and to offer alternative perspectives.

As discussed in this thesis,<sup>37</sup> it was only in the mid-1980s that Sinn Féin began to systematically engage in concerted moves to raise the prominence of the republican cause. This meant that until then it was relatively easy to dismiss and control a poorly organised and resourced party that placed its focus upon military action to end British occupation of Northern Ireland. To a large extent, the difficulties faced by Sinn Fein in sustaining support for the armed struggle, and the curtailing of republican activities, meant that throughout most of the 1970s and 1980s, there were few concerted attempts to challenge the poor media coverage, although the election of Bobby Sands to Westminster in 1981 catapulted the movement onto television and newspapers across the world. Even so, in the late 1980s the government began to feel that republicans were getting an easy ride in the media and that the 'terrorists' were thriving on the 'oxygen of publicity' and introduced the Broadcasting Ban in 1988, despite the fact, as Henderson *et al.* (1990) showed, republicans rarely featured in the news prior to the ban.

### Changed Media Coverage

More recent research has shown that there has been a significant departure from the long-term biased and negative coverage of Irish republicanism (Lago, 1998). In particular, it was noted that there had been a shift not only in the number of times Sinn Féin was interviewed in the news, but more importantly in the qualitative parameters of interviewing. Clearly in comparison to the findings of Henderson *et al.* (1990), subsequent research showed that despite the fact that the Broadcasting Ban was still in place, there was a transformation of the attitudes and perceptions of journalists towards Sinn Féin, perhaps the first public sign that something extremely significant and dramatic was taking place in Northern Irish politics.

Yet, to simply argue that the changes in media coverage of Sinn Féin which began in the early 1990s are the result of the re-balancing of a biased news agenda, or of a journalistic realisation of its integrity as an independent communicator, is simplistic and fails to acknowledge the intrinsic relationship between news and politics. Moreover, to suggest that the increased televising of republicanism during the latter years of the ban resulted from the relaxing of

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<sup>36</sup> The use of the expression 'equal grounds' does not attempt to suggest that the resources, power and ability of the republican movement has progressively become similar or equal to that of the British government. Instead it proposes that the politicisation of the party, discussed in Chapter Four, and the parallel professionalisation of its communicative efforts have awarded a more pronounced ability to attempt to influence the news, in particular when compared to the republican movement of the 1970s or early 1980s.

<sup>37</sup> See Chapters Four and Five.

governmental restrictions imposed upon the broadcasting of Sinn Féin, would also not fully explain what was indeed happening behind the scenes. Thus, what has been a progressive transformation of the British news agenda is rooted in a far more complex and deeply intertwined process of transformation which started in the 1980s and became particularly evident in the beginning of the 1990s. While changed journalistic attitudes are obviously reflected in the news output, such changes in behaviour are also affected by the events which occurred outside the direct domain of the media, in particular those within the political sphere. As Curtis suggested in 1984, 'as the authorities' attitudes alter, the media will follow suit' (p.136).

### The Political Transformations

In this sense, those changed patterns of coverage which have already been noted must ultimately be seen as the result of a long and fastidious process of transformation which occurred in the first instance outside the realm of the so-called fourth estate. As Miller and McLaughlin noted:

the importance of focusing on the media politics of the peace process in Ireland is that in many ways they are quite different from the media politics of the war, which preceded it and currently coexists with it. The most important change here is the shift in position of the British government. (1996:422)

It is equally important to note that the British government's changed position was also largely influenced by the transformation of the republican movement itself which took place throughout the 1980s and culminated in the 1990s. Thus, as discussed in Chapter Four, the combination of the failure of the IRA's military strategy, the inability of Sinn Féin to mobilise and secure support for the armed struggle and the changes which took place in international politics, such as the collapse of communism, forced republicans to reassess their strategies and develop new avenues to accomplish Irish reunification.

In more specific terms, this politicisation and political shifting allowed the start of a process of negotiation between Gerry Adams and John Hume in 1988, focusing on a joint search to find alternative routes to seek the re-establishment of a 32-county republic. On the one hand, it resulted in the increased co-operation at some levels between the two parties, in particular in the formulation of joint demands for the start of all-party negotiations. Attempts were also made to develop a pan-nationalist front between Sinn Féin, the SDLP and the Irish government, which was to cause much fury amongst unionists, whose continued reluctance and intransigence meant that there was little positive and concerted co-operation between the different unionist parties, unlike their nationalist counterparts. It is here that perhaps lies one of the most fundamental differences between unionist and nationalist strategies, which necessarily affected the media's perceptions of both, as will be seen. This also led to a progressive change in coverage, whereby journalists became increasingly more aware that nationalist and republican issues also had to feature on the news.

At another level, the failure of the republican strategy of the 1970s/80s and the subsequent re-alignment of the party resulted in the emergence of a more politically conscientious stance, emphasising the need to compromise, negotiate and find equality for the nationalist people of Northern Ireland. This, coupled with the joint venture with the SDLP and aggravated by the British realisation that the IRA could not be defeated only contained, meant that the government was progressively forced to reassess its own view of the conflict as a law and order problem and its belief that the republican movement lacked in political rationale. Prior to this:

for the better part of 25 years the British government has publicly adhered to the position that the conflict in Ireland is caused by 'terrorists', primarily of the republican variety, whose motivations are criminal, material or pathological. In general, the government have claimed that their response has been to operate within the law. (Miller and McLaughlin, 1996:422/3)

Despite the continuation of the IRA military campaign, the British could no longer ignore the signs of a dramatic republican departure, which was first outlined in the *Scenario for Peace* document in 1987 and formalised at the 1992 Árd Fheis, entitled *Towards a Lasting Peace*. Nor could they dismiss the attempts of Hume and Adams to try and bring peace to Northern Ireland at the margins of the British government, while calling for the start of all-inclusive negotiations. Indeed, one of the first signs of change within the government's attitude was seen with a new round of secret talks between the British and Sinn Féin which started in 1990 and continued until 1993 (Miller and McLaughlin, 1996). Finally, in 1993, Anthony Bevens commented in the *Observer* that a senior British source had told him that there was an ethical dimension to the IRA, that their actions were underpinned by political motivation and that:

the Provisional IRA was imbued with an ideology and a theology. He then added the breathtaking statement that its ideology included an 'ethical dimension' – that members would not continue killing for the sake of it. He went on to argue that the Provisionals did not kill 'for no purpose', and that if that purpose was removed, there was no reason why they should not stop killing. (Bevens, 1993:3 in Miller and McLaughlin, 1996:423)

As Miller and McLaughlin (1996) argue, this showed a significant departure from the traditional governmental approach: that the republican movement lacked rationale and that they murdered and maimed for no reason other than criminal behaviour. Thus, at the end of 1993, in attempt to regain control of the peace process from the Hume and Adams initiative, the British and Irish governments launched the *Downing Street Declaration*. This clearly indicated that the British had begun to adapt to a new political climate. One of the immediate implications of the 1994 IRA cease-fire was the removal of the Broadcasting Ban. Yet, as has been argued elsewhere (Lago, 1998), the ban had long been dislodged by the political events which were taking place and, as has also been commented:

the ban had been made untenable by the emergence of the peace process in which Sinn Féin's *de facto* exclusion from the news under the ban was ended and Gerry Adams and other Sinn Féin representatives appeared extensively. For the first time, the ban began to look unsustainable. (Miller, 1994a:52)



## The Impact on the News Media

Many of the changes that have taken place in the media coverage of republicanism were the result of an equally transformed governmental approach to the conflict, its resolution and approach towards Sinn Féin. In a sense, the transformation of the republican movement initiated a cascade effect, firstly influencing the government and subsequently impacting upon the media. This has meant that Sinn Féin's stance, not only in the eyes of British officials but also in the eyes of the media, has evolved from simply being the political wing of a so-called 'terrorist' group, to being recognised as a legitimate political party, albeit still associated to the IRA. The result, as Miller and McLaughlin have explained, is that:

the emergence of the 'peace process' in Ireland has caught journalists on the hop. For 25 years, Northern Ireland has been covered from within the 'anti-terrorist' paradigm. 'Terrorism' was the cause of the conflict. It was devoid of political motivation and the only way to bring peace was to defeat the IRA and convince people to live together. Now it seems that the official view has changed. Sinn Féin are now to be regarded as having a legitimate electoral mandate and at some point a place at the negotiating table. (1996:436)

In order to reflect the new political mood in Northern Irish politics, the media had to reconsider their position and begin to examine and locate Sinn Féin within the peace process and not simply treat its leader as an 'apologist for murder',<sup>38</sup> and it is the continuation of this process that the subsequent analysis focuses upon. Clearly, there have been a number of transformations which led to a changed media approach to Sinn Féin. Yet, what needs to be ascertained against this background is the ways in which the media coverage of republicanism continued to evolve in the later part of the 1990s, in particular with the new impetus in the peace process following the election of Labour to government. Thus, following this initial shift in media attitudes, it is also important to analyse how media coverage of republicanism has since undergone further changes, in particular in the period leading up to the Good Friday Agreement.

The subsequent analysis thus proposes, not only to trace any further transformations in media coverage of republicanism, but also to establish the contemporary patterns of reporting. This is primarily achieved through an examination of the number of times republicans appeared in the print news. Comparing these results with those of the other main Northern Irish political parties provides further contextualisation to the reporting of Sinn Féin in the print news. Moreover, the combined examination of Sinn Féin and IRA quantitative reporting informs on contemporary journalistic attitudes towards the two organisations, namely determine whether journalistic interest in Sinn Féin has increased and decreased in relation to the IRA.

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<sup>38</sup> In an interview with Gerry Adams, Jeremy Paxman asked him 'How does it feel to visit a country where most people think you are an apologist for murder?' (*BBC2, Newsnight*, 17<sup>th</sup> November 1994) (in Lago, 1998:682).

## Republican Appearances

### Party Mentions

In total, and over the three-year period from 1996 to 1998, Sinn Féin was mentioned in 13501 different print news stories. In comparison, the UUP was only mentioned 7351 times, the SDLP 4886 and the DUP in 3278. Overall, as illustrated in Figure 27, Sinn Féin had a substantially higher number of mentions in print news than any of the other political parties, and almost twice as many as the second most mentioned party, the UUP. Sinn Féin was also mentioned more times than the two combined unionist parties, the UUP and the DUP, and almost three times more often than its nationalist rival, the SDLP. Equally, these results indicate that the two combined nationalist parties were mentioned more times than the two unionist parties, with the SDLP and Sinn Féin controlling 64% of mentions, whilst unionists accounted for only 36% of the total number of times each party was mentioned.<sup>39</sup>

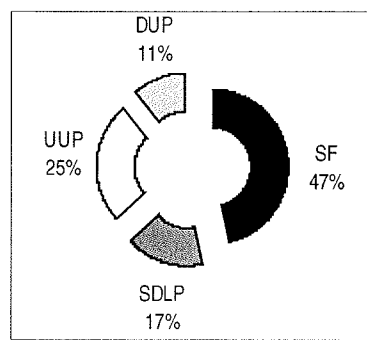


Figure 27: Total Party Mentions 1996-1998

These results show that between 1996 and 1998 there was a pronounced quantitative interest of print news in featuring Sinn Féin, as expressed by the number of mentions of the party. In addition, the extent of republican quantitative coverage in print news is also further reinforced by comparing their mentions to those of the other political parties. The significance of these results and the comparatively higher number of mentions of Sinn Féin are particularly relevant when the electoral performance of each party is also taken into consideration. Although the UUP has the strongest electoral mandate, having secured 33% of the vote at the 1997 general election, while Sinn Féin was only the third most voted party with 16%, the latter was nevertheless mentioned the most. In addition to this, while Sinn Féin appeared more times in print news than its nationalist counterpart, the SDLP, it is the republican party that represents a smaller proportion of the nationalist community and secured a narrower vote than the SDLP at the last general election.<sup>40</sup>

What these results show is that despite unionism representing the political inclination of the

<sup>39</sup> These results do not inform on the number of times the parties were mentioned in the same story, but they do enlighten on the number of times they were mentioned individually, which might have been in the same story or not.

<sup>40</sup> The SDLP polled 24 per cent of the Northern Irish vote at the 1997 general election.

majority of the people of Northern Ireland, in terms of print coverage the two nationalist parties have a substantially greater number of mentions. Additionally, the printed press also bypassed the more moderate nationalists, the SDLP, and instead focused upon mentioning more times the smaller and more radical, Sinn Féin. Although these results cannot inform on the type and quality of Sinn Féin's news coverage, they nevertheless indicate its parameters in quantitative terms. In this sense, the results show that media coverage of republicanism has continued to change, in quantitative terms at least, throughout the latter part of the 1990s and that Sinn Féin is increasingly appearing more in the print news.

In addition, the results obtained for Sinn Féin mentions showed that the total number of references to the party was divided in an almost equal manner between all three years as seen in Figure 28 (p.208). While in 1996 there were 4351 mentions, there was a slight decrease by 1.7% between 1996 and 1997 with 4275 mentions in 1997, but these subsequently increased between 1997 and 1998 by around 13% and Sinn Féin was mentioned 4875 times in 1998. The results also showed that there was a relatively consistent quantitative coverage of Sinn Féin in the three years, and that from 1996 to 1998 mentions of the party increased by 11%. This indicates that the quantitative level of interest in the party, expressed in the number of times it was mentioned, has largely remained within the same parameters, although there was an overall increase. It can be argued that media coverage of Sinn Féin in quantitative terms was not drastically affected by the different political events that happened throughout the three examined years, and instead reflected a more widespread and constant media attitude to Sinn Féin.

Moreover, all three other parties, the UUP, SDLP and DUP, also saw their number of mentions decrease from 1996 to 1997 and then subsequently increase from 1997 to 1998, although, as Figure 28 (p.208) shows, Sinn Féin still registered the highest number of mentions for each individual year. This means that there was a general decrease in the number of print news stories mentioning the main political parties in 1997. Nevertheless, as was suggested in the historical overview of this chapter, the weakened majority of the Conservative government largely froze the peace process in 1997, only to be overturned with the election of Labour to government. Furthermore, the political events of 1997 were less dramatic than those of 1996 and 1998, the former of which saw the resumption of the IRA military campaign, while during the latter, a settlement for peace was finally reached.

While Sinn Féin had the highest total and yearly number of mentions, it was nevertheless the UUP that increased its mentions the most from 1996 to 1998, by 18%, even if Sinn Féin's references continued to be on average approximately one and a half or two times higher than

those of the UUP. Again, this reinforces the suggestion already made that in quantitative terms there was a greater interest of print news in mentioning Sinn Féin, despite the fact that the UUP is a much stronger electoral party. As Audrey MacGee has suggested, ‘Sinn Féin are getting an easier time at the moment because principally they are being seen as the ones who are trying to make an effort in the peace process’.<sup>41</sup>

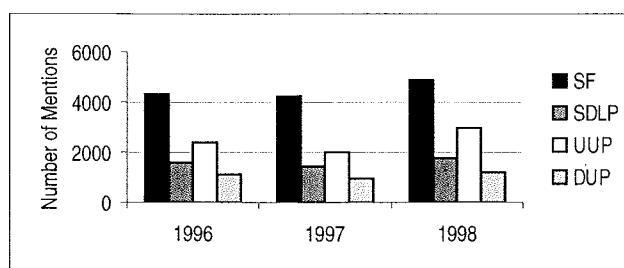


Figure 28: Yearly Party Mentions 1996-1998

These figures also indicate that there was a nationalist domination of print news in quantitative terms in all three years. Although the UUP repeatedly emphasised its unwillingness to negotiate with Sinn Féin, it was the latter and the SDLP which were frequently seen as moving the peace process forward. Indeed, it is significant to consider that following the deadlock in the peace process and the continued British unwillingness to allow Sinn Féin to the negotiating table, at the end of 1996 it was Gerry Adams and John Hume who presented a possible solution to John Major. In it, they made a series of suggestions which outlined a potential way out of the stalemate. Meanwhile, unionists merely continued to voice their concerns and the government focused on its growing and evident need to survive until the 1997 general election which was to prove to be the end to 18 years of Conservative rule. It was also Hume and Adams who started the peace process in the late 1980s, which the British later attempted to hi-jack with the *Downing Street Declaration* in 1993. In a sense, it has been largely Sinn Féin and the SDLP who have forced the political process forward and who have also made more contributions to engage in meaningful negotiation.

### Mirroring the Changed Political Stance

As one journalist explained, this greater focus of the news media upon Sinn Féin and, by default, upon Gerry Adams, is the result of an increased journalistic interest and concern in understanding and examining the grievances of the republican community.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, this has resulted not only from Sinn Féin’s more politically active stance, but its professionalisation of communication is seen as a key explanatory factor in the changing news coverage of Irish republicanism. Moreover, it was also suggested that this increased coverage has extended itself

<sup>41</sup> From the *Times*, in interview, 21<sup>st</sup> July 1998.

<sup>42</sup> Unknown journalist source, in survey, 1998.

not just to include Sinn Féin in the news agenda, but to actually explore and analyse the party's political strategies. Martin Kettle from the *Guardian* commented that 'I think that we are mainly interested in Sinn Féin insofar as they are 'interested' in the political process. We are much less interested in repeating the party's political line, which is now well known'.<sup>43</sup>

This changed media attitude, reflecting a more pronounced interest and sensitivity to republican issues has, according to journalists, emerged from a progressive realisation that they should also cover both communities in Northern Ireland, nationalist/republican and unionist, and not award preferential treatment to unionist predicaments.<sup>44</sup> By expanding its news coverage to include republicanism, the news media have moved away from what was traditionally a pro-unionist/British government stance, largely ignoring nationalist and republican concerns, and in the process, misinforming the public.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, as the results for the number of mentions to the two parties (Sinn Féin and SDLP) show, Sinn Féin was far more successful in simply being mentioned in the print news than its nationalist rival, the SDLP. As Jonathan Barton from the *BBC* commented:

I sometimes wonder whether from time to time the British media haven't over reported Sinn Féin at the expense of the SDLP, who have a much bigger electorate mandate. However, the close links between Sinn Féin and PIRA – crucial to the peace process – do justify special prominence for Sinn Féin. I think its important to make this clear: Sinn Féin count largely because they are the political wing of a terrorist organisation.<sup>46</sup>

However, to understand why journalists continued to changed their attitudes towards Sinn Féin, it is also necessary to take into account that this is the culmination of the same process of political transformation which fuelled the first change of media coverage in the mid-1990s. Thus, to comprehend why Sinn Féin had such a higher number of mentions, in particular in comparison with the three other main political parties, it is also important to note the continued impact of its changed political stance upon the British government and the media. Of particular importance was that to some extent Sinn Féin successfully persuaded the British and the news media that it was now committed to more peaceful political strategies, although the Tory government continued to raise a number of pre-conditions other than an IRA cease-fire before Sinn Féin could be allowed to join the negotiating table. As Audrey MacGee from the *Times* suggested, whilst there has always been a relationship between the media and Sinn Féin, this progressively changed as the party became more interested in and committed to political negotiation and to a peace strategy, rather than relying on an armed campaign to dislodge the British from Ireland.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>43</sup> In survey, January 1998.

<sup>44</sup> Unknown journalist source, in survey, 1998.

<sup>45</sup> See Miller (1994) or Rolston and Miller (1996).

<sup>46</sup> In letter, 26<sup>th</sup> February 1996.

<sup>47</sup> In interview, 21<sup>st</sup> July 1998.

Moreover, in terms of political shifts, it has been Sinn Féin that has been seen as departing the most from its traditional political and strategic approach to the Northern Irish conflict, whereby it has largely renounced the use of a military strategy and has instead committed itself to a more constitutional search for a solution. This dramatic republican departure was rewarded with an unconditional entry into the negotiating process by the Labour government, on the sole basis of the re-instatement of the 1994 IRA cease-fire. Although the reaching of a peace agreement did not require the participation of Sinn Féin, as the SDLP held the majority of the nationalist vote, both the British and Irish governments recognised that without the party's inclusion a lasting agreement would be a difficult and potentially impossible task. As a consequence, the media also began to believe and reproduce this vision and, as Sarah Smith suggested, 'since the first cease-fire they (Sinn Féin) are also seen as more acceptable and less demonised'.<sup>48</sup>

This meant that as the British government increasingly saw the need for inclusive negotiations with Sinn Féin on board, journalists also believed that in order to advance the peace process it was necessary to give Sinn Féin the benefit of the doubt. In particular, the news media started to acknowledge that the party and its leaders were fully committed to the constitutional process and that they had finally renounced the use of violence as a negotiating tool.<sup>49</sup> Equally, the growing electoral mandate that Sinn Féin was accumulating reinforced the calls that it could no longer realistically be excluded from the negotiating process, although in reality the Tory government seemed indifferent to Sinn Féin's success at the Northern Ireland Forum. Nevertheless, Martin Fletcher has suggested that one of the most important elements, which has not only helped Sinn Féin to appear more in the news, but also ultimately forced a governmental policy re-appraisal has been the success of its more recent electoral results. He argued that 'one of the biggest things driving Sinn Féin is their electoral success. The fact that they can increase their vote every election and stand a very good chance of overtaking the SDLP over the next 2 or 3 years, as the biggest national party'.<sup>50</sup>

As a result of the party's own strategic and ideological transformation Sinn Féin has increasingly tried to portray itself as a legitimate political party committed to constitutional politics.<sup>51</sup> This has been evident at a number of different levels, namely that the party has repeated its interest and willingness in participating actively in a peaceful search for a solution to the Troubles. For Sinn Féin the media began to provide an avenue through which to publicise and convey its message.<sup>52</sup> The fact that they were seen as central to the peace process was also

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<sup>48</sup> From *Channel 5 News*, in survey, 1998.

<sup>49</sup> Unknown journalistic source, in survey, 1998.

<sup>50</sup> From the *Times*, in interview, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1998.

<sup>51</sup> See Chapter Four.

<sup>52</sup> See Chapter Six.

rooted in their changed political strategies and increased willingness to participate in the democratic process of debate rather than rely on the armed tactics of the IRA. This resulted in altered governmental perspectives that necessarily influenced the media stance towards the republican movement. It is also significant that journalists have become increasingly more interested in reporting Sinn Féin and nationalists' concerns, and that they recognise the key role that the party plays in the search for a peaceful solution to the Troubles.

### The Impact of Professional Communication

While the changed political stance of the party affected the perceptions of the British government and subsequently of the media, its communication strategies have also been crucial, as Miller has commented:

it is evident that the media are regarded as a very important element in the struggle for power and resources in Northern Ireland by most if not all of the participants in the conflict. That is why public relations are central parts of the campaigning and legitimating strategies of those organisations. (1994:246)

Alongside the progressive politicisation of Sinn Féin and its commitment to constitutional and negotiated forms of politics, as discussed in detail in Chapter Five, since the mid-1980s the party has increasingly awarded more attention and resources to developing a professional and sophisticated communication approach. As numerous journalists have argued, the result has been that Sinn Féin has produced and implemented a more comprehensive and successful media operation than the remaining three political parties. In fact, some journalists have argued that one of the reasons why Sinn Féin is mentioned more times than the other parties is because of the superior quality of their media strategies.<sup>53</sup> More specifically, Audrey MacGee commented that Sinn Féin appears in the news more because they are 'particularly good at getting across what they want and at controlling it',<sup>54</sup> while another journalist suggested that their communication methods are more efficient than those of other parties.<sup>55</sup> Additionally, as discussed in Chapter Five, Sinn Féin's success in communicating is related to their belief that the 'repetition of a common message [ ] in a cohesive way has an effect on media coverage'.<sup>56</sup> Sinn Féin is also seen as more successful than its rival parties because 'they are committed, articulate, focused and unrivalled. [ ] the UUP often fails to win over the press by not being available, being abusive and impatient. Same goes for certain SDLP politicians'.<sup>57</sup> Ultimately, as Ewen MacAskill put it: 'in the 1970s and 1980s, the press portrayed IRA/Sinn Féin as beyond the pale. (Since then) they have succeeded in gaining acceptance as a political party'.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Unknown source, in survey, 1998.

<sup>54</sup> From the *Times*, in interview, 21<sup>st</sup> July 1998.

<sup>55</sup> Lena Ferguson, from *Channel 4 News*, in survey, 1998.

<sup>56</sup> Confidential source, from the *Irish Times*, in survey, 13<sup>th</sup> March 1998.

<sup>57</sup> Martina Purdy, from the *Belfast Telegraph*, in survey, 1998.

<sup>58</sup> From the *Guardian*, in survey, August 1998.

Nevertheless, Vincent Browne from the *Irish Times* has commented that:

I think their relations with the media are very different from those of normal political parties simply because of the paramilitary association. I therefore think that comparing the coverage of Sinn Féin with the coverage of other political parties is difficult to make.<sup>59</sup>

Overall, as a *Times* journalist has suggested:

certainly, they are getting an easier time at the moment [ ] but they have also to a large extent [ ] created that situation, because they have gone out and courted [ ] not only Irish, British national media, but also international media and have campaigned to put their message across. [ ] I think they are getting an easier time in the British press, whether that is a long lasting thing is another issue.<sup>60</sup>

Moreover, the superior quality of their media apparatus was also reflected in the way in which they eventually sold the agreement, as Martin Fletcher argued, 'subsequently they did a good job in presenting an agreement which was not really very favourable to them, they did a very good job in selling it to their followers. A much better job than the UUP'.<sup>61</sup> He added:

I think they managed their two Dublin conferences very well. They got big names, sort of legendary figures in the republican movement to speak for the agreement. They got prisoners out of prisons to come and speak in favour of the agreement. The fact is that they got ninety something per cent in favour of an agreement that essentially recognises the legitimacy of Northern Ireland and it is very hard to see how it leads towards a united Ireland. So they did a good job of selling it.<sup>62</sup>

### Leader Mentions

Closely connected to party mentions is the performance of its party leader, Gerry Adams and its comparison with those of the other three leaders. From this, it emerges that the pattern of greater numbers of mentions to Sinn Féin has also been extended to the number of times its leader appeared in the printed news. From the data obtained, it was noted that Gerry Adams was mentioned a total of 6878 times in the three year period and that he was also the leader with the highest number of mentions. As Figure 29 shows (p.213), in quantitative terms Gerry Adams dominated the print news agenda with 38% of mentions, whilst in second place appeared David Trimble with 5468 mentions, followed by John Hume with 3048 and finally Ian Paisley with 2701 mentions. It was also established that in common with the results for overall nationalist and unionist mentions, the two nationalist leaders appeared more times than the two unionist leaders, despite the fact that Ian Paisley is the single most popular politician in Northern Ireland.<sup>63</sup> Thus, the combined nationalist leaders had 10% more mentions than their unionist rivals.

<sup>59</sup> In survey, 7<sup>th</sup> April 1998.

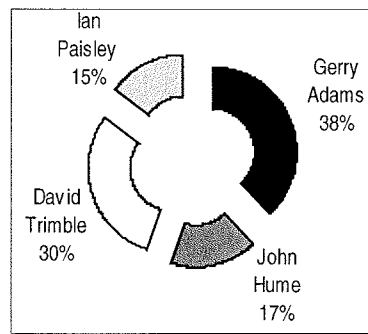
<sup>60</sup> Audrey MacGee, in interview, 21<sup>st</sup> July 1998.

<sup>61</sup> Martin Fletcher, from the *Times*, in interview, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1998.

<sup>62</sup> Martin Fletcher, from the *Times*, in interview, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1998.

<sup>63</sup> Dennis Murray, *BBC Nine o'clock News*, 15<sup>th</sup> April 1998.





**Figure 29: Total Leader Mentions 1996-1998**

What also became evident was that while both Sinn Féin and Gerry Adams were mentioned more times than the other parties and their respective leaders, there was nevertheless a substantially higher number of mentions of Sinn Féin than of Adams. Indeed, this was a characteristic of all mentions to the different elements examined, whereby party mentions were always higher than those of their leaders, indicating that media coverage of Northern Ireland politics tends to focus on the different organisations rather than on individual characters. At the same time, the data also highlighted that there was a more pronounced difference between the number of times the republican leader and Sinn Féin were mentioned in comparison to those of the other three political parties and their respective leaders. While the difference between the number of times Sinn Féin and Gerry Adams were mentioned was approximately 50%, for the other parties this ranged from 18% for the DUP and Ian Paisley to 37% for the SDLP and John Hume.

This shows that there is a clear tendency of the print news to mention leaders less often than the parties, although in the case of Sinn Féin the difference is more pronounced. These results also showed that although Gerry Adams had the higher number of mentions overall, both nationalist leaders had a substantially smaller number of mentions than their political parties, in particular when compared to those mentions of unionist leaders and parties. In the case of Gerry Adams this can be attributed to the fact that for many he is still seen as the face of terrorism. For example, it is also Gerry Adams that had often to justify an IRA attack or was seen carrying the coffin of an IRA volunteer, while the image of Sinn Féin is less personified and demonised.

As in the case of references to the party, it was also found that mentions of the different leaders had decreased from 1996 to 1997, only to subsequently increase from 1997 to 1998, as can be seen in Figure 30 (p.214). However, overall mentions of Gerry Adams increased from 1996 to 1998 by 18%. This shows that while Gerry Adams is mentioned fewer times in the press than his party, there is nevertheless a correlation in terms of the number of times each was mentioned across the three years, with both decreasing from 1996 to 1997 to subsequently increase in

1998. Moreover, there was also an increase in the number of times both Sinn Féin and Gerry Adams were mentioned in the printed news in general between 1996 to 1998.

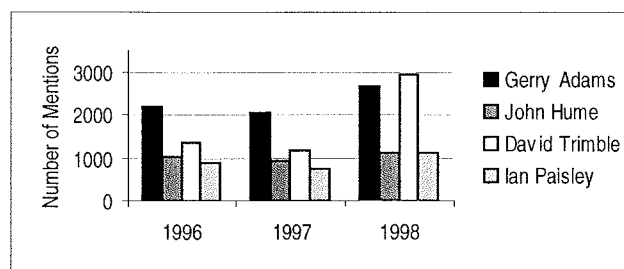


Figure 30: Yearly Leader Mentions 1996-1998

The results also indicated that although Gerry Adams was mentioned in total more times than David Trimble, the latter nevertheless was mentioned more in 1998. This means that despite Sinn Féin's greater number of mentions than the UUP in 1998, Gerry Adams was not mentioned as many times as the unionist leader David Trimble in 1998. One explanation for David Trimble's quantitative control of mentions in 1998 is related to the fact that the future of Northern Ireland and the Good Friday Agreement was portrayed as largely depending upon his judgement. Whilst an agreement could be reached without Gerry Adams' presence, David Trimble who, later in the year became the Northern Irish First Minister, had the *de facto* power to veto the deal. Moreover, unlike David Trimble, John Hume and Gerry Adams both opted not to take a ministerial role in the Northern Ireland devolved government.

Gerry Adams' overall higher number of mentions is also related to the crucial role he played in transforming Sinn Féin from a purely military movement to a prominent political party. This means that the transformation of the republican movement, which affected the British approach to the conflict and led to a changed approach by the media to the party, is also reflected in media coverage of its leader. Of particular importance is that although John Hume has been portrayed as the man who gave Northern Ireland the best chance of peace by bringing Sinn Féin and the IRA to the negotiating table, nevertheless, in the eyes of many it is Gerry Adams who has been the great transformer. As one journalist explained, 'there has been a fairly wide acceptance that the leaders are trying to steer the republican movement onto an exclusively peaceful path',<sup>64</sup> which meant that Gerry Adams was no longer simply seen as an 'apologist for murder'.

It is also significant to point out that the same association of Gerry Adams/Sinn Féin with the IRA means that to some extent Adams is still seen as the face of terrorism, and this is a key factor. As Martin Fletcher suggested, 'if you are a journalist, [ ] to write about Gerry Adams is more likely to make news, to elate your readers... than writing about the Alliance Party. [ ] It

<sup>64</sup> Confidential source, from the *Irish Times*, in survey, 20<sup>th</sup> July 1997.

gives them that edge, that sort of attraction'.<sup>65</sup> Another issue is that alongside the political relevance of Gerry Adams and the role he had in the re-directioning of the republican movement there is the quality of the communication strategies employed by the party and its leader. As one journalist from the *Guardian* put it, there is also a difference between how journalists, and in particular foreign journalists, perceive Gerry Adams and David Trimble. This is primarily due to the ability of Sinn Féin in relating to the news media, namely by being extremely helpful towards them, so that 'people will always go back with the idea that Gerry Adams he is a nice man, he's too nice, while that bugger David Trimble, wouldn't give you the time of day. So, I mean [ ] you know on the one level it is good manners, on the other it is good politics'.<sup>66</sup>

Although these are valid justifications for the greater number of times Sinn Féin and its leader were mentioned in the print news, the reasons for this changed media stance are rooted elsewhere. These results and the suggested changed media coverage should be seen first and foremost as reflecting a media reaction to other more important transformations that took place in Northern Irish politics, already discussed here. These transformations, are further reinforced by a changed quantitative coverage of the IRA and Sinn Féin appearing in the same stories as the IRA. However, what is particularly striking is that according to journalists, Sinn Féin and Gerry Adams' increased presence in the news media has been the result of its gradual politicisation and move into constitutional politics, paralleled by a professionalisation of its communication strategies. Yet, they also stress that one of the main reasons why they appear in the news more often than the other parties is still because of their association with the IRA.

### Paramilitary Associations

In addition to examining the number of times the republican party and its leader were mentioned in the print news, it is also important to determine how party mentions compared to those of the IRA. As argued in the introduction to this section, there has been an historic tendency for the news media to concentrate on the armed activities of the republican movement, consequently overlooking Sinn Féin. By comparing Sinn Féin's news appearances with those of the IRA, the effects of the politicisation of the movement and its repeated attempts to distance itself from the IRA, as discussed in Chapters Four and Five, can be established, as can the extent to which this process has been mirrored in news coverage.

What is revealed from this analysis is that Sinn Féin appeared 13501 times in print news, whilst the IRA was featured in 20174 stories. Clearly, this shows that the IRA was still mentioned more times than Sinn Féin, which means that in purely quantitative terms, print news continues

<sup>65</sup> From the *Times*, in interview, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1998.

<sup>66</sup> In interview, 8<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

to have a more pronounced interest in featuring the IRA rather than its political counterpart. Moreover, it was determined that in the three-year period in question, Sinn Féin and the IRA were mentioned in the same news story 9068 times, representing 67% of all mentions of Sinn Féin. It should be noted that this does not imply that in these instances an association was made in the text between both, only that they were featured in the same story. This means that of the 13501 times when Sinn Féin was mentioned in the print news between 1996 and 1998, on only a third of these occasions was the IRA not mentioned as well. Nevertheless, this still denotes an important change in coverage of both organisations, in particular the tendency to examine Sinn Féin in relation to the IRA. Hence, although Ewen MacAskill has argued that ‘Sinn Féin’s protestations to be separate from the IRA have been dismissed’,<sup>67</sup> references to both in the same news story have nevertheless decreased.

Thus, these results show a further departure from traditional media coverage of Irish republicanism, whereby the focus has now shifted towards a greater examination of Sinn Féin, in particular in relation to its role in the peace process and commitment to constitutional forms of negotiation. As already suggested, journalists also acknowledge that with the start of the negotiations, especially from the 1990s onwards, the media have become increasingly interested in political republicanism and its policies, and thereby have progressively moved their attention away from the IRA, although the latter continues to be a key interest, particularly in terms of the continuation of its cease-fire.

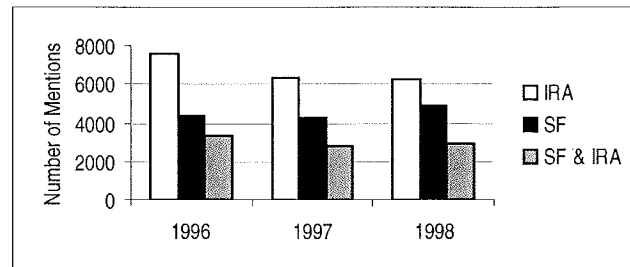
It was also determined that the number of times Sinn Féin and the IRA were mentioned in the same news story had decreased from 1996 to 1998 by almost 11% (Figure 31, p.217). In fact, this decrease in joint mentions was directly proportioned to increased mentions of Sinn Féin, suggesting that there has been a correlated change in republican coverage. It is also relevant to note that while party mentions increased, references to the IRA and joint mentions decreased, further putting the onus upon a shift of news media interest, in quantitative terms at least, towards Sinn Féin.

In common with the number of mentions to Gerry Adams and Sinn Féin mentions of the IRA/Sinn Féin and the IRA had decreased from 1996 to 1997, as seen in Figure 31 (p.217). However, single mentions of the IRA continued to decrease from 1997 to 1998. This shows that there has been a progressive pattern of fewer references to the IRA in print news media in comparison to an increased number of mentions of its constitutional representatives. However,

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<sup>67</sup> From the *Guardian*, in survey, August 1998.

as Audrey MacGee has suggested, the end of the IRA cease-fire in 1996, and the military campaign in which the IRA actively engaged in 1996, meant that the movement had to rebuild the trust of other politicians as well as of the media.<sup>68</sup> Even so, Audrey MacGee also commented that ‘Sinn Féin had John Major worried by the way they put the blame on him for the breakdown of the cease-fire’.<sup>69</sup>



**Figure 31: Yearly Sinn Féin and IRA Mentions**

The outcome of this republican effort was an overall decrease in the number of times the IRA was referred to and an increase in the number of times Sinn Féin appeared in the news, but also a progressive decrease in the % of stories in which the party was mentioned along with the IRA in each of the examined years. Thus, whilst in 1996 Sinn Féin and IRA references represented 75.7% of all Sinn Féin mentions, in 1997 they had decreased to 66% and by 1998 represented only 60% of overall party mentions.

This gradual shift of focus upon the different components of the republican movement has been explained by Jonathan Barton, who suggested that when it comes to Sinn Féin and the IRA the former is seen in two ways: ‘as democratic representatives of a significant minority and as the political wing, and to some extent the public face of a paramilitary organisation’.<sup>70</sup> However, he also crucially stressed that the balance and importance awarded to each of these roles had altered through time and it was this that explained the changed media coverage of Sinn Féin in relation to the IRA. Moreover, in tandem with such transformations in coverage of Sinn Féin and of Gerry Adams, this further shift in quantitative media interest away from the armed wing reinforces the already suggested progressive re-modulation of media coverage of republicanism and of Northern Ireland, reflecting not only the politicisation of the republican movement but also the subsequent process of adaptation of the British government.

Closely related to the reduction of Sinn Féin/IRA associations have been the efforts that the

<sup>68</sup> From the *Times*, in interview, 21<sup>st</sup> July 1998.

<sup>69</sup> From the *Times*, in interview, 21<sup>st</sup> July 1998.

<sup>70</sup> From the *BBC*, in letter, 26<sup>th</sup> February 1996.

party has made to distance itself from the IRA, namely through the adoption of a series of communication strategies, some of which are discussed in Chapters Five to Seven. In particular, it was noted that Sinn Féin no longer issues IRA statements and has for a considerable period of time avoided making any comments regarding IRA decisions or policies. This distancing of Sinn Féin representatives and of the party has meant that the notion of a growing gap between both has been created, which is also perceived by the news media and reflected in their portrayal of the organisation. As one journalist suggests, Sinn Féin have successfully communicated the message that they are and wish to be treated as a separate organisation from the IRA, by no longer issuing IRA statements and instead focusing on their electoral gains.<sup>71</sup> In this sense, the results for joint mentions to both organisations denote that the party has been able to successfully distance itself to some extent from the so-called terrorists and that although:

media professionals consider Sinn Féin to be the political wing of the Provisional IRA; that is, they regard the organisations as essentially the same. The present leadership of Sinn Féin is considered by most media professionals to be some way ahead of some of the volunteers in the IRA, and in that sense, to have taken some degree of personal and professional risk in pursuing the peace process as doggedly as they have done.<sup>72</sup>

Nevertheless, while the continuation of Sinn Féin/IRA association in 60% of stories might be encouraging for those republicans who support the IRA, it is still challenging Sinn Féin's attempt to portray itself as a legitimate political party. In addition, it also points towards a partly failed communicative strategy and/or continued media bias, further reinforced by the fact that, as argued previously, journalists are more intrigued by Sinn Féin's position at the negotiating table, as they see it as representing the IRA. As Chris Jones from *Channel 4 News* suggested:

Sinn Féin wishes to present their role in the peace process, but Channel 4 News, as part of the media, feels it has a duty to question Sinn Féin about the wider republican community. This may include military/terrorist acts, punishment beatings and the current thinking of the IRA.<sup>73</sup>

However, the main problem continues to be with Sinn Féin itself as paradoxically, in an attempt to remain within the peace process it has tried to distance itself from the IRA, yet needs to keep it on board in order to continue in the talks. This means that Sinn Féin, as highlighted in Chapter Four, now finds itself in a no win situation where, unless it distances itself from the IRA, it will continue to see more than half of its mentions associated to the IRA. Yet it is also this same association with the IRA which has guaranteed its presence in the news media, and as Martin Fletcher has suggested, Sinn Féin and its representatives 'have the glamour that goes with terrorism, and they know that and they exploit that'.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Mark Davenport, from the *BBC*, in survey, 29<sup>th</sup> September 1997.

<sup>72</sup> Nelson Mews, from the *BBC*, in letter, 24<sup>th</sup> January 1996.

<sup>73</sup> In survey, 13<sup>th</sup> March 1998.

<sup>74</sup> From the *Times*, in interview, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1998.

While it is important for the party to appear in the news in its own right, for the grassroots of the movement it is vital that the ties with the IRA are maintained. So, for example, although Sinn Féin might claim it is not the IRA, nor does it speak for it, some form of collaboration and links with the IRA have to be maintained if the latter is to sustain the support for the peace process to which Sinn Féin is committed. As Richard Ayre put it:

Sinn Féin's support for and links with the IRA are an indivisible part of the movement's history and its political appeal. Sinn Féin has changed many times down the years, and so has the IRA. They have marched together, and with a substantial overlap of personnel at senior level. It would be disingenuous for any journalists to be unaware of that fact when reporting Sinn Féin activity.<sup>75</sup>

However, as Martina Purdy commented, there have been instances where Sinn Féin have been able to successfully balance a commitment to its traditional roots and the IRA, whilst also attempting to reach and appeal to a wider nationalist audience:

Sinn Féin used the cease-fire (although it had been suspended) to demonstrate their commitment to dialogue, persuading many SDLP voters to 'give them a chance'. At the same time, a willingness to wrap themselves in the tri-colour maintained traditional support. It was the reasonable force of their arguments that were used, building successfully a perception in many parts of the North that the British government were to blame for the end of the cease-fire. McGuinness and Adams successfully milked the perception that only they could bring about another cease-fire.<sup>76</sup>

Overall, changed media attitudes towards republicans, noted elsewhere (Lago, 1998, Miller and McLaughlin, 1996), have been further aggravated. Similarly, this has meant that Sinn Féin is now recognised by the British government as a growing political element which must be part of any lasting peace process. As one journalist highlighted the media have recognised the republican movements attempt to challenge the Troubles through peaceful means<sup>77</sup> and at the end of the day, as Mark Davenport stressed, 'they have successfully marketed and sold a product which has some very negative connotations'.<sup>78</sup>

### **The Reporting of Republicanism**

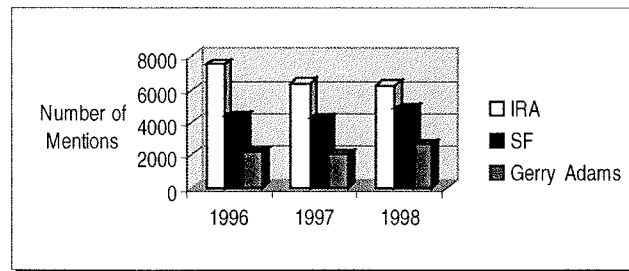
The results obtained from the research conducted on the number of times the different republican organisations (Sinn Féin and IRA) and its political leader (Gerry Adams) were mentioned in the print news indicate that from 1996 to 1998 there were some changes in the quantitative parameters of coverage of republicanism. More specifically, the research highlighted how there has been a continual decline in references to the IRA, with a parallel overall increase in mentions of its political elements - Sinn Féin and Gerry Adams. Therefore, as seen in Figure 32 (p.220), in quantitative terms the constitutional side of Irish republicanism is appearing more frequently in the print news while its armed wing, the IRA is not.

<sup>75</sup> BBC, in letter, 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1996.

<sup>76</sup> From the *Belfast Telegraph*, in survey, 1998.

<sup>77</sup> Unknown journalistic source, in survey, 1998.

<sup>78</sup> From the BBC, in survey, 29<sup>th</sup> September 1997.



**Figure 32: Yearly Republican Mentions**

The results also demonstrated that in purely quantitative terms, republicanism featured more times than any of the other main Northern Irish political parties.<sup>79</sup> However, while this does not allude to the quality of such coverage, it nevertheless stresses that the changes in media coverage of republicanism, continued to evolve in the latter part of the 1990s. As has been explained, these transformations have been primarily rooted in the re-directioning of the party and the wider republican movement, and rewarded by an increased media coverage.<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, it is also important to note that media coverage of Sinn Féin is still described as ‘frequently critical and ill-informed’.<sup>81</sup> In fact, during the course of this research, some journalists suggested that their style of reporting has not dramatically changed, although some progress has been made towards a more balanced and neutral approach. As illustrated by a comment made by a *Channel 5 News* journalist, news coverage of Sinn Féin is ‘not extensive. (It is) straight, fair without forgetting they are in favour of an armed strategy’.<sup>82</sup> What this suggests is that news coverage of the republican movement, and in particular of the party and its representatives, is still pursued in terms of their association with the IRA, despite Sinn Féin’s commitment to the negotiation process. Nevertheless, it also shows that there have been some changes in terms of media coverage of Sinn Féin in the sense that this is now described by journalists as being fair.

### An Historic Interest

Even so, despite an increase in the number of references to Sinn Féin and a decrease in the number of times the party appeared in the same story as the IRA, journalists continue to insist that in terms of coverage, their main interest still resides in the long-standing issue of the armed struggle. In fact, a number of journalists commented that the only reason why Sinn Féin had such a prominent news coverage was because of their links with the IRA. However, one reason for the continued examination of Sinn Féin in relation to the IRA has been justified by one

<sup>79</sup> As previously highlighted, the only exception to this are the results for leader appearances for 1998 when David Trimble of the UUP was mentioned more times than Gerry Adams from Sinn Féin.

<sup>80</sup> Confidential source, *Irish Times*, in survey 30<sup>th</sup> July 1997.

<sup>81</sup> Confidential source, *Irish Times*, in survey 30<sup>th</sup> July 1997.

<sup>82</sup> Sarah Smith, in survey, 1998.



journalist who commented that there is an inherent fear amongst journalists of 'being accused of being soft on Sinn Féin'.<sup>83</sup> This concern with being branded as pro-IRA or as an IRA sympathiser, as the *Guardian* was accused by the *Spectator* (Rusbridger, 13<sup>th</sup> March 2000), has had a direct impact upon the reporting of Sinn Féin, not just in terms of focusing on certain issues related to the armed campaign and their commitment to peace, but also had an impact on the overall approach to the republican movement. Rusbridger commented that:

the missiles that have been lobbed through the *Guardian's* window recently concern our coverage of Ireland. Something that may have long been apparent to alert *Guardian* readers has come to the attention of the *Spectator's* media columnist: that we have in our editorials, shown a considerable degree of understanding towards the leaders of Sinn Féin as they have attempted the near-impossible task of persuading a movement devoted to violence that democratic politics is a more worthwhile and effective way of resolving the nightmare of conflict in Northern Ireland. We have also been careful to note how the problems that Sinn Féin leaders have with their hard-liners are mirrored by the difficulties David Trimble has with his instinctive rejectionists. This is not, you might think, a terribly extreme position. It is, give or take the odd nuance, the position of the British, American and Irish governments. (*Guardian*, 13<sup>th</sup> March 2000:4)

At the same time, it is important to consider that, as Curtis suggested in 1984, when the British government changes its approach to the Northern Irish question, the media will also follow suit. Therefore it is plausible that the fear of being labelled pro-IRA by simply covering Sinn Féin in the news will diminish in time and thus diminish the coverage of the IRA. This is fuelled by Labour's changed attitude towards Sinn Féin when it came into power in 1997; whereby it recognised Sinn Féin's strong electoral position and its commitment to peace. Thus, it can be argued that in due course this changed governmental attitude will also filter to the reporting of Sinn Féin, whereby journalists no longer fear being seen as too sympathetic to the so-called 'terrorists', simply because the latter are no longer perceived as such.

Nevertheless despite the transformation of the republican movement and the adaptation of British government policy, there is still a continued interest amongst the media and the public in the IRA. This is primarily related to the IRA's cease-fire and the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons. Moreover, the IRA's failure to commit to decommissioning by the end of 1998 also meant that the British government had to carefully balance its own approach to the republican movement. Nevertheless, some newspapers have been intent on destroying the peace process and have been openly critical of Sinn Féin. For example, when the IRA announced the 1994 cease-fire the *Daily Record*, responded by publishing on its front page the photographs of every Scottish soldier killed in Northern Ireland.

This approach by some sections of the media against the republican movement, and indeed against any negotiation process which re-examines the position of Northern Ireland within the

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<sup>83</sup> Martin Fletcher, from the *Times*, in interview, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1998.

United Kingdom, was mirrored in the results obtained for the number of mentions across the different papers. In particular, the *Daily Record* had one of the highest numbers of stories mentioning both Sinn Féin and the IRA, as did the daily and Sunday *Telegraph* papers. As Curtis noted in 1984, the *Telegraph* and the popular papers have waged a continuous campaign against coverage of Northern Ireland on television:

their articles on Ireland, as on other issues, have more in common with works of fiction—such as thrillers and romances—than with reporting actuality. Their leader writers are unlikely to be converted from their splenetic jingoism until the establishment as a whole decides it has come to the end of the line in Ireland. The *Daily Mirror* is a partial exception. Its editorials have consistently advocated disengagement from Ireland, but its day to day reporting is little different from the *Sun*'s, and in any case it saves most of its Irish news for its Irish edition. (p.277)

Although since 1984 the British government has changed its policies in relation to Northern Ireland and the republican movement, some newspapers such as the *Telegraph* and the *Daily Record* have not radically transformed their coverage. This continued tendency to criticise Sinn Féin and undermine the peace process in general, whereby both the *Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* claimed that for the sake of democracy in Northern Ireland, people should vote no to the peace process (McCarthy, *Belfast Telegraph*, 9<sup>th</sup> July 2000) is also acknowledged by some journalists. Deáglan de Bréadún from the *Irish Times* pointed out in one of his reports of the talks back in 1996 that 'London-based newspapers, giving evidence of wishful thinking, published photos of Mr Adams and Martin McGuinness "behind bars" at the gates of the talks, trying to get in rather than to get out' (1998).

Indeed, this approach has been frequently criticised in the republican newspaper *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, namely in relation to two incidents which happened in March/April 1997, one of which had devastating consequences for a family:

when father of ten, John Slane, was killed by loyalists on 14<sup>th</sup> March (1997) there was virtual silence in the British media. The *Guardian* and *Independent*, among others, did not rate it a mention. It was as if it had never happened. When a horse race was postponed because of an IRA bomb warning, the same media had unlimited space for the story. [ ] It is not difficult to have utter contempt for the British media. (10<sup>th</sup> April 1997)

On numerous occasions, the differences in how republicanism and unionism/loyalism are portrayed in the news media have also been highlighted in the republican newspaper *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, whereby it is argued that the media are really only interested in republican violence while ignoring that perpetrated by loyalists (Mallon, *AP/RN*, 26<sup>th</sup> February 1998).

However, while some newspapers, such as the *Daily Telegraph*, have historically been critical of Sinn Féin at times biased against the party, others, such as the *Irish Times*, have been more interested in examining the Northern Irish conflict and in contextualising it. In fact, newspapers

such as the *Irish Times* and the *Mirror* were also seen to cover Irish republicanism in a quantitatively different manner from the others. For example, while mentions of all political parties are more numerous in the *Irish Times* than in any other newspaper, the *Irish Times* and the *Mirror* were the two newspapers which had the smallest % of simultaneous mentions of Sinn Féin and the IRA in the same story. It was also the two *Mirror* papers which referred to Sinn Féin more frequently than to the UUP. More specifically 58% and 54% of all mentions to the four parties considered were made to Sinn Féin in the *Sunday Mirror* and the *Daily Mirror*, respectively. In relation to republican coverage of the *Irish Times*, a confidential source from the newspaper explained:

the Irish Times does not agree with the party's analysis, strategy or tactics. It does not feel obliged to swallow Sinn Féin's fictions about its responsibility for violence. [ ] (It) reports the party's activities, policies and comments. It analyses Sinn Féin's strategy and tactics and condemns its support for violence. This is in line with the paper's articles of trust. We are obliged to follow a constitutional line and we do. We are also obliged to be fair and we are.<sup>84</sup>

This shows that although the newspaper does not agree with and to a certain extent does not believe in much of Sinn Féin's positioning, it nevertheless attempts to report the party with the same fairness and accuracy that it awards to any other party, being critical without being biased. Nevertheless, on a number of occasions the republican newspaper, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, has still criticised the reporting of the *Irish Times*, having described it as 'fanciful' (*AP/RN*, 13<sup>th</sup> November 1997). It can also be observed that whilst republicans claim that the media are still favouring unionists as seen in this extract:

compare the saturation coverage that was given to the deaths of seven nationalists after Christmas. [ ] No Unionists was asked to comment, no loyalist cross-examined, there were no editorials questioning the impact of loyalist violence on the peace process. The spotlight was on republicans. (Mallon, 26<sup>th</sup> February 1998)

unionists can be heard complaining about pro-Sinn Féin bias, as Robert McCarthy from the UKUP commented:

in Northern Ireland, many elements of the media have ceased to be unbiased commentators or objective reporters. They have instead become, perhaps unwittingly, enthusiastic supporters of a process whose implementation ultimately threatens the very existence of democracy itself. (*Belfast Telegraph*, 9<sup>th</sup> July 2000)

Clearly, the media will always be seen by opposing groups as favouring the other, a similar situation to that felt by Senator George Mitchell and the British and Irish governments who had to carefully balance the negotiating process as either nationalists or republicans felt that unionists were being favoured or vice-versa. However, as another journalist argued:

Sinn Féin's views and its distinctive rhetoric have been subjected to much more rigorous activity. It is quite proper that when we report the views of Gerry Adams that we bear in mind that their profile owes more to the bullet than the ballot. We should treat Sinn Féin spokesmen with fairness, objectivity and sensitivity and understanding. We mustn't play a silly game of heroes and villains in our coverage of Northern

<sup>84</sup> In survey, 30<sup>th</sup> July 1997.

Ireland.<sup>85</sup>

### Influencing the News Agenda

Although some quarters of the media are intent in undermining the peace process and Sinn Féin, on a number of occasions the party was still able to successfully influence the news agenda. One particular example that was seen by different journalists as representing a success for Sinn Féin's communication strategies was the 1997 general election, in which the party polled a record vote and elected two MPs to Westminster. As Martina Purdy argued:

by far the party surpassed other parties in terms of media relations. The party had weekly press conferences, they had a press conference to launch their candidates, to launch the elections, to launch their manifesto. Sinn Féin also made great efforts to promote mid Ulster as a second horse race between McGuinness and the DUP. It succeeded. Also, it continually claimed Adams would have an 'uphill' battle in West Belfast to scare voters out to the polls.<sup>86</sup>

Nevertheless, another journalist from the *Guardian* argued that Sinn Féin's success was more related to the failure of others in influencing the news agenda *per se* whereby 'obviously they did well, because the SDLP is in such a shambles and because people had nothing to blame SF for',<sup>87</sup> and of the poor quality of their strategies and campaigning. Furthermore, one source from *The Irish Times* claimed that Sinn Féin was most successful in terms of levels of exposure 'in the issues on which the British government's errors, indecision's or inactivity are most obvious or where unionists seem most reluctant to change'.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, this was one of the main features of the peace process, with Sinn Féin portraying itself as willing and interested in negotiating and engaging in dialogue with the UUP, while the latter refused any contact with what they saw as spokespersons for 'terrorists'. This also suggests that the ability of the party to influence the news agenda is both connected with its political stance and dependent on its ability to market its position as:

Sinn Féin successfully put the blame on the London government for the failure of the peace process. Although the IRA was still bombing etc, the nationalists/republican constituency held John Major accountable. Sinn Féin skilfully seizes on John Major's comments that he would unveil measures to bring forwards the peace process after an election. That means Major looked more concerned about power than peace.<sup>89</sup>

A number of journalists, including Martina Purdy from the *Belfast Telegraph*, also pointed out that Sinn Féin was very successful in getting news coverage of issues that are of concern to the wider nationalist community, reflecting the media's increased interest in this area. Arguably, the main reason for this is that it shows that the party is moving away from its narrow and inward-

<sup>85</sup> Jonathan Barton, from the *BBC*, in letter, 26<sup>th</sup> February 1996.

<sup>86</sup> Martina Purdy, from the *Belfast Telegraph*, in survey, 1998.

<sup>87</sup> Martin Kettle, from the *Guardian*, in survey, January 1998.

<sup>88</sup> Confidential source, in survey, 30<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

<sup>89</sup> Martina Purdy, from the *Belfast Telegraph*, in survey, 1998.

looking position of the 1970s and most of 1980s and is instead focusing on creating a pan-nationalist force. In terms of the party's ability to influence the news, while this has been described as 'reasonably successful' some journalists nevertheless question whether this is a Sinn Féin success or whether it is because journalists are responding to the same events that Sinn Féin is trying to promote.<sup>90</sup> Yet, if we consider, that as Mark Leron<sup>91</sup> from Sinn Féin explained, the party is increasingly more confident with its news and feels that its issues of concern are now part of the news agenda, then the issues which it promotes are, in fact, those that the news media claim to be interested in. Indeed, Mark Davenport from the *BBC* commented, 'I think we tend to have about the same themes. But inevitably our coverage of events is not always to their liking as we cater for an audience which includes their critics as well as their supporters'.<sup>92</sup>

Nevertheless, media interest in Sinn Féin has continued to some extent to reside in a restricted number of areas. More specifically, this has meant that there is a continued focus on issues relating to the IRA and the long-standing and contentious debate on the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons. Vincent Browne explained that 'the main themes of coverage have to do with the IRA and the IRA's attitude to the cease-fire',<sup>93</sup> whilst Nelson Mews commented that 'the overall issues have not changed but the peace process currently dominates politics in Northern Ireland so that is what we currently concentrate on'.<sup>94</sup>

Moreover, as Mark Davenport from the *BBC* suggested, 'like the Northern Ireland parties, Sinn Féin does not get much coverage for its social economic policies. This will probably change if violence decreases of the levels of the past, and the region gets some form of devolved government',<sup>95</sup> an opinion also shared by Vincent Browne, who states that 'nobody has any interest in Sinn Féin's views on economics or social policies'.<sup>96</sup> Whilst the quantitative pattern of Sinn Féin coverage in the news indicates that the party is increasingly appeared more often than any of its other political rivals there is still some dismay within the republican movement at the media coverage of the party in the last few years. In a story entitled 'Don't believe everything you read' published in Sinn Féin's official newspaper *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, MacBradaigh warned that:

the important thing is to remember in all of this is the agenda. While censorship was in place North and South it was easy for elements of the media to misrepresent republicans. They simply didn't cover anything they said. Things have now become more subtle and in some ways more dangerous. In the days when violent incidents involving the IRA were common occurrence, it was these which politicians and

<sup>90</sup> Sarah Smith, from *Channel 5 News*, in survey, 1998.

<sup>91</sup> Sinn Féin press officer, in interview, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2000.

<sup>92</sup> *BBC*, in survey, 29<sup>th</sup> September 1997.

<sup>93</sup> From the *Irish Times*, in survey, 7<sup>th</sup> April 1998.

<sup>94</sup> From the *BBC*, in letter, 24<sup>th</sup> January 1996.

<sup>95</sup> In survey, 29<sup>th</sup> September 1997.

<sup>96</sup> From the *Irish Times*, in survey, 7<sup>th</sup> April 1998.

journalists choose to misrepresent. Now that we are in a phase of political struggle which primarily involves political argument, every sentence and nuance can be misrepresented. (2<sup>nd</sup> October 1997)

### **Overview**

The quality and effectiveness of Sinn Féin's political communication strategies can be assessed and measured in a variety of ways, namely by examining the output of such efforts, as conducted in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. However it is equally important to examine the party's media coverage and to consider how its communicative efforts have contributed to it. From this perspective, the results presented here and the evidence provided by journalists suggest that one of the reasons for the increased number of references to Sinn Féin in the printed press, and in particular in comparison to the three other main political parties, is the quality and success of the party's communicative efforts. More specifically, journalists highlighted that it was the party's undivided commitment to repeatedly communicate the same cohesive message and its willingness to help the media that made Sinn Féin's communication apparatus more effective than that of the other parties. The professionalisation of political communication was thus seen as a crucial factor in the increased quantitative coverage of Sinn Féin, as was what journalists described as a heightened media interest in reporting republicanism. Yet, we must also consider that while these two factors - a successful communication strategy and an increased journalistic interest - have undoubtedly contributed to a stronger quantitative coverage of Sinn Féin, they are nevertheless merely two consequences of a more crucial revolutionary process which saw Sinn Féin enter the world of diplomacy and the British government adapt to this new republican stance.

Thus, the patterns of coverage examined and discussed in this chapter must be viewed in light of the political transformation of the republican movement which took place in the mid/late 1980s, culminating in the start of the peace process in the early 1990s, as discussed in Chapter Four. The quantitative increase in references to Sinn Féin in the period of 1996-1998, both in relation to the other parties but also in the context of a decreased number of stories associating Sinn Féin with the IRA, should be considered not so much as a new or radical departure from traditional media coverage of republicanism, but more as the reinforcement of the transformation process in coverage, first noted in the mid-1990s. This research has shown that media coverage of Sinn Féin has continued to evolve in quantitative terms to the extent that journalists freely admit that other parties, such as the SDLP, are being marginalised by the news media in their pursuit of the republican agenda.

Nonetheless, it is also significant to note that while the aim of this particular chapter was not to specifically consider the qualitative dimension of the news discourse, some potential problems

have in fact been raised regarding the possible parameters of this heightened coverage. Of particular concern is that while there has been a decrease in the number of stories mentioning Sinn Féin and the IRA simultaneously, journalists freely admit that their interest still resides first and foremost in the party's role in the peace process, and its commitment to peaceful negotiation, as well as in the IRA. Indeed, a number of journalistic opinions were highlighted which stressed that it was the links between the IRA and Sinn Féin that made the party so 'attractive' for journalists, although at the same time there was some concern amongst news professionals that they would be branded IRA sympathisers if they adopted different parameters of coverage. Clearly the threat that the IRA still poses and its possible return to the armed struggle is still a key issue both amongst journalists and politicians. Now that it has been established that important quantitative transformations have taken place, what remains to be examined is to the extent to which news coverage of Sinn Féin has changed in qualitative terms, which is the focus of the subsequent chapter.

## Chapter Nine: The Good Friday Agreement

It started comically, developed through various stages of farce, almost ended in tragedy, but somehow finished with a jaded triumph. (O'Farrell, *Scotland on Sunday*, 12<sup>th</sup> April 1998)

The Good Friday Agreement, also known as the Belfast Agreement, was the climax of months or years of negotiations (depending on which date is taken as a starting point) and ultimately offered the best chance for peace that Northern Ireland has ever had. The secret behind its potential success, which at time of writing is still unsure, was the outcome of an all-inclusive process of negotiation and compromise between the different political orientations in Northern Ireland, supported and instigated by the British and Irish governments in the knowledge that the conflict could not be ended by military force. At the same time, it was also spurred by a public realisation that in order to end a strife that has killed more than 3000 people and injured many more, it was necessary to seek a solution which would allow the people of Northern Ireland to live together. The success was that all parties had to compromise and concede on certain aspects, and as Tony Blair stressed:

the idea that if one side wins something in Northern Ireland, the other loses, that's gone. The essence of what we have agreed is a choice: we are all winners or all losers. It is mutually assured benefit or mutually assured destruction. This is because the package is based on balanced principles, which for ages people have thought contradictory, but which are in fact absolutely compatible. We can all win. Put this agreement into practice, and we do all win. (*Mirror*, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1998)

The aim of this chapter is to examine 15 crucial days in the history of Northern Ireland and to consider the two aspects which this thesis has focused upon: political communication and news coverage and their interaction. In doing so, the Good Friday Agreement serves as a case-study for the validation of the main arguments in this thesis, that of a changed political republican stance<sup>1</sup>, its implications on party communication strategies<sup>2</sup> and the transformation of media coverage of Sinn Féin reflecting the new political environment in the province.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, as discussed in Chapter Eight, media coverage of Sinn Féin has been gradually transformed since the start of the peace process, and has adapted to a more politically minded party and consequently a changed British government strategy. This also induced the news media to re-appraise its approach to Irish republicanism, which ultimately resulted in an increased news coverage, thus providing the party with an opportunity to put its views across without having to endure the same biased attitude which characterised the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>4</sup> The result has been a transformation of the reporting of Northern Ireland where Sinn Féin is now portrayed as a

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter Four.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapters Five, Six and Seven

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter Six.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Curtis (1984) or Henderson *et al.* (1990).



political party with a legitimate electoral representation, in line with the British government's own approach. The aim here is then to examine contemporary media coverage of Sinn Féin and its own political communication efforts in relation to a specific political event and to determine any further transformations in news reporting.

This analysis is underpinned by an examination of 15 days of British news coverage in both print and television news, between April 3<sup>rd</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> 1998. For this, seven newspapers were randomly selected from the sample of newspapers used in Chapter Eight,<sup>5</sup> more specifically, four broadsheets: the *Herald*; *Scotland on Sunday*; the *Independent* and *Independent on Sunday*; and three tabloid papers: *Daily Record*; the *Mirror* and the *Sunday Mirror*. This involved the examination of 143 different print news stories. In addition, 38 regular television news bulletins were also examined, covering *BBC1*, *BBC2*, *ITN on ITV* and *Channel 4 News*, as seen in Table 11 (p.298). Both analyses focused on a detailed examination of the news texts and how these reported and related to the events which were taking place. The main aim was to determine the parameters of coverage of the Good Friday Agreement, in particular focusing on the reporting of Sinn Féin and Irish republicanism in comparison to that of Ulster unionism.

In terms of the organisation of the chapter, there are three distinct sections, the first of which presents a combination of political analysis and analysis of media coverage of the period examined. Section two analyses Sinn Féin's communication efforts and the messages the party emphasised. The third section is an overview, where the general parameters of media coverage of the Good Friday Agreement are discussed and the implications highlighted.

### ***Politics and News: negotiating the agreement***

In a number of ways, the period between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> of April 1998 was both typical and atypical of the troubled history of Northern Ireland. During the period in question, the deep-seated divisions and distrust that have engulfed the province were still present, thus not making these 15 days not dissimilar to any other in Northern Irish politics. It was also typical because it witnessed the difficult and painstakingly slow process of trying to establish common ground and an agreement within the entrenched views held by the different political groupings. As in any other negotiation process for conflict resolution, it was characterised by a repeated cycle of success, failure, progress and then delay; a feeling captured by the *BBC* anchor, Peter Sissons, who commented that 'for every guarded mention of progress there is another of differences and difficulties' (*Nine o'clock News*, 9<sup>th</sup> April 1998).

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<sup>5</sup> See Table 3, p. 188.

However, this same period was also atypical, representing the culmination of a long, and arduous negotiation process and the pinnacle of years of inter-party and inter-governmental talks, searching for a peaceful solution to the Troubles. Simultaneously, it also embodied how much had changed in Northern Ireland, and in particular how a new approach to the conflict was developed by not only Sinn Féin but also by the British government.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, it was the period when eight parties and two governments were given a deadline - 10<sup>th</sup> April 1998, set by Senator George Mitchell in late March 1998, by which agreement had to be reached, thus forcing them to work together and find common ground, under strict time constraints.

### **The Negotiation Process**

Although it was clear that a deal had to be reached by the set deadline and both the British Prime Minister and the Irish Taoiseach, with the support of the American President, attempted to ensure that this was respected, what was not obvious was the final shape the agreement would take and which side it would favour. In essence, the talks process centred around trying to find an acceptable compromise between what in reality were incompatible aspirations: a united Ireland versus the continuation of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom. The result, as one journalist from the *Daily Record* put it, was 'like nailing custard to the wall' (Maguire, 10<sup>th</sup> April 1998). In addition, as Jon Snow stressed, there had to be 'something for everyone', although the big question was whether this would be 'enough for anyone?' (*Channel 4 News*, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1998). As the *News at Ten* anchor commented, 'for the people of Northern Ireland, next week will be a landmark for good or otherwise. The politicians here are going into new territory and all of them are weary, for here one man's compromise is another's sell out' (Trevor MacDonald, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1998).

### **The First Stage: Inter-Governmental Agreement**

Before a settlement that would end the Troubles could be found, the two governments, British and Irish, had first to establish what would be an acceptable solution to both. This meant that while for the majority of the preliminary negotiation process the media concentrated on the different parties, in the period leading up to the Good Friday Agreement the two governments were increasingly portrayed as the key elements which could deliver a settlement, and thus dominated much of the news agenda. As the *Herald* put it 'the British and Irish governments have played a crucial role in persuading warring political factions to reach agreement' (11<sup>th</sup> April 1998). Moreover, since the blue print for agreement -also known as the 'Mitchell document' - that would form the basis of the last period of negotiation was dependent on inter-governmental agreement, this placed even more of an onus on the two governments. In essence, without inter-governmental agreement there would be no inter-party agreement. For this to

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<sup>6</sup> See Chapters Four and Eight.

occur, on the one hand, the British had to concede some rights to Ireland in determining Northern Ireland's affairs, recognising that there were those within the Province who saw themselves as Irish and wanted to be part of the Republic. On the other hand, the Irish had to refute their territorial claim to the six counties and accept that any constitutional change to the status of the province would be decided by the people of Northern Ireland alone.

However, these necessary compromises were strongly opposed by the parties that each government indirectly represented. While unionists repudiated the idea of the Irish government having any power in the province's affairs, republicans and nationalists believed that the territorial claim enshrined in the Irish constitution was their legitimate right and that a strong North-South co-operation formed the basis of any agreement. Crucially, this meant that while the parties participating in the negotiations had the power to shape the future of Northern Ireland, it was, in effect, the two governments which sanctioned any underpinning principles of compromise in the grim knowledge that this could be rejected by the parties at any time.

Although it was widely accepted that finding a compromise would be a difficult and hazardous task, what had not been expected were the outstanding differences between the two governments, nor the pressure that some parties placed on the two leaders, in particular unionist pressure on Tony Blair. Indeed, unionists repeatedly warned that the greatest threat to the agreement came from the prevailing differences between London and Dublin (Brogan, *Herald*, 3<sup>rd</sup> of April 1998), and that Dublin had to give more concessions if unionists were to sign the deal. The main cause of disagreement centred on the cross-border bodies and its powers: the Irish aspired to a strong and powerful cross-border co-operation, while the Blair government strongly resisted such attempts. Nevertheless, the main problem was not so much a lack of agreement between the two governments but their realisation of what later would or would not be acceptable. This was particularly evident when the UUP repeatedly demanded more concessions from the Irish or Gerry Adams warned Tony Blair not to play the 'Orange card'.

In terms of the parties themselves, the sticking point was also the issue of North-South co-operation. While unionists did not want these bodies to have executive powers, nationalists advocated the opposite, although, ironically, cross-border co-operation between North and South was already underway in a number of areas, and particularly in fisheries. In an attempt to find a solution, the two government leaders held a series of short meetings at the margins of the Asian-European Summit in London, where they tried to find a compromise between the different party demands and in the process delayed the release of the Mitchell document, which had been initially planned for the evening of 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1998.

### Governmental Disagreements Delay the Mitchell Document

Having expected the release of the Mitchell document in the late afternoon/evening, television news on the evening of April 3<sup>rd</sup> 1998, seemed unable to cope with the political developments of the day. With the exception of *Newsnight*, all news bulletins could not agree whether or not George Mitchell had finalised the blue print for agreement or indeed if it had been disclosed to the parties. The outstanding question was whether the optimism of Number 10 sources, which journalists were keen to emphasise in contrast with the growing doubts emerging from the Trimble camp, had successfully misled journalists. For example, *Channel 4 News*, started by stating that the two governments were at ‘loggerheads’, although the possible settlement would still be circulated later that night. At a later point in the programme, Jon Snow stated that the document was already being circulated amongst the parties, although while discussing live on air with its political correspondent Gary Gibben, the latter stressed that there were still no signs of the document (3<sup>rd</sup> April 1998).

The *Nine o'clock News* and *News at Ten* teams were also having difficulties in deciding whether a deal had been reached between the two governments and if the Mitchell document had been circulated. Astonishingly, Michael Buerke opened the bulletin stating that ‘Northern Ireland’s politicians were called into Stormont tonight to be given an agenda for a settlement’, whilst at the same time stressing that there was still no inter-governmental agreement (*Nine o'clock News*, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1998). In a pre-recorded report, Dennis Murray insisted that progress had been made although the Mitchell paper would only be made available on Monday. Yet, when he joined Michael Buerke live, Murray stated that in fact the outstanding issues had not yet been resolved. These were clear signs that television news was having difficulties in reporting what was happening behind the scenes and instead was being influenced by the optimism of a team of governmental sources successfully persuading them that progress had been made and that the negotiations were proceeding according to plan.

At the same time, these incidents also provide an insight into some of the difficulties that journalists faced in covering what was a largely secretive process from which they were excluded. To make matters worse there were also repeated attempts from all participants at the talks to influence the news and put their own spin on events, further adding to the confusion. The combined result was that the reporting of the process was largely descriptive and simplistic chiefly because there was little concrete evidence of and agreement about what was in fact happening inside the Stormont Castle buildings. The nature of process was nevertheless embodied in one of Dennis Murray’s comments that night, when he stated that ‘I would say that the only thing you can say is that anyone that tells you what is going to happen by the deadline next Thursday, with any certainty, simply doesn’t know what is going on’ (*Nine o'clock News*,

3<sup>rd</sup> April 1998).

It was only *Newsnight* with the added benefit of time that got the facts right when it reported that George Mitchell had to delay the presentation to the parties of his blueprint for peace because of the continued lack of governmental agreement. Also, with the advantage of time, the following day, the press avoided most of the mistakes made by television journalists the night before, while the *Independent*, commented that:

an increasingly upbeat mood surrounding the Northern Ireland peace process was checked last night when talks chairman George Mitchell was unable to produce a working paper aimed at teeing up the final stretch of negotiations. The document was initially due at 8pm, but at 10pm the former US Senator informed the parties that he was not in a position to distribute it. The delay was taken by the parties as an ominous indication that Tony Blair and the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, had been unsuccessful in bridging the gaps between them in a series of contacts yesterday. (McKittrick, 4<sup>th</sup> April 1998)

Some strands of the media also seemed intent on blaming Bertie Ahern for the delay, and particularly on his unwillingness to give further concessions to unionist demands on cross-border bodies. For example, the *Herald* supported unionists accusations that the Irish government was demanding concessions without offering any in return, and described the Irish Taoiseach's body language as a 'clear hint to Blair wither to face down the Ulster Unionist leader' (Cooney, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1998). It was Eamon Mallie who in fact stressed that Bertie Ahern's insistence on strong cross-border bodies was actually realistic and reflected Ahern's belief that only this would guarantee a permanent republican cease-fire (*Channel 4 News*, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1998).

### Unionist Intransigence

Although television news in general was unable to accurately report what was happening behind the smokescreens, the talks were also becoming increasingly more secretive, with government spin doctors insisting on an optimistic approach while trying to subdue the UUP's continued negative stance and Trimble's so-called 'no surrender mentality' (Brogan, *Herald*, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1998). Thus, as the *Independent* reported, despite some sharp public exchanges between the parties, a number of governmental sources continued to state that progress was constantly being made (McKittrick, 4<sup>th</sup> April). Highlighting a changed approach to unionism, a number of broadcasters began to emphasise that unionists would have severe difficulties with the proposals that were being discussed between the two Prime Ministers as well as with the contents of the Mitchell document, although this had not yet been released.

This was particularly evident in the approach of *Channel 4 News*, increasingly intent on exposing the difficulties and negative moods within unionism, although initially without providing any real supporting evidence or in-depth examination. During one instance, Jon Snow

commented that ‘the Ulster Unionists are pretty angry, and specifically angry over the idea that Dublin has persuaded London that it must have a legislative role in setting up their cross-border council’ (3<sup>rd</sup> April 1998). However, in response, *Channel 4 News* political correspondent, Gary Gibben, stressed that it was not possible to state this at that particular moment in time as the Mitchell document had not been disclosed, ‘and the Ulster unionists we have just managed to speak to, said that wasn’t the case’ (3<sup>rd</sup> April 1998). Nevertheless, Gibben also emphasised that unionists were the only party that continued to be unwilling to sign up to a document with which the remaining parties were satisfied. Indeed, Gibben suggested that a considerable amount of pressure would have to be put on Trimble to force him to change his position.

It was not only Jon Snow who stressed the difficulties that unionism would face; the political commentator, Eamon Mallie, also warned of the possibility of unionists un-picking or rejecting a deal with which they were dissatisfied. This line of reporting was further pursued by Snow in an interview with the UUP representative, Dermott Nesbitt, where the news anchor again insisted on speculating on the contents of the document and the unionist reaction to it, as seen in this extract:

Snow: Dermot Nesbitt, if Dublin is allowed to legislate for the setting up of this body, it doesn’t necessarily mean then that Dublin will be actually in some way exercising control in Northern Ireland does it? (*Channel 4 News*, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1998)

*Newsnight* adopted a somewhat similar approach, although Dennis Murray avoided directly challenging or speculating on the unionist position, and instead emphasised Sinn Féin’s belief that Tony Blair would have to put further pressure upon Trimble for unionists to accept an agreement (3<sup>rd</sup> April 1998). Unlike their *Channel 4 News* counterparts, *BBC’s Nine o’clock News* and *ITV’s News at Ten* were both more optimistic and, as Dennis Murray put it, ‘it is not all sweetness and light here yet, but there does seem to be a new mood of determination’ (*Nine o’clock News*, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1998).

Moreover, continuing the theme explored on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April by *Channel 4 News*, that unionists would have more difficulties than any other parties in accepting the Mitchell proposals, *Scotland on Sunday* was also keen to stress that unionist intransigence was, in fact, jeopardising the chances of a settlement (Comfort and O’Farrell, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1998). The *Independent on Sunday* also claimed that unionist positions were endangering the peace process, and warned that if unionists continued to be perceived as ‘blocking the peace’, public opinion would ‘harden’ against them (Castle *et al.*, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1998). Unlike previous media coverage of the 1980s, unionist predicaments and strategies were now being challenged by journalists and Trimble began to be described as a ‘hard-liner’, endangering the peace process, especially since he had ‘planted most of the mines’ along the path to peace (Routledge, *Independent on Sunday*, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1998).

The pattern of the negotiations meant that initial news coverage focused primarily on the lack of inter-governmental agreement although examining this as a consequence of unionist intransigence. In focusing upon these two interrelated aspects, other political participants in the process, including Sinn Féin, were largely excluded from the news. Although media attention was upon unionists, news reporting depicted them as rigid and obstinate while, at the same time, the limited reporting of Sinn Féin focused on their suggestions that Tony Blair had to force Trimble to compromise, a similar stance which the news itself had taken (*Newsnight*, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1998) Despite the focus of derogative news coverage on unionism, as Martin Fletcher suggested, this was not a problem for Sinn Féin as the party has always been happy to take a secondary profile in the news when unionists are having difficulties.<sup>7</sup> While journalists increasingly began to pontificate and focus on the unionists' difficulties, their reporting of Sinn Féin was mainly limited to the straightforward commentary of the party's positions without any accompanying analysis, as seen in this example: 'the SDLP and indeed Sinn Féin and others they favour a vainer style: collective responsibility type administration' (*Channel 4 News*, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1998). This meant that although Sinn Féin was not appearing extensively in the news they were nevertheless indirectly 'benefiting' from the challenging coverage of unionism.

#### Unionist Anger over Undisclosed Proposals

Nevertheless, the lack of inter-governmental agreement did not prevent a series of bilateral talks between the different parties taking place throughout the day, paving the way for the Mitchell document and trying to iron out outstanding problems. Despite earlier unionist threats demanding concessions from Bertie Ahern on the issue of cross-border co-operation, Dermott Nesbitt from the UUP continued to state that although some progress had been made, this could not and would not be 'based on blackmail by terrorism' (*Nine O'clock News*, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1998). These bilateral talks also began to stress that there was another sticking point in the negotiations: the Northern Ireland executive, with unionists favouring a committee system instead of the nationalist preferred cabinet style. Even so the continued dispute between the two governments over the powers of cross-border co-operation proceeded throughout the following day, only to be fuelled even further by increased unionist worries that the Republic would be given some powers in the running of Northern Ireland.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> of April 1998, the focus of the talks shifted to Dublin, where, in an attempt to solve the impasse and address growing unionist concern over cross-border bodies and the future Northern Ireland assembly, Bertie Ahern had a series of meetings with representatives of the different parties. Despite his efforts, unionists continued to raise their demands and in an

<sup>7</sup> From the *Times*, in interview, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1998.

attempt to have their worries addressed, began to put even more pressure on Tony Blair to join the talks in advance of his scheduled visit. In Trimble's appeal to the British Prime Minister, he stated that 'having people talking in Belfast and in London 400 miles away is not conducive for progress and I think there is a sense now in bringing people together' (Brogan, *Herald*, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1998). Nevertheless, Trimble himself had refused to negotiate or even acknowledge the presence of Sinn Féin negotiators.

In an attempt to overcome the slow pace in which progress was being made, the parties met for the first time on a Sunday since the start of the talks in 1998. The fact that unionists were already becoming alarmed at the possibility of Dublin's role in the North, although this had not yet been finalised, illustrated how fragile and sensitive the negotiation process was and an eventual agreement would be, even if Hume and Adams and the two governments continued to be optimistic (Brogan, *Herald*, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1998). News coverage continued to focus on the two governments and on unionism, albeit some newspapers began to examine more carefully republican predicaments, although largely in relation to the Irish government. In contrast to the emphasis being placed on unionist difficulties and their generally pessimistic mood, nationalist accomplishments were exposed and McKittrick commented that:

now with Bertie Ahern as Taoiseach, a new understanding appears to have been reached among the three nationalist elements, and in negotiating terms they all seem to be in the same neck of the woods. Although this fact is not being trumpeted abroad, it will greatly strengthen Gerry Adams hand in dealing with dissent in the republican ranks. (*Independent*, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1998)

This stressed that unlike unionism, there was co-operation between the nationalist parties and the Irish government, while McKittrick compared this once again to the growing difficulties among unionists, who were more worried and divided about the deal, thus making them 'more problematic for everyone' (*Independent*, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1998). Significantly, the *Independent* journalist also stressed that the British government had changed its attitude and approach to unionism, namely that Tony Blair was now carefully trying to force unionists to move towards the nationalist position unlike in previous instances where the British government tended to defend unionism. Commenting on the new government policy, McKittrick wrote:

"giving comfort to the Ulster Unionists is vital" the PM told a private gathering of Irish-Americans politicians two months ago. The trick, in the final dour days of negotiation ahead, will be to continue with that comfort while nudging Trimble towards the nationalist position. (*Independent*, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1998)

This signalled that there was a growing awareness in some corners of the media for the intricacies of the peace process, expressed not only in certain newspapers such as the *Independent* and the *Independent on Sunday*, but also in television news bulletins, including *Channel 4 News* and *Newsnight*. It also indicated that for a settlement to be reached it was imperative to persuade unionists to move away from their intransigent positions, thus placing the onus for change on unionism and no longer solely on nationalism and republicanism.



Equally important is that this journalistic approach reflected how much British government strategy had evolved,<sup>8</sup> and in particular that it now saw itself as responsible for ensuring that unionists compromised with nationalists. This indicated a move away from the idea that the British government did not have a responsibility to contribute to the change of the status of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom, as John Major had stressed in the House of Commons after the release of the *Downing Street Declaration* of 1993 (Adams, 1997). Instead, the British government had now shifted to the ‘ranks of the persuaders’.

However, as McKittrick and others warned, this would not be an easy task, especially since there was an unrealistic belief within unionism that an agreement would be reached without Sinn Féin, an accusation which was later repeated by a number of broadcasters. This exposed a rather primitive yet optimistic unionist view as:

some of them thought and indeed actually hoped that the IRA cease-fire would have been broken down by now, they believed the mirage of Dublin and the SDLP splitting off from Sinn Féin. Because of this the psychology of deal-making has not permeated the unionist party as thoroughly as it has most of the other parties. (*Independent*, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1998)

Thus, despite Senator Mitchell’s continued efforts and repeated governmental sources stating that progress was being made with only minor outstanding details to be resolved, there was still no sign of agreement between the two governments, while serious concerns over the feasibility of the deadline began to emerge from the Stormont Castle buildings in Belfast, which were also reflected in the news. Peter Sissons stressed that:

the countdown is on for the Northern Ireland peace talks and all the parties have expressed hope that an historic deal can be done before Thursday’s deadline. But for their optimism to be justified a draft agreement has to take shape soon. (*Nine o’clock News*, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1998)

### The Last Chance to Influence the Agreement

Although signs began to emerge indicating that by the evening of the 6<sup>th</sup> of April, four days before the deadline, Senator Mitchell would finalise his document, there were nevertheless extended last minute efforts by the main parties, and in particular the UUP, to influence the document. In the eyes of many, this was their last opportunity to have some input in the future of Northern Ireland. However, the extent of these attempts, especially those of the UUP, were of such magnitude that the talks were once again hit by a major crisis, this time between the SDLP and the UUP, who failed to reach agreement on the structures and powers of the North-South Council, with the SDLP accusing unionists of jeopardising the negotiations and being unwilling to compromise.

In an attempt to examine the growing differences emerging from Stormont Castle buildings,

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<sup>8</sup> See Chapter Eight.

Mark Davenport conducted an in-depth examination for the *Nine O'clock News*. Here he examined the stances of the three major parties and the two governments on the different elements which would constitute the Mitchell proposals. Despite the severity of the situation and the threat of the collapse of the talks, Davenport opted to examine the process with an analogy to a light-hearted chess game:

in reality the game in which Mo Mowlam, Gerry Adams and the rest are involved is every bit as complicated as any chess match. Whilst the individual figures involved will all be making their tactical moves, the preferred outcome in this game is not a victory for one side or the other, but a draw which will allow everyone to claim some credit. (6<sup>th</sup> April 1998)

What Davenport failed to consider was that the principle obstacle to any agreement was the inability of the UUP and David Trimble to accept a deal that journalists had described as being agreeable to most other parties and which would ensure a permanent cease-fire. *News at Ten* adopted a similar approach to that of Mark Davenport for the *Nine o'clock News*, although this time John Irvine considered the parties difficulties, and in particular the UUP's, as resembling a molecular puzzle. Just like Davenport, Irvine's report was somewhat simplistic and descriptive and failed to examine the deep intricacies of the battles taking place behind the scenes. Moreover, challenging the optimism of the Northern Ireland Secretary of State, Mo Mowlam, most television news tried to convey a sense of further stalemate into the talks, or the 'gloom' approach, that reaching an agreement would not be easy. This was particularly evident in the reporting of *News at Ten*, which throughout the process opted for a 'doom and gloom' strategy. In announcing failure it would then be able to announce a breakthrough, and with it give the impression that it was providing viewers with the latest and most dramatic events.

On the same evening, *Newsnight* questioned why there was yet another delay in the issuing of the blue print for the talks. Gordon Brewer wondered whether it had anything to do with 'Mr Mitchell dotting the I's or crossing the T's on an historic agreement' or whether 'he (is) trying to paper over differences which are so fundamental they could yet scupper the deal?' (6<sup>th</sup> April 1998). It was the *Newsnight* political correspondent, Tom Coulter, who stressed that the document had been delayed yet again because of the pressure that the parties, and especially the UUP, were placing on the two governments and Senator Mitchell in a last minute attempt to influence its content. This also provided yet another opportunity for journalists to challenge unionist positions, and their efforts to 'unionise' the forthcoming Mitchell document, as seen in this exchange between Gordon Brewer and Tom Coulter:

Brewer: Can you just clear something up for us? Jeffrey Robinson from the UUP was saying in the beginning of the programme he wouldn't necessarily accept what was in this document anyway. That it wasn't a blue print. If that is the case, why are they all so concerned about every last little word in it?

Coulter: Well, I think really, people do believe this will be what the governments and certainly Senator Mitchell's best guess, as to what people will agree

to in a final settlement, but the parties may not have agreed to at this moment in time. But they are all having their input there, but they obviously want to put as much as they can from their own viewpoint into this document if it is going to be a blue print and I think most people now believe that it will be, that it will form the basis of a final settlement and they want to have their input there, and that is why they are making these changes, these alterations at the last moment and wanting to have their say [ ]. (*Newsnight*, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1998)

In trying to explain the latest developments in the negotiation process, Michael Brunson suggested that ‘what is happening is that Tony Blair and Mr Ahern from the South and Senator George Mitchell himself, are saying to the parties: look 22 months ago you put your hand to the search for peace, now we must know the answer’ (*News at Ten*, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1998). However one key question continued to remain unanswered: what aspects of the agreement were the parties prepared to accept? Although this was raised by John Irvine reporting for *News at Ten*, when he suggested that journalists had heard enough about all the problems that the process was facing, yet little was known about what areas they are willing to compromise on, all broadcasters failed to try and provide an answer and instead pursued their agenda of progress and delay.

In a sense, it was the difficulties within the agreement that made it news, and this became increasingly obvious as time went by. However, the problems with the reporting of the negotiation process up to this point were also connected to the fact that the talks were becoming more secretive. The endless repetition of unionist difficulties continued to be exposed in the news media, in particular since the party had now chosen to reveal these in front of the cameras to the dismay of many involved in the talks (*News at Ten*, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1998). This meant that news continued to focus upon unionism, albeit in a negative way, and Sinn Féin was left on the periphery to enjoy seeing unionists being ‘picked on’ by journalists. From a republican perspective, the limited news coverage of the party was not really problematic as it was paralleled by a negative unionist coverage.<sup>9</sup>

#### Unionist Officially Reject the Mitchell Document

Finally, the long-awaited Mitchell proposal for a settlement was handed over to the parties shortly before midnight on 6<sup>th</sup> April 1998, thereby missing the main news bulletins and on the whole, failing to feature in the press examined. Despite being considered a ‘long-awaited paper’ (Campbell, *Herald*, 7<sup>th</sup> April 1998), of all the daily papers examined the only story covering the topic was in the *Herald*. One of the possible reasons for this, apart from the timing of the release, was that the contents of the document were not for public disclosure and until the different parties had had a chance to examine it little would be known other than through rumour, speculation or leaking. For a while there was a certain state of peace and quiet at

<sup>9</sup> John Mullin, from the *Guardian*, in interview, 8<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

Stormont Castle buildings while parties concentrated on examining Senator Mitchell's proposals, although this was not to last long and chaos re-emerged the next day, plunging the peace process once again into serious difficulties.

Hours after the Mitchell document was given to the parties, the UUP rejected it on the 7<sup>th</sup> of April 1998, claiming it was a "Sinn Féin wish list", while John Taylor from the UUP stated, 'I wouldn't touch this paper with a 40ft barge pole'. As Jon Snow put it that evening, the negotiation process had gone 'from high optimism to traditional gloom' (*Channel 4 News*, 7<sup>th</sup> April 1998). Through such an outright, public outcry and refusal to accept a document whose contents were still only within the domain of the talks, unionists again became the focus of attention. At the same time, the manner in which unionists rejected the Mitchell proposals also raised considerable disregard for them, in particular from nationalists and republicans. As Seamus Mallon from the SDLP, stated:

are they (unionists) forgetting that there are other parties in these negotiations and [ ] at one point when we looked out of the window there were more negotiators outside than there were in the building. I think it tells you something that you cannot negotiate by stunt, by walk out, by conditions of return or by ignoring the positions of the parties with whom you are negotiating. (*Channel 4 News*, 7<sup>th</sup> April 1998)

Jeffrey Donaldson, defending the UUP from accusations that their rejection was a negotiating ploy stated:

this is no stunt, this is for real. We have major significant fundamental difficulties with the proposals in this document and people have got to understand that. And if there is to be agreement we have got to agree with it and unless there is movement we are not going to get agreement. (*Channel 4 News*, 7<sup>th</sup> April 1998)

### Unionists Negotiate by Stunt

Despite unionist attempts to persuade politicians and journalists that they were not negotiating by stunt, television news began stressing this accusation. In particular it questioned unionist predicaments and strategies in an increasingly challenging manner, seemingly overturning the more pacific approach to unionism that broadcasters had adopted for many years. Jon Snow was intrigued to know what unionists expected to achieve in the remaining 48 hours that they had not been able to accomplish in the previous 18 months (*Channel 4 News*, 7<sup>th</sup> April 1998). Meanwhile, Gary Gibben stressed that 'a Downing street spokesman insisted the draft text was a synthesis of the Irish and British government's view' (*Channel 4 News*, 7<sup>th</sup> April 1998), thus making it very difficult to understand how the contents of the document could be any different from what unionists had expected. Adding to the accusations, Seamus Mallon stated:

let's remember that David Trimble met with Tony Blair almost on a weekly basis for two years. Under no circumstances could there be anything in this document or the Prime Minister's thinking that would come as a surprise to David Trimble and if there is, what were they talking (about) every once a week for two years? (*Nine o'clock News*, 7<sup>th</sup> April 1998)

More bluntly, *Newsnight* wondered ‘is this just a ploy or is the peace process under threat?’, while at the same time stressing that by rejecting the document the Ulster unionists had successfully ‘put themselves at centre stage’ (7<sup>th</sup> April 1998), raising the possibility that the unionist stunt could have been pre-planned. Also important was that journalists were questioning unionists’ true motives for their rejection of the Mitchell document, mirroring the British government’s own suspicions. The *Herald* reported the next day that government sources suggested that the unionist outrage ‘is largely synthetic, a necessary performance before the cameras to appease his (Trimble’s) followers and lower expectations of a final compromise’ (Brogan, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1998). This showed that it was not just journalists and fellow politicians who questioned their true motives but so did their historical ally, the British government. The media focus on unionism was becoming more negative, challenging unionist predicaments and questioning their strategies. In the course of this, Sinn Féin continued to reside comfortably outside the media agenda, satisfied that the attacks and questioning were now levelled at unionists.

Still, the accusations that David Trimble and the UUP were playing the media, and in particular that they spent most of their time in front of the cameras rather than in the negotiation process, were not just levelled by television news; this was a theme picked up by the *Independent*, who commented that ‘opinions differ among the other parties involved on whether the chairman’s paper had caused a genuine crisis for the UUP or whether its rejection amounted to a stratagem aimed at extracting concessions in the last days of the talks’ (McKittrick, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1998). The *Herald* also suggested that David Trimble’s outrage at the content of the news was mainly for the cameras (Brogan, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1998).

Some journalists began comparing unionists’ outright rejection of the document with the role that Trimble had played in bringing down the last inter-party accord, the Sunningdale Agreement. *Channel 4 News* anchor, Jon Snow, asked Jeffrey Donaldson of the UUP if the unionists were going to be the ‘rug pullers again’, to which Donaldson replied:

well, I hope the people will have learnt the lesson of 1974 and that is if you push the unionists too far, they will not agree to the kind of proposals that we got in Sunningdale and the kind of proposals that are set out in the document last night. (7<sup>th</sup> April 1998)

This further highlighted their intransigence and unwillingness to negotiate in ‘good faith’. Even the *Daily Record*, which had for a long time taken a clear anti-republican and pro-unionist stance<sup>10</sup> stated that ‘the Ulster peace train was in danger of going off the rails last night with unionists threatening to reject the draft agreement’ (Oliver, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1998), although refraining from admitting that unionists had in fact rejected the deal.

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<sup>10</sup> See Curtis (1984) and Chapter Eight.

Dennis Murray was also unable to fully admit that unionists were stage-managing their rejection for maximum impact, although he acknowledged that their attempts to spin were greater than those of the other parties. Instead, focused on a less anti-unionist approach and suggested that the problems unionists were having were being fuelled by Bertie Ahern's support of the SDLP and Sinn Féin, thus making it crucial for Tony Blair 'to reassure unionists that the union is safe', while at the same time indirectly putting the blame on the Irish Taoiseach (*Nine o'clock News*, 7<sup>th</sup> April 1998).

Stronger appeals were made by David Trimble for Tony Blair to join the talks process. Following a number of phone calls to Blair, who was heading the London Summit of the European Socialist heads of government, the Prime Minister decided it was time to join the action. Somewhat ironically, what became one of the most important sound bites of the negotiating process seemed to have a republican feel to it. When Blair arrived in Belfast and stated, 'I feel the hand of history upon our shoulder [ ] and leaders should lead and lead from the front' (*Channel 4 news*, 7<sup>th</sup> April 1998), it resembled a comment made by Gerry Adams the week before, that Mr Blair should 'take up a leadership position [ ] and get into the driving seat and move it (the process) forward' (Brogan, *Herald*, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1998).

#### 'Leaders Should Lead' from Belfast

In one sense, whether negotiating by stunt or not, unionists successfully captured not only the attention of the media but also of the two governments. Shortly after Blair's arrival in Belfast, an emergency meeting lasting two hours was held with David Trimble, where every line of the proposed document was examined and in which the latter sought clarification and guarantees. Only 72 hours before the deadline, Blair tried to save the peace process, insisting that the agreement rested on the principle of agreement, whereby no changes would be made to the status of Northern Ireland without the consent of its people, although the manner in which unionists had rejected the Mitchell document had 'dismayed the Prime Minister' (Brogan, *Herald*, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1998a). While unionist rejection of the document was one of the most excruciating crises before a settlement was reached, it also led to the re-emergence of a major stumbling block, with accusations from the SDLP that unionists were once again 'cherry-picking' the agreement. Further accusations were then levelled at unionists for trying to shift the focus of attention away from the talks' process to the media arena. As Brogan put it, 'a day of drama began just after midnight yesterday, when the parties were handed the draft settlement drawn up by Mr Mitchell. By morning, the parties were engaged in a round of bitter verbal exchanges as the implications of the proposals sank in' (*Herald*, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1998a).

At the same time, unionists' dramas had also succeeded once again in capturing the attention of

the news media, and journalists began to emphasise that the reaching of a deal was now dependent on the two prime-ministers (*News at Ten*, 7<sup>th</sup> April 1998). A number of journalists again suggested that it was Tony Blair's responsibility to 'reassure the unionists they are not being sold out, while at the same time he cannot alienate nationalists' (Gorrod and Maguire, *Mirror*, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1998). In a ploy to extract further concessions from Tony Blair, David Trimble astutely and cynically preferred to blame the pro-Sinn Féin content of the talks on everyone else other than the Prime Minister, suggesting that while Blair was engaged with other matters, the Irish had persuaded British officials to favour nationalists. Still, the logic of Tony Blair not knowing what his officials were including in the draft agreement was vehemently questioned especially since the Prime Minister saw a peace agreement as a personal commitment.

### Is an Agreement Still Possible?

Negotiations continued on Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> April 1998, with the resumption of talks between the British and Irish governments and the UUP. Trimble's main concern was the lack of guarantees that changes in the status of the province were linked to unionist consent. A second area of concern was the role that the Irish government would play in the province although, as will be discussed, it later emerged that this was not the true cause of unionist unhappiness, once again suggesting that unionists were negotiating by stunt. In order to resolve these outstanding issues, the presence of the Irish Taoiseach was also necessary and he joined the talks in Belfast despite the death of his mother the previous day. Frantic activity continued inside Stormont Castle buildings, with a series of meetings between governmental officials and the parties, chiefly the UUP, in a bid to find an acceptable solution which would address unionist worries without ostracising nationalists.

At the same time, news reporters continued to have similar difficulties in determining the mood of the talks because of all the 'spinning' that the parties and the governments were putting on events. While unionists stressed their pessimism, government officials and other parties emphasised their up-beat mood. As Russell Edmonds reported for the *Herald*; 'whatever positive message the government spin doctors in London, Dublin and Belfast had conveyed up until a few days ago has now been overcast by the dark cloud of dissent from all shades of unionism' (9<sup>th</sup> April 1998). Furthermore, some journalists began to question whether in fact the unionist rejection of the Mitchell document did not reflect their 'horror of sharing any real power with members of Sinn Féin' (Jon Snow, *Channel 4 News*, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1998).

This was an issue that had already surfaced in the news and once again signalled a greater aptitude of the news media to challenge unionist predicaments and strategies. In an interview with Reg Empey from the UUP, Jon Snow questioned the unionist representative about the true

reasons behind the unionist stance, as evident in this extract:

- Snow: Let me come straight to the point. Are you prepared to sit in a cabinet with collective responsibility and share power with a Sinn Féiner within the cabinet?
- Empey: Well, we don't believe that the proportionality proposals that we have put forwards are compatible with the responsibility of sharing cabinet [ ] We believe that the two are incompatible. But I would also add that there is also the question of whether people are genuinely committed to exclusively peaceful means. And that therefore means what do they do with their weapons? Are they prepared to decommission? Are they prepared to say the war is over. These are things that we wish to know and our supporters wish to know.
- Snow: But in truth Reg Empey, you never thought Sinn Féin would ever come as far as this, you never thought they would ever get into a process. Likewise you never thought the question of having to sit down with them would ever arise, and now it has. (*Channel 4 News*, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1998)

This theme was also picked up by some of the newspapers, although the reason for unionist difficulties continued, at times, to be bound with the two governments' insistence that a deal had to include Sinn Féin in order to ensure a permanent cease-fire (Edmonds, *Herald*, 9<sup>th</sup> April 1998). In seemingly attempting to give unionists some advice on how to portray themselves, the *Mirror* even warned that although considerable progress had been made by all the parties, unionists could not afford to be viewed by the public as 'an immoderate party'. The only way to avoid this was by stressing that, unlike republicans, they had never been involved in the use of violence as a negotiating ploy (9<sup>th</sup> April 1998). Indirect challenges to unionist positions also continued to appear in some newspapers, and the *Mirror* stressed that:

these are the people who are now working towards a settlement in this stage of the peace process. They will have to work together in the new assembly and they will have to work together in the north-south bodies. So if they genuinely want peace – and the *Mirror* believes that – they must accept that. (9<sup>th</sup> April 1998)

Although this was a crucial point that required careful examination, once again only *Channel 4 News* and *Newsnight* ventured such suggestions. The *Nine o'clock News* approach, although stressing Trimble's refusal to negotiate with Sinn Féin, was to emphasise that unionists were still not prepared to acknowledge republicans. Dennis Murray simplistically commented that 'Sinn Féin still don't get the time of the day from the Ulster Unionist, a visible sign of differences' (8<sup>th</sup> April 1998). Still, what Murray did not mention was that Sinn Féin also had outstanding differences with the UUP and yet had not refused to negotiate directly with unionists. At the same time, *News at Ten* adopted a similar approach to that of *Nine o'clock News* and focused on the distance between unionists and republicans by simplistically stating that 'as David Trimble crossed paths with Gerry Adams this evening, he barely acknowledged him' (8<sup>th</sup> April 1998). Moreover, contrasting Trimble's repeated accusations that other parties and participants failed to reach a compromise and accept the unionists' perspective (*News at Ten*, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1998), Gerry Adams repeatedly stated that, conversely, he was aware of the



unionist difficulties (*Nine o'clock News*, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1998), showing a more positive and inclusive approach which was regularly featured in the news.

Despite these different approaches and the emphasis that Trimble placed on the lack of compromise within the unionist perspective, one issue which all broadcasters were keen to emphasise was the absence of trust between the two parties, suggesting that they had 'to take a long leap of faith for the sake of peace' (John Irvine, *News at Ten*, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1998). Furthermore, the press also began to suggest that there were indications that the UUP leader was under considerable pressure from some members of his party and negotiating team, exposing the emergence of dissent within unionist ranks (Maguire, *Mirror*, 9<sup>th</sup> April 1998). At the same time, the negotiating process was becoming more media-oriented and, as Robert Moore put it, 'the arguments are being played out in front of the cameras, old positions re-stated [ ] (and) the press here are cramped at the front gates and the parties are coming out to score points and to play to their constituents' (*News at Ten*, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1998).

In an attempt to make sense of the events, *Channel 4 News* compared the negotiation process with a lion show at a circus, with Senator Mitchell as the ring master trying to control and ensure that the 'lions' perform to an eagerly-awaiting public, the people of Northern Ireland. In his report, Gary Gibben questioned whether Senator Mitchell still had as much control as the lion master, in particular since some of the 'lions' in the peace process were becoming increasingly less tamed (8<sup>th</sup> April 1998). Moreover, both *Channel 4 News* and *Newsnight* pinpointed David Trimble's growing isolation. Jeremy Paxman started the programme by asking '24 years ago he helped to bring down a power-sharing government in Northern Ireland. Is the unionist leader prepared to buy it this time?' (*Newsnight*, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1998). The unionist position continued to be scrutinised by the media, and in particular their fear of having to share power with Sinn Féin. At the same time, descriptions of Trimble emphasising his isolation and the stalemate he had injected into the talks were being repeated throughout, as seen in this extract:

a man determined to march to his own tune, with less than a day to the deadline, David Trimble remains in the spotlight and is still counselling caution. [ ] The future of Northern Ireland rests heavily on his judgement, but the burden of history rests heavily on David Trimble too. [ ] Sinn Féin are of course the new ingredient Sunningdale didn't have. They are keen to remind Mr Trimble they are determined to achieve an agreement'. (Jaquie Long, *Newsnight*, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1998)

In contrast, coverage of republicanism continued to focus mainly on repeating Sinn Féin positions, without any analysis. This left the party in a largely comfortable position in terms of media coverage, with the probing eyes of the media focused elsewhere.

### The Last 24 hours for Compromise

Almost twelve hours before the deadline for agreement was to expire, Bertie Ahern and Tony

Blair made a series of last minute attempts to ensure that a deal would be reached by the deadline. Although there was an entire day of talks, secrecy was high at the Stormont Castle buildings and few details emerged regarding the negotiations which were taking place. Still, news did emerge of a breakthrough on the contentious issue of North-South bodies that had dominated much of the latter days of the talks, alongside the suggestion that a secret deal had been struck between the two governments, the SDLP and the UUP.

Speculating on this supposed deal, which did not include Sinn Féin, journalists began reporting that the details of the proposed agreement had changed dramatically to please unionist demands (*Newsnight*, 9<sup>th</sup> April). As the *Nine o'clock News* anchor Peter Sissons suggested, there was now a possibility that the deal could be rejected by Sinn Féin. Dennis Murray more cautiously commented that while this was a possibility it was simply too soon to start making such speculations even though Sinn Féin had voiced their discontent (9<sup>th</sup> April 1998). Some journalists began to conjecture whether a situation could arise where Sinn Féin would not sign the deal nor reject it and instead take a neutral approach. However, despite these proposed suggestions, it was widely acceptable to all, with the exception of unionists, that a deal without Sinn Féin would not bring long-lasting peace to Northern Ireland (*Newsnight*, 9<sup>th</sup> April 1998). At the same time, some television bulletins claimed that there had been a change in the mood of the talks and it was now the unionists' turn to sound happy (*Nine o'clock News*, 9<sup>th</sup> April 1998).

It was also on this occasion that the first interview with a republican representative of the period took place, with the appearance of Mitchell McLaughlin on *Newsnight* with Jeremy Paxman. The focus of the interview was on the difficulties that Sinn Féin was having with the changes that had been made to the Mitchell agreement, and although the interview started with Paxman asking in a typically abrupt manner 'what has gone wrong?', the interview progressed smoothly, and unlike Paxman's usual aggressive approach to his interviewees, there was even a moment of humour between both, as seen here:

- Paxman: Mr. McLaughlin what has gone wrong?  
 McLaughlin: Well, effectively what went wrong was after an initial bout of panic by the unionists, in relation to strands 2 and 1, or at least the relationship between strands 2 and 1 and this attempt to renegotiate...  
 Paxman: Northern Ireland and cross-border institutions, yes?  
 McLaughlin: Absolutely. As we have got so focused here, I think we end up using the jargon of the talks (laughter).  
 Paxman: (laugh's) Ahm... now is this going to be a proposal you can sign up to whole-heartedly? (*Newsnight*, 9th April 1998)

Despite Paxman's insistence on asking whether or not Sinn Féin would accept the changed proposals for an agreement, and McLaughlin repeatedly avoiding to answer to his question, Paxman did not alter his style of questioning nor adopt his renowned aggressive mode. For example, although in an interview with Michael Howard of the Conservative Party Paxman

asked him the same question 21 times as he persistently evaded an answer, in the case of Mitchell McLaughlin he simply seemed resigned to the fact that the republican politician was not going to give the answer Paxman was looking for. Instead, Paxman even apologised to Mitchell McLaughlin for insisting on the same question:

Paxman: So what sort of a framework are you looking at? Are you looking at some interim document that you can sign up to bits of it or that this rolls over the Easter weekend or what?

McLaughlin: Well, the package we will be looking at and we are prepared to look at will include powerful North-South all-Ireland bodies that are legislated from within each parliament and which can deal in an executive fashion with all those harmonising functions that reflect the reality of the demographic, the political and the economical of the people in the island of Ireland.

Paxman: I'm sorry, I don't want to be rude, but we know what you want. What I was getting at was whether you think you are [ ] going to get it and if so within what time frame?

McLaughlin: I've told you that unless that [ ] is the substance of the agreement then there isn't going to be one and having told you what I want I'm telling you what the bottom line is.

Paxman: Ok Mitchell McLaughlin thanks very much. (*Newsnight*, 9th April 1998.)

Jeremy Paxman's attitude to Mitchell McLaughlin illustrated how the transformation of media coverage and journalistic attitudes to Sinn Féin flourished during such a crucial period in the history of Northern Ireland. This is also particularly evident when compared to previous attitudes, namely when Jeremy Paxman asked Gerry Adams 'how does it feel to visit a country where most people think you are an apologist for murder?' (*Newsnight*, 17<sup>th</sup> November 1994 in Lago, 1998:682). Thus, in this interview Mitchell McLaughlin was treated as a politician invited to put forward his view without being branded or treated as a terrorist.

Having been kept abreast of the deal struck between the two governments, the SDLP and UUP, Sinn Féin was now having problems with what they regarded as a pro-unionist agreement, and with the possibility that a compromise had in fact been reached without their inclusion. The onus had now partially shifted towards the republican camp although at no point did Sinn Féin outrightly reject the deal as the UUP had done. In fact, this was something that was noted by some journalists, namely Catherine MacLeod, who stressed that unlike unionists, Sinn Féin negotiators had 'skilfully positioned' the party in the negotiations process while still expressing their concerns and dislike for some aspects of the deal (*Herald*, 10<sup>th</sup> April 1998). Moreover, as McKittrick reminded his readers, historically the most prominent threat to any peace accord or solution to the troubles had come from the unionist/loyalist camp (*Independent*, 10<sup>th</sup> April 1998a).

Sinn Féin's main concerns were that the agreement was too pro-unionist, which meant that further tactful negotiations were required to keep all parties on board. However, this also meant that the midnight deadline passed unnoticed although not deterring the pace of negotiations. As

Paxman put it:

tonight's deal is the culmination, if it comes, of two years of talks, haggling, walkouts, suspensions, cajoling and some pretty astonishing moves too. Not just the republicans, who decided to try advancing their cause by politics, but unionists who shifted too, some of them a very long way. (*Newsnight*, 9<sup>th</sup> April 1998)

Although Sinn Féin was now having problems with the changed contents of Senator Mitchell's proposals, there was little analysis of this in the news media, with the exception of *Newsnight's* interview with Mitchell McLaughlin. Instead, journalists merely focused on repeating party statements that the deal was too unionist, and continued to challenge the unionist position. For example, the *Herald* merely reported that 'Mitchell McLaughlin, a Sinn Féin negotiator, left the talks at 1.30 am to issue a stark warning that the talks were on the point of collapse over the issues of cross-border bodies' (MacLeod, 10<sup>th</sup> April 1998).

### Agreement at Last

A marathon of last minute negotiations and talks proceeded during the night, demonstrating the commitment of all to find an acceptable solution. Nevertheless, Sinn Féin continued to have problems with the unionist slant of the document and it was only around seven in the morning, following a number of warnings that the party was deeply dissatisfied with the proposals, that it seemed willing once again to embrace the proposals. However, when a settlement was almost complete and Sinn Féin was back on board, unionists suddenly objected to the document, claiming that they could not sign a deal that allowed Sinn Féin into government without prior decommissioning. As the *Independent* commented the following day, once again it was the UUP who had 'almost brought the peace process to a halt' (Sengupta, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1998).

To the exasperation of Tony Blair and of many of the other parties at the negotiating table, David Trimble told the Prime Minister that the deal was not acceptable, a move which was described as Trimble 'suddenly produc(ing) two booby-trapped rabbits out of his red, white and blue hat' (Sengupta, *Independent*, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1998), and described by the *Daily Record* as a 'shock demand' (Maguire and Gorrod, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1998). Although the talks' deadline had passed, the negotiations did not get any easier and the fact that the UUP continued to refuse to negotiate directly with Sinn Féin only complicated matters further. In a last minute attempt to salvage the opportunity of long-lasting peace, Blair, who according to the media was becoming saturated with the unionists intransigent attitude, refused to re-draft the agreement and instead wrote a letter to Trimble stating that decommissioning of paramilitary weapons was an inclusive part of the deal. He also asked the American president, Bill Clinton, to intervene with a number of telephone calls to the different party leaders, stressing that those who had the vision to bring peace to Northern Ireland would be rewarded and that the United States would accompany and support any attempts to bring an end to the conflict. The chance for agreement gained renewed impetus with last-minute unionist tantrums being overcome. At the same time, government

officials were still alluding to unionist stunts and even to their sabotage of the peace process, while Sinn Féin was reported as pleased that its long-standing warning that unionists were not serious about the agreement had been proved right (Maguire and Gorrod, *Daily Record*, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1998).

Following a day of last minute negotiations and careful drafting and re-drafting of the document to ensure that the different leaders could present it to their parties, at 17.36 on Good Friday, Senator George Mitchell finally announced that a settlement for peace had been reached, albeit almost 20 hours after the original deadline:

raw emotion, joy, wonder and disbelief swirled around the Castle buildings yesterday. And when the light of dawn came it chased away the political darkness of Northern Ireland to reveal a promise that things could be different'. (Millar, *Irish Times*, 1998)

In reaching this deal, the different political factions had also shown that despite their deeply entrenched views, they were able to finally brush them aside in search of an agreement which was on the whole acceptable to all. Significantly, Sinn Féin was still on board since, although as MacLeod stressed 'there is little doubt there would have been some sort of cobbled-together agreement with or without Sinn Féin, but without it on board the agreement would hardly be worth the paper on which it was written' (*Herald*, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1998).

Even so, the day after the agreement was reached, David McKittrick warned that despite all the joy and the accomplishment of a cross-party peace agreement, it was important to note that it still had to be accepted by both Sinn Féin's and the UUP's grassroots (*Independent*, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1998). While media coverage during the negotiating process had generally focused on exposing unionist tantrums to the indirect benefit of Sinn Féin, now that both Sinn Féin and the UUP had to sell the agreement to their parties, this resulted in a change of news tactic where comparisons between both parties began to be made.

### **The Agreement**

The agreement is an acknowledgement by both communities in the North that there is no way around one another: unionists can't be driven into the sea, nationalists can't be cowed into silence. (de Bréadún, 1998)

As the *Irish Times* political editor suggests, the agreement emerges from the conclusion of years of struggle both at a political and a military level, which nevertheless failed to resolve the conflict in Northern Ireland. The Good Friday Agreement is the second agreement based on the notion of cross-community co-operation. As with its predecessor, the Sunningdale Agreement,<sup>11</sup> 'the central thrust [ ] is the same nationalist acceptance of the present constitutional position of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom in return for power-sharing within Northern Ireland and links between North and South' (Ruane and Todd, 1999:1). As the authors also

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<sup>11</sup> For an account of the Sunningdale Agreement see, for example, Aughey and Morrow (1996); Boyce (1988) or Whyte (1996).

stress, the Belfast Agreement goes further than Sunningdale on a number of aspects, in that it fully recognises that the right to determine Northern Ireland's constitutional future lies with the people of Northern Ireland. As a number of journalists noted, this is truly remarkable and represents British acceptance that if the majority of the people in Northern Ireland want to be part of a united Ireland, the government has a duty to assist re-unification (Campbell, *Herald*, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1998). It also addresses the need for an agenda on equality and human rights, notwithstanding that, unlike Sunningdale, it offers an end to violence. In essence, the Belfast Agreement offers the best opportunity for peace to Northern Ireland, although at time of writing the question of whether it will succeed or not still remains without a definite answer.

The agreement aims to put an end to almost 30 years of violence and discrimination, and offers a framework where the unionist/loyalist and the nationalist/republican communities can coexist in a peaceful and constructive environment where the identity and culture of each community is acknowledged and respected. Its precise objectives are to address three main sets of relationships: relationships within Northern Ireland; between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland; and finally between Northern Ireland and the rest of Britain. These three patterns of interaction underpin the organisation of the agreement; three strands, each addressing one level. The agreement also considers other measures required for peace, some of which are included in the three strands while others touch on long standing issues, such as human and civil rights, questions of policing and justice and the issue of prisoners of war, amongst others. Underpinning the agreement is the principle of consent. In order for it to work, a number of constitutional amendments are required, such as the repeal of articles two and three of the Republic's constitution, and mechanisms must be put in place which will allow for future referendums on the status of Northern Ireland.

Ruane and Todd (1999) have suggested that this agreement has the ability to succeed because of the so-called 'changing conditions' in Northern Ireland, implying changes in demographics and economy that have encouraged a political interest to find a solution to the Northern Irish question. The authors have also argued that the agreement seeks to resolve the conflict at two distinct, yet interrelated levels which they call the political deal and framework. Whilst the political deal addresses the principles which will allow the opposed communities to live and work together, at the same time recognising their individual and different aspirations, the framework aspect seeks to examine the underlying reasons for the conflict and to initiate a process of social transformation.

### The Principles of Peace

As mentioned, the agreement was divided into three separate strands, the first one addressing

the relationships within Northern Ireland itself. Measures included within Strand One are the creation of a 108-member Assembly, elected by proportional representation. The allocation for committee and ministerial posts on the basis of proportional party strength, and key decisions must necessarily be taken on a cross-community basis. In terms of the powers that the Assembly will have, these are to pass legislation for Northern Ireland in the same areas that were the responsibility of the Northern Ireland government. Strand Two sets the principles under which the relations North-South of the Irish border are to take place. A North-South ministerial council is created which will examine the best ways for cross-border co-operation, and address matters of interest of both, covering issues such as tourism. Finally, Strand Three creates a British-Irish Council, with representatives from the British and Irish governments, and the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands, to discuss issues such as transport, fisheries, culture, health and education and matters of the European Union.

An important aspect of the Agreement, and one which has caused much controversy since 1998, is the issue of decommissioning whereby all participants in the agreement re-affirm their commitment to total disarmament while those involved with military groups will collaborate with the International Body on Decommissioning which will overlook the surrendering and destruction of paramilitary guns and armament. Other measures covered by the agreement are the British commitment to reducing the security forces' in Northern Ireland and the appointment of an independent commission to address the question of policing in Northern Ireland and the future of the RUC. In addition, the agreement sets out mechanisms that will accelerate the release of political prisoners of war of those paramilitary organisations which have sustained a cessation of violence. Ultimately, 'there are no obvious winners or losers in the Stormont talks agreement and all parties can say, like the curate when asked about his egg, is that "parts of it are excellent"' (de Bréadún, *The Irish Times* 1998). Reflecting the feeling of many people, including journalists, the *Mirror* commented:

remember the date. Good Friday, 1998. The day a new future dawned for Northern Ireland after decades of bloodshed. Yesterday's agreement is truly historic. It is so remarkable, such a fantastic achievement that it barely seems possible. People who lived in contempt and hatred of each other have sat down to commit themselves to peace. They have reflected the overwhelming yearning of the people of Northern Ireland for a future without violence. But to do this they needed something more – hope, faith and trust. Throughout this long process there have been many Jeremiads who said it could never happen. But the leaders working their way towards this agreement never gave up. (11<sup>th</sup> April 1998)

### **Selling the Agreement**

These are the first hurdles the peace deal must overcome with both republicans and unionists scrutinising what is on offer paragraph by paragraph knowing that ferocious hard-line critics will be ready to tear it all apart at the slightest opportunity and return to the old certainties of hatred and division. (O'Farrell, *Scotland on Sunday*, 12<sup>th</sup> April 1998)

The first day after the deal had been reached there was some return to normality and although the all-night negotiating marathons were over, it was now time to ensure that the deal would be a success. Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern and indeed all the participating parties could congratulate themselves for having contributed to giving Northern Ireland its best chance for peace. Although peace was closer, the Troubles were not over yet and it was now time for Sinn Féin and UUP party leaders and negotiators to sell the deal to their parties and the communities they represented. This meant that in the eyes of the media, there were growing similarities between the positions occupied by David Trimble and Gerry Adams, which were mirrored in the news. Thus, there were a number of reports emphasising the similar position in which both leaders found themselves as seen in these two examples: 'no where will it be more difficult than within Sinn Féin and the unionist parties where the leaderships will have to demonstrate that there were gains in the settlement for all of them' (MacLeod, *Herald*, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1998a) or 'Trimble and Adams now have the thought task of selling the deal to hard-liners in their parties. Both are thought likely to succeed' (Maguire and Gorrod, *Daily Record*, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1998).

David Trimble was the first of the two leaders to take the agreement to his party executive from which he emerged with the support of 55 of its members. Despite the growing signs of disagreement within unionist ranks, the Good Friday Agreement had overcome its first test and its future seemed promising, although the success of the executive meeting was only the first of many battles within unionism (*ITN Evening News and Sport*, 11<sup>th</sup> April). In the republican camp, as the *Independent on Sunday* reported, there was a similar yet 'quieter process of assessment' (McKittrick *et al.*, 12<sup>th</sup> April 1998). In fact, although comparisons were drawn between the two parties the media continued to focus on the difficulties Trimble would have in canvassing support from his party (McKittrick *et al.*, *Independent on Sunday*, 12<sup>th</sup> April 1998). At the same time the suggestion that the UUP's rejection of the Mitchell document was rooted in their refusal to sit with Sinn Féin in government manifested once again, as Peter Hunt commented 'it has emerged that what is most bothering party activists is the possibility of their leaders sitting down with Sinn Féin ministers in the Northern Ireland cabinet' (*BBC News and Sport*, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1998).

Sinn Féin, on the other hand, officially began the process of canvassing support on 12<sup>th</sup> April, during the commemorations of the Easter Rising at a series of rallies both North and South of the border. These were crucial meetings as the deal had to be sold to the grass-roots, the wider republican community and the IRA. Without their support Sinn Féin could not sign the deal, and although its participation was not specifically required, it was nevertheless highly desirable and seen as crucial. However, Sinn Féin's attempt to sell the deal to the republican community also stressed some existent differences in media approaches to the movement. Although as far as the



*BBC News* and the *Independent* were concerned, Gerry Adams had merely put the case for the deal to its supporters, the *Daily Record* emphasised the Sinn Féin/IRA links and stated that ‘the IRA yesterday gave Gerry Adams a pat on the back’ (Brophy, 13<sup>th</sup> April 1998). For many within the republican movement, Sinn Féin had accepted less than the offer of a united Ireland, thus republican dissent began to surface both within the party and within the IRA. As the *BBC News* suggested, ‘some in Sinn Féin will be disheartened that their long-cherished ideal still hasn’t been achieved, others will welcome the leadership step-by-step approach’ (12<sup>th</sup> April 1998). However, although *ITN* anchor, Nicholas Owen, tried to emphasise the possibility of protest within republican ranks, Jonathan Irvine commented that while there was some disagreement within Sinn Féin it was ‘highly unlikely’ that the party would reject the deal after having been part of the peace process for so long (*Weekend News*, 12<sup>th</sup> April 1998).

Ironically, neither unionists nor republicans were wholly satisfied with the deal, and whilst the negotiating process had ended, the persuasion process was just beginning. In a bid to try to ensure that Sinn Féin leaders were able to sell the deal to its party, the Irish government began the early release of prisoners of war on the 14<sup>th</sup> April, only days after the agreement was reached. While this was welcomed by Sinn Féin, allowing them to see some immediate benefits in having participated in a peaceful and negotiated search for a settlement, it was nevertheless deeply problematic for those doubtful and weary within the unionist camp. As Martha Kearney reported:

while unionist problems may be causing the government some consternation, it could just spur republicans on to accept the agreement. In the logic of Northern Ireland, one’s said difficulty is often viewed as (an) advantage for the other. (*Newsnight*, 14<sup>th</sup> April 1998)

Unionist revulsion at the idea of IRA members being released so soon afterwards, was one of the main stumbling blocks that the agreement had to face following its conclusion. However, what was a radical step forward in the search for long-lasting peace needed equally radical responses. Most media were unable to fully accept this and instead began questioning the wisdom behind such a move and, for the first time in the period under examination, they began to question Sinn Féin’s stance and the wider peace accord. This was one of the instances where the media clearly reflected the scepticism and apprehension felt by the wider public towards the deeply contentious, yet necessary, early release of prisoners of war. Even so, instead of describing the early release of prisoners of war as part of the agreement that had been reached, journalists described it as ‘a small reward’ (*News at Ten*, 14<sup>th</sup> April 1998), and with the exception of the *Nine o’clock News*, no other broadcaster mentioned that the prisoners were already on parole, which meant that their release was somewhat symbolic. Moreover, *News at Ten* also misleadingly claimed that the republican prisoners who were released had re-affirmed

their support for the IRA cease-fire but reserved their opinion on the peace deal.<sup>12</sup> What this shows is that despite the progress that has been made within Northern Ireland there are still some issues which remain for the wider public emotionally charged and are thus treated accordingly by the media.

### Test at the Orange Order

On April 15<sup>th</sup>, David Trimble took the deal to the Orange Order, presenting a further test to the Agreement. Although the Order stated that it could neither reject nor recommend the deal and that it needed further clarification, some of the news media immediately jumped to the conclusion that the deal had been rejected. The *Daily Record* for example said that ‘five days after Ulster’s political parties signed up to the peace deal, it was rejected’ (Mallon, 17<sup>th</sup> April) and so did *News at Ten* (15<sup>th</sup> April 1998) and the *Independent* (McKittrick, 16<sup>th</sup> April 1998). However, later in their stories they all stated that, in fact, the Order could not recommend it at that point, showing that the media were intent on exposing as much as possible unionists difficulties and in even exaggerating these. This was particularly evident when it was revealed that further clarifications were needed by the Orangemen. Thus Garry Gibben commented:

it is interesting to see what the Orange Order actually objected to in the deal. It wasn’t the constitutional mechanics, what had been agonising people for so long in the run up to that deal, is things like the decommissioning arrangements are they strong enough? And in particular the reform of the RUC and the early prisoner releases. (*Channel 4 News*, 15<sup>th</sup> April 1998)

Illustrating journalists’ attitudes to unionism, Shenna MacDonald commented, ‘are people not a little fed up with unionist schisms?’ (*Channel 4 News*, 15<sup>th</sup> April 1998). One of the main reasons for this was the lack of unionist cohesion, and instead unionists were publicly expressing their discontent and even accusing each other of failing the unionist people. This was seen in a joint *Newsnight* interview with William Ross and Reg Empey from the UUP, where both unionist representatives levied accusations at each other (14<sup>th</sup> April 1998). The battles within unionism were fought live on television and, as Eamon Mallie pointed out, ‘unionism in general would rather see a combined force within their community. But the bottom line is that there is a lot of fragmentation here’ (*Channel 4 News*, 15<sup>th</sup> April 1998). A few days later, when Alex Thompson interviewed Jeffrey Donaldson from the UUP - one of the party negotiators who had not accepted the final agreement - unionist difficulties and lack of coherence were once again exposed by a journalist on live television. Although Thompson began the interview by questioning Donaldson’s motives for his refusal to accept the deal, when the UUP member explained that this was partially due to the lack of IRA decommissioning and of having to sit in government with Sinn Féin, Thompson challenged this explanation by stating that the UUP was

<sup>12</sup> In their statement the prisoners supported both the continuation of the IRA’s cease-fire and the Sinn Féin’s stance at the negotiating table.

already working alongside republicans at local level, thus Donaldson's explanation was simply not acceptable (*Newsnight*, 17<sup>th</sup> April 1998).

In fact, this was one of the major differences between the strategies of the UUP and Sinn Féin which necessarily impacted on the media coverage of the parties. While reporters had emphasised that there was a considerable amount of dissent within the UUP, and in fact within the party's own negotiating team and its group of MPs, unionists were openly fighting their battles in public for all to see. In stark contrast, although there were a number of journalists referring to dissent within republican ranks, they were unable to support these allegations with opinions from members of the party that opposed the leadership's stance. For example, *News at Ten* commented that 'Sinn Féin leaders themselves face bitter criticism from within their own movement accused of treachery and of betraying core republican values' (14<sup>th</sup> April 1998). In a comparative examination to expose dissent within both parties conducted by Robert Moore, he included members of the UUP speaking out against the deal, but none from Sinn Féin itself. Instead, he used a commentary by Geraldine Taylor from Republican Sinn Féin, which would naturally oppose the deal. The key aspect here is that while unionist party members would publicly criticise their leadership and the party's decision to accept the deal, if there was dissent within Sinn Féin this would not be publicly expressed because of the cohesive and coherent control of its messages. Moreover, McKittrick also suggested that the party had expelled any dissident members that might have existed within Sinn Féin (10<sup>th</sup> April 1998b) further ensuring the repetition of the same message.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of April, according to an opinion poll, it was clear that although there was no consensus amongst politicians on the validity of the deal, the people saw it as the best chance for Northern Ireland. In fact, 73% of the people of Northern Ireland supported the agreement. More problematically the peace deal clearly did not signal the end of violence in the province as shown when a Catholic taxi driver was murdered by loyalist paramilitaries the same day that the Northern Ireland Forum met for the last time. An agreement might have been reached but the problem has yet to be fully resolved.

### ***Political Communication in Action***

On the core issues there will be no slipping. Unionism cannot dictate the pace of these talks because the pace of unionism is a snail's pace. (Gerry Adams in Maguire, *Mirror*, 9<sup>th</sup> April, 1998)

### **Sinn Féin's Strategies**

The moderation and modernisation of republican strategy and ideology, discussed at length in Chapter Four, underpinned not only Sinn Féin's participation in the Good Friday Agreement,

but also fuelled the start of the peace process itself.<sup>13</sup> As numerous scholars, such as Ruane and Todd (1999), have suggested, the peace initiative was primarily facilitated by the republican movement and its search for a solution to the conflict. This process of ideological transformation, described by some as a move away from traditional republicanism towards constitutional nationalism (McIntyre, 1995 in Ruane and Todd, 1999), meant that Sinn Féin's stance and demands were considerably different from those that traditional republicanism had maintained throughout the 1970s and 1980s. However, the result, as Todd has argued, is that:

there is no agreement on the character of Irish nationalism and Irish republicanism today, nor on their interrelationships. Are they now satisfied nationalists, content to work within the new institutions, accepting British sovereignty for the foreseeable future? Or are they nationalists on the march, intent on further constitutional change? Republicanism in particular is an enigma. Has it simply converted to a gradualist constitutional nationalism? (1999:49)

In a sense, although seemingly incompatible, the suggestions that Todd (1999) puts forward stress the complex changes that have taken place within Sinn Féin, namely that it has become more moderate adopting a more constitutional form of nationalism, whilst resigning itself to the fact that a united Ireland is not achievable in the immediate future.<sup>14</sup> Illustrating this transformed approach, Gerry Adams argued that their presence in the negotiating process was 'part of our collective journey from the failures of the past and towards a future of equals', while remaining committed to the ultimate republican objective (Campbell, *AP/RN*, 9<sup>th</sup> April 1998). In essence, Sinn Féin's contribution to the Good Friday Agreement can be said to be the first visible culmination of the transformation of the republican movement, as discussed in Chapter Four, which also resulted in a re-evaluation of the British government's strategy examined in Chapter Eight. Moreover, this process of transformation was also acknowledged by some spectrums of the news media, namely by McKittrick, who argued that:

Adams has shown himself to be an astute assessor of the republican grassroots, as is illustrated in the achievement of pushing the Sinn Féin vote up over the years. [ ] he has been a modernizer but also a highly cautious one: if and when he does go for a deal he will be confident of its saleability. (*Independent*, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1998).

This opinion was echoed by Martha Kearney from *Newsnight*, who commented that 'Sinn Féin have travelled an extraordinary journey in the last decade' (9<sup>th</sup> April 1998), even if some journalists are still unable to recognise Adams' contribution to the political process and instead continue to focus on his past association with the IRA:

Gerry Adams has lived most of his life in safe houses to avoid the bullets of the loyalist gunmen. His father was an IRA terrorist and Adams joined the organisation at 16. By 1972 Adams was invited to Whitehall to take part in truce talks. In 1973, he was charged with IRA membership and jailed. He was freed three years later and set about disposing old-style republican leaders. He became West Belfast MP in 1983 but never took his seat and took over as Sinn Féin president, the following year he was shot in a loyalist assassination attempt. (*Daily Record*, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1998)

<sup>13</sup> See Chapter Eight.

<sup>14</sup> See Chapter Four.

### Changed Approaches

As discussed previously, in practical terms the party's changed approach at the negotiating table has implied a shift in strategy. Although still seeking a united Ireland, it has expanded its political remit and explored new avenues for the continuation of its struggle. This was mirrored in the creation of a pan-nationalist front, which played a crucial role in the negotiation process and established some co-operation between the three main Irish nationalist elements, the Dublin government, the SDLP and Sinn Féin. In turn, this signalled that the republican movement's lone campaign of the 1970s and 1980s was replaced by a more widespread effort extending to new levels. While this represents a significant departure in republican strategy and to some extent ideology, it ultimately indicates that Sinn Féin presented itself to the negotiating table as a party prepared to compromise and search for an agreement through peaceful means in the knowledge that partition could not be immediately revoked, although a new political and social climate could be created. As David McKittrick has argued:

republicans are signalling that they want to move away from violence and into politics: not everyone believes them, but the idea of a peace process has permeated the atmosphere, implanting the notion in some unlikely quarters that there might be a better way. (*Independent*, 10<sup>th</sup> April 1998)

Even if there might have been some faint illusions within the republican camp that the Good Friday Agreement had the potential to signal Irish re-unification, what republican negotiators were ultimately concerned with was the achievement of an interim compromise, which would address some long-standing issues and would move the republican struggle forward. Despite the fact that Sinn Féin had repeatedly argued that it was unwilling to accept an internal settlement, it nevertheless knew that the negotiating process and the agreement could realistically only offer a 'bridge to the future' that would allow the advancement of its cause and find more immediate solutions for outstanding issues like justice and equality (Whelam, *AP/RN*, 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1998). Moreover, Sinn Féin's approach and participation in the talks also showed the party's acceptance of the need to compromise and address unionist concerns, although unionists themselves were largely unwilling to reciprocate. In fact, this republican strategy of good-will and interest in negotiating with unionists, as discussed in the previous section of this chapter, was a predominant feature of the news coverage which often depicted unionists as intransigent.

### New Discourse and Aims

The new republican attitude at the negotiating table was also reflected in republican messages stressing a changed approach to the Northern Irish problem and possible solutions and compromises, as well as a different vision of unionism and the British government.<sup>15</sup> In particular, Sinn Féin placed a strong emphasis on the need for radical change at the

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<sup>15</sup> See Chapter Four.

constitutional and the institutional levels, which, although not securing Irish unity would facilitate it in the long run while overturning the ‘colonial structures of the society’ (Todd, 1999:58). As Adams stressed:

Sinn Féin’s strategy is to seek the maximum possible change – not the minimum’, and our focus should be about bringing about fundamental political and constitutional change. This is not the responsibility<sup>16</sup> of future generations as Seamus Mallon and Reg Empey tell us. This is our responsibility. (*AP/RN*, 5<sup>th</sup> February 1998)

Furthermore, while some of the changes demanded by Sinn Féin, in terms of North-South co-operation and the review of policing, could secure a partial remedy to the partition of Ireland and address the lack of equality between nationalists and unionists, this was also seen as facilitating the healing process. These same demands also signalled the degree of transformation of the republican movement and as the republican political commentator, Eamonn McCann, noted on *BBC2 Newsnight*, the simple fact that Sinn Féin was now prepared to consider cross-border bodies and a devolved national assembly for Northern Ireland ‘represents a major historical shift in the political line of the republican movement’ (7<sup>th</sup> April 1998). However, although Sinn Féin’s stance had been dramatically transformed, it was also crucial that party negotiators ensured that the agreement would be accepted by its people, and that it would not signify an immediate end to partition. One of the reasons why this was possible was that party strategists had carefully prepared its grassroots to accept its new stance and, as John Mullin suggested, ‘they were very good at preparing the people for what they were about to do’.<sup>17</sup>

To the dismay of the UUP, who believed that the IRA cease-fire would collapse and that Sinn Féin would not be part of an agreement, republicans were now prepared to accept a compromise solution whereby the vision of the immediate future for Ireland did not so much emphasise reunification, as ensure that there would no longer be conflict and the people of the island of Ireland could live together in a productive harmony. As Adams commented:

the challenge is enormous. It is to devise constitutional and political arrangements which will allow people to realise their full potential and which will enable all the people of this island to work together in peace and harmony and with a shared destiny. It is also to agree immediate up-front changes in relation to equality, discrimination, culture, prisoners and policing which speedily impacts on the day to day lives of people. (*RM\_D*, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1998)

Instead of an implicit suggestion of Irish unification, republican discourse changed and the new republican buzzwords became justice, democracy, equality, freedom and compromise. In essence, as Gerry Adams stressed, ‘the objective of this is to diminish the negative impact of partition, encourage co-operation, common purpose and untied action throughout Ireland in political, economical and social areas’ (*RM\_D*, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1998).

<sup>16</sup> The spelling of responsibility was corrected here as in the original document it appears as ‘reponsibility’.

<sup>17</sup> From the *Guardian*, in interview, 8<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

Sinn Féin's realistic aims were to leave the negotiating table with a strong equality agenda which would place the nationalist community on an equal footing with unionism, while advance the republican struggle by reducing the effects of partition, increasing cross-border co-operation and giving republicans and nationalists a say in the running of the province. Unlike their unionist counterparts, republicans presented themselves as a moderate political force willing to negotiate, while simultaneously seeking maximum change. The essence of their participation centred around what chief republican negotiator, Martin McGuinness, termed the 'core issues' which had to be addressed 'if conflict is to become part of our past'<sup>18</sup> (in *RM\_D*, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1998). Thus, while searching for an interim political compromise that would further the Irish cause, the agreement was seen as providing the first opportunity to correct the mistakes of the past and address the symptoms and causes of the conflict:

the peace process, if it is to mean anything, (it) has to be about righting wrongs: it has to be about resolving those issues which have given rise to conflict, inequality and injustice. It has to be about overcoming the fears and divisions which have for centuries blighted our island and the relationships within it and with Britain. (Adams, *RM\_D*, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1998)

Amongst the different issues that Sinn Féin wanted the agreement to address, and one which the party was adamant about, was the early release of political prisoners. From a republican perspective this was seen not only as a necessary measure to end the conflict, but it would also ensure the continuation of the IRA's support for the political initiative. Moreover, as the prisoners of war were seen as a symptom of the conflict and not as a cause<sup>19</sup> this made it even more crucial to address this issue (Adams, *RM\_D*, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1998). At the same time, two other key republican demands were the reform of the historically unionist/Protestant RUC and the withdrawal of the British Army (*AP/RN*, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1998).

### Negotiation Tactics

Despite the fact that Sinn Féin seemed intent on compromising and negotiating an acceptable settlement to both communities, its relationship with some of the other main actors was, on occasion, at best unclear and even contradictory. Although it repeatedly warned against unionist unpicking of the proposed Mitchell document (Oliver, *Daily Record*, 10<sup>th</sup> April 1998), which formed the basis for the final agreement, the party was nevertheless keen to appear to consider unionist predicaments. Thus, not even the UUP's refusal to negotiate directly with Sinn Féin challenged this dual strategy: criticising unionist intransigence while simultaneously reflecting a sensitivity and understanding for unionism. Instead, republicans repeatedly emphasised that a deal had to include both Sinn Féin and the UUP, making it an inclusive agreement.

<sup>18</sup> The spelling of past was corrected here as in the original document it appears as 'part'.

<sup>19</sup> The reason why the republican movement has argued that prisoners of war are a symptom of the conflict and not a cause is because from their point of view if there was no inequality, discrimination and conflict in Northern Ireland there would be no need for IRA campaigns and thus there would be no prisoners of war.

Furthermore, while highlighting unionists' unwillingness to negotiate with republicans, the latter repeatedly stressed that unlike unionists it was now prepared 'to make peace' (Adams in Smith, *Daily Record*, 13<sup>th</sup> April 1998). The party was also keen to highlight that one of the persistent problems which had plagued the negotiating process had been the unionists' refusal to talk directly with Sinn Féin. As Mitchell McLaughlin commented, 'there are probably misunderstandings and difficulties between us which could and should be resolved if we engaged in direct face to face talks' (*RM\_D*, 7<sup>th</sup> April 1998).

Instead of republicans depicting unionists as the intransigent enemy who refused to negotiate with them, something which the news media was already doing of its own accord, Sinn Féin opted for a different strategy which emphasised its own moderation and willingness and in the process indirectly exposed unionists' negative approach. Thus, republicans repeatedly emphasised the need for compromise between the two factions and that unionist concerns had to be addressed rather than dismissed (Adams, *AP/RN*, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1998). In adopting a more positive approach than their unionist counterparts, and by stressing that they were 'reaching out the hand of friendship' (MacLeod, *Herald*, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1998a), republicans were also further contrasting unionist intransigence. Clearly, this reflected the clever and successful strategy of repeating the same message, a characteristic of republican communication<sup>20</sup> which, as mentioned, meant that journalists began describing unionists and David Trimble as 'unreasonable and unrealistic' (Cooney, *Herald*, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1998). In fact, as Martin Fletcher suggested, 'there were times when [ ] other parties, perhaps the unionists, the UUP had troubles, when they (Sinn Féin) were content to sit back, and [ ] let them wallow in their own difficulties, that is something they (Sinn Féin) are very good at'.<sup>21</sup> This was also further enhanced by the party's ability to control information, ensuring the repetition of a cohesive message by all party representatives.<sup>22</sup>

Sinn Féin's approach to the two governments also indicated a carefully crafted tactic at the negotiating table, whereby the party sought to reinforce the idea of pan-nationalism and co-operation with the Irish government and the SDLP, arguing that:

nationalists entitlements have to be met in these negotiations. There is massive responsibility on all Irish nationalist leaders at these times. Nationalist Ireland is urging their leaders to stick very firmly together and achieve the equality and justice which nationalists in the North have been denied for generations. (*RM\_D*, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1998)

Despite unionist efforts to split the three nationalist forces (*RM\_D*, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1998), Sinn Féin emphasised that the onus was not just on republicans but rested on all nationalist leaders who, in the face of unionist pressure, should combine their efforts and secure a good deal for their communities. Although the proposed repeal of articles two and three of the Irish constitution,

<sup>20</sup> See Chapter Five.

<sup>21</sup> From the *Times*, in interview, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1998.

<sup>22</sup> Sarah Smith, from *Channel 5 News*, in survey, 1998.



and the compromise between Bertie Ahern and David Trimble, the Taoiseach was still highly placed in republican consideration (*RM\_D*, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1998). At the same time, rather than trying to fight a losing battle by opposing the removal of the articles, Sinn Féin criticised this without a parallel and similar revision of British Constitution (*RM\_D*, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1998). Republican emphasis's on their association with other nationalist forces was successful as they were, at times, described as 'more confrontational' nationalists (Brophy, *Mirror*, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1998), or that Sinn Féin had been converted into subtle moderates (*Mirror*, 9<sup>th</sup> April 1998), or were simply considered as part of the nationalist family (McKittrick, *Independent*, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1998).

Attitudes towards the British government were also noted to have changed, reflecting a concerted republican strategy which placed the emphasis on reaching an agreement on Tony Blair. While on numerous occasions the British Prime Minister was criticised or warned by republicans not to 'play the Orange card' (MacLeod, *Herald*, 9<sup>th</sup> April 1998), and not to give in to unionist demands (Castle *et al.*, *Independent on Sunday*, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1998), the British were nevertheless praised by republicans for taking hold of the unique opportunity that the peace process offered. Receiving particular commendation was Tony Blair, who had impressed Adams with his understanding of the unique challenge to reach a lasting and peaceful solution to years of violence, suffering and inequality (*RM\_D*, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1998).

At the same time, Sinn Féin negotiators and especially Gerry Adams repeatedly emphasised the crucial role that Blair could play in ensuring that unionists moved forward and embraced the changes that were needed. Thus, Gerry Adams frequently commented that Blair had to put more pressure on David Trimble (*Newsnight*, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1998) or that government officials had to persuade unionists to accept the deal (*Channel 4 News*, 7<sup>th</sup> 1998). Whilst this reflected a new approach to the British government, no longer seen as the enemy but as holding the power to facilitate an agreement, it also echoed changed government stances, whereby the British Prime Minister increasingly saw his own role as a discretely moving unionists towards the nationalist position (McKittrick, *Independent*, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1998). In particular it requested gentle governmental persuasion rather than coercion, as seen here, 'there is still a number of days to go before the deadline expires, and I would hope that the UUP in that time will be persuaded by those whom they meet from the British government' (Gerry Adams in *Channel 4 News*, 7<sup>th</sup> April 1998).

### Facing Unionism

Although Sinn Féin was also aware of unionist tactics to colour the agreement with an orange tint, it argued that while respectful of unionism, republican and nationalistic aims deserved equal attention. Thus, 'we are mindful of the unionist perspective but on the core issues of

justice, equality and the right of the people of this island to live together in peace without division, no British government will face us down' (Adams, *AP/RN*, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1998).

Encapsulating the republican position, Adams stressed that:

we want an agreement with the unionists and we seek to come to this very, very positively. But we have to say that we will not be intimidated by unionist stunts, by unionist intransigence, by unionist refusal to engage because that is unionists trying to put a brake, to put a stop, trying to prevent the type of change that is required. (*Nine o'clock News*, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1998)

Despite accusing unionists of 'posturing' and stating that David Trimble had to start acting like a political leader (*Channel 4 News*, 7<sup>th</sup> April 1998), republicans portrayed themselves as willing to work alongside unionists and thus appealed to the two Prime Ministers to intervene. As Martin McGuinness stressed:

the unionists have refused to negotiate with us. But I think over the course of the next few days, whether they speak to us or not they will come to realise that they are involved in negotiations not just with the Irish government and the SDLP but also with Sinn Féin. In the coming days the political representatives of unionism will be under no illusion whatsoever that Sinn Féin is a key element in this process and that the agenda which they have to embrace is an inclusive one. (*RM\_D*, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1998).

Adams repeatedly warned that unionist strategies to re-negotiate the agreement were not acceptable and instead the two Prime Ministers should move the process forward through inclusive negotiation, even if unionists continued to reject direct negotiation. While adopting a seemingly moderate and diplomatic stance, Sinn Féin nevertheless carefully stressed that the party would not be intimidated by unionist stunts, simply because these were desperate unionist attempts to stop the inevitable transformations within Northern Ireland (*News at Ten*, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1998). This showed a party mindful of the unionist perspective yet determined to defend its own:

in terms of trying to do a deal and in terms of trying to do an agreement we are quite prepared to engage and to look at and to explore everyone's issues. We are also quite prepared to talk to those parties who will talk to us. You see, remember folks, David Trimble is yet to say a word to the people at this table' (Gerry Adams, *Newsnight*, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1998).

Furthermore, unionist attempts to blame Sinn Féin for the problems at the negotiation table were repeatedly refuted, stressing that although Sinn Féin also had a number of difficulties with the blue print for agreement (Maguire, *Daily Record*, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1998), at no point in time did it reject the deal. In fact, the simultaneous expression of republican discontent with some aspects of the proposed agreement, coupled with its continued commitment to negotiate was seen by some journalists as reflecting a successful republican strategy, which kept the party on board the negotiations while also exposing their difficulties (MacLeod, *Herald*, 10<sup>th</sup> April 1998). Also vital, as Martin Fletcher stated, was the perception that journalists had of Sinn Féin and the commitment it was making. As Fletcher put it:

I thought they were one of the straightest briefers of the lot, we were all gathered outside the Stormont Castle buildings, where the final stages of the talks were going on

and every party would send out their spin doctors and they would spin furiously. I thought the Sinn Féin people were the most honest about what was going on than many of the other parties, they were quite straightforward and they didn't breach confidences, unlike some of the other parties.<sup>23</sup>

In fact, even when there were growing concerns that a secret deal had been struck between the two Prime Ministers, the SDLP and the UUP, Sinn Féin merely warned that it was crucial that the final agreement reflected the views of all communities and not only those of unionists (*Newsnight*, 9<sup>th</sup> April 1998). Moreover, it maintained that one of the underlying reasons for the unionists' public refusal to accept what was a secret document, the Mitchell document, was an attempt to create the false impression that the blue print favoured nationalists and republicans, and thus jeopardise the SDLP's and Sinn Féin's request for further alterations (*Campbell, AP/RN*, 9<sup>th</sup> April 1998). Even when the chance of a cross-party agreement seemed bleak, to illustrate Sinn Féin's determination to find and be part of an agreement Adams jokingly stated that 'Sinn Féin has one advantage over other parties. We've brought a camp bed. We don't share it, of course' (Atkinson, *Mirror*, 10<sup>th</sup> April 1998).

#### Perspectives on the Agreement

Overall, Sinn Féin's messages during the period in question emphasised two distinct yet interrelated points. Firstly, party strategists and communicators wanted to publicise the image of Sinn Féin as a reasonable party asking for reasonable demands. Although it clearly wanted to leave the negotiating table with a number of accomplishments and concessions, it nevertheless sought to portray itself as a party intent on securing a long-lasting solution to the Troubles, that was acceptable to the different communities. The aim was not so much to seek to overturn Northern Ireland but an interim solution where the mistakes of the past were acknowledged and corrected (Adams, *AP/RN*, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1998). In addition, Sinn Féin insisted on the notion that it had a legitimate and elected right to be at the negotiating table, which the news media during their coverage appeared to recognise. The key aspect to their strategy was summarised as follows:

they knew what they wanted to say and they came out and said it. They stayed on message and they won't be deflected (or) [ ] drawn into issues that they don't want to be drawn into. They spoke forcibly, they knew how to use sound bites. A lot of the other parties were just very ad hoc, they just came out without a clear sense of what they wanted to say, and just answered questions, that's a recipe for trouble.<sup>24</sup>

In the aftermath of the agreement, the focus was placed on the fact that it 'represented a significant advance' for the republican cause, and although Irish re-unification had not been secured, another battle had been won (*ITN Evening News and Sport*, 12<sup>th</sup> April 1998). At the same time, in a bid to portray the deal as a partial success for republicans, Adams emphasised

<sup>23</sup> From the *Times*, in interview, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1998.

<sup>24</sup> Martin Fletcher, from the *Times*, in interview, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1998.

that Tony Blair had persuaded unionists to compromise and concede more than they had ever been prepared to do, allowing the republican movement to start a new phase in their struggle to end partition (*BBC Evening News*, 12<sup>th</sup> April 1998). This was, in fact, a key approach to the agreement, as stressed in *An Phoblacht/Republican News*:

however you view the outcome of the multi-party talks which concluded on Good Friday there is absolutely no doubt that once again the Irish political landscape has been transformed. A geological upheaval has occurred. Familiar landmarks are missing; new obstacles and dangers have appeared, untried paths and strange vistas have opened up and they hold both perils and opportunities, everyone is challenged. (MacDonncha, 16th April 1998)

Republicans also emphasised that although there were aspects of the agreement which were not to their complete satisfaction, namely Strand 1 (the Northern Ireland Assembly), the key question that had to be addressed was whether this offered a ‘new beginning’ (Adams in Campbell, *AP/RN*, 9<sup>th</sup> April 1998). As Derrig commented in *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, ‘the revolutionary is an improviser, you work with what you got’ (*AP/RN*, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1999), an aspect which the *Guardian* journalist, John Mullin also noted:

they have a great sort of ability to turn what is (or) what can be viewed as a setback and a defeat or a difficult into something which is something much more positive, is much more triumph, they are very good at all that. And the fact that they can keep the party absolutely in line, is a very clear comparison with the way the Ulster Unionist party operates.<sup>25</sup>

Indeed some journalists recognised that the republican strategy had paid off (Martha Kearney, *Newsnight*, 9<sup>th</sup> April 1998), while in the aftermath of the agreement McKittrick commented that:

over the months, Sinn Féin delegates played their cards close to their chest, favouring a strong north-south body but refusing to admit publicly that an assembly should be part of any deal. This seemed illogical in that any cross-border institution would have to be anchored in a Belfast Assembly but it made sense politically in that it meant the republicans gave no hostages to fortune and made no concessions. (*Independent*, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1998)

Ultimately, although there were those who doubted Sinn Féin’s commitment to the agreement, as ‘at best half-hearted’ (*Herald*, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1998), others awarded to the party a key role in the deal. As Sengupta put it, ‘the agreement is still not final since two of the most important elements involved, the Ulster Unionists and Sinn Féin, must sell it to their grassroots’ (*Independent*, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1998).

## Overview

This examination of the Good Friday Agreement has shown in the first instance that the transformation of journalists’ attitudes and the reporting of Irish republicanism which began with the peace process and was discussed in Chapter Eight, continued to prevail during this period. Although Sinn Féin was not the focus of the news, the reporting of the party’s presence at the negotiating table revealed an interest by the news media in covering republicanism. More

<sup>25</sup> In interview, 8<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

specifically, the coverage of Sinn Féin's predicaments focused on the party's growing political stance and recognised the transformation of the republican movement. This meant that the party's presence at the negotiating table was depicted as being both legitimate and as crucial to a settlement.

While coverage of the party was not particularly extensive or detailed, what also reinforced the changed attitudes of the news media towards republicanism and the reporting of Northern Ireland was the way in which unionists were treated and depicted in the news. Thus, although the news coverage still focused on reporting unionist predicaments, the manner in which this was done changed, namely that unionists were carefully scrutinised by journalists and their positions challenged and criticised. Moreover, the party and its leader, David Trimble, were depicted as intransigent, immoderate and unwilling to compromise. In fact, as McKittrick commented:

after the Mitchell paper was released, Sinn Féin had become the dog that didn't bark, republicans seemed to accept a clearly partitionist document with some approaching approval, with the noise objections coming instead from the Trimble unionists. (*Independent*, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1998)

Nevertheless, as has been repeatedly emphasised in this thesis, changed journalistic attitudes are the outcome of a much deeper and wider process of political transformation. In this case, the reporting of Sinn Féin has changed not only because the party itself has evolved but also because government attitudes towards the party and the conflict have been modified. Thus, the revised role and strategy of the British government is now as the facilitator and purveyor of peace and agreement rather than maintaining Northern Ireland within the British union. Clearly, since the start of the peace process there have been a number of dramatic modifications in the politics of Northern Ireland and consequently, in the reporting of the Province. While for a considerable period of time republicans were depicted as 'mad bombers' and murderers, and without any political motivation and intent on jeopardising peace for their own selfish interests, this position has now been reversed and unionists now find themselves under the microscope. Indeed, unionists have been aware of this to the extent that they have reviewed their policy of not appearing on television and radio with republican politicians:

signalling a dramatic departure for unionists, UUP secretary Reg Empey said the poll review followed growing concerns that the broadcast media was giving Sinn Féin a "propaganda freebie". "We were promised when the broadcast ban was lifted that journalists were going to tear them asunder. We haven't seen anybody laying a glove on them yet". (Purdy, *Belfast Telegraph*, 28<sup>th</sup> July 1997)

Whilst the patterns of news coverage did not necessarily represent a victory for Sinn Féin during the Good Friday Agreement,<sup>26</sup> they were a successful outcome in a long line of transformations

<sup>26</sup> John Mullin, from the *Guardian*, in interview, 8<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

and adaptations that began with the peace process. Although republican communicative strategies played an important role in how the party was depicted in the news, through their insistent and coherent message of negotiation and compromise, and by proxy, how others were covered, the changes in politics both within and outside the republican movement proved more relevant. In the reporting of the Good Friday Agreement and beyond, Sinn Féin was partially responsible for achieving their changed presence in the news media. More importantly this has been also the culmination of a process of transformation of something far more crucial: the political transformation of the republican movement and the subsequent adaptation of the British government's policy.

## Chapter Ten: Reviewing Sinn Féin- some concluding remarks

The main aim of this thesis was two-fold: to examine and assess the communicative strategies used by the republican movement, focusing in particular on the political party, Sinn Féin; and secondly, to consider how the party accesses the news agenda and is subsequently presented in the news. This study took as a starting point the existent literature in the relevant area of research and began by questioning its contemporary validity.<sup>1</sup> The main reason for this approach was that the thesis directly acknowledged that there has been a complex, substantial and intertwined process of political and ideological transformation within the republican movement which has extended itself to Northern Irish politics.<sup>2</sup> This process of republican transformation was translated into a progressive move away from the armed struggle and replaced by more political and constitutional strategies. In turn, this challenged the contemporary suitability of many of the commonly held assumptions enshrined in the existent literature. Hence, it demanded a re-examination of these shared understandings and of Sinn Féin's current political positioning and strategy. The research began by stating that the so-called republican 'departure' (Bean, 1994) was a *de facto* situation which nevertheless needed to be scrutinised, especially in terms of its implications upon the party's communicative efforts and its presence in the news.

As Derrig (*AP/RN*, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1998) has suggested, in many ways the republican movement of the 1990s onwards bears little resemblance to that of the 1970s and 1980s. This has meant that the Sinn Féin upon which Curtis (1984) and others based their pioneering work, which examined republican communicative strategies and their presence in the news media, no longer exists as such. Instead, it has been 'replaced' by a different approach and a modified political role within Northern Irish politics. The political and strategic reformulation of Irish republicanism has also impacted upon the party's communicative strategies, thus questioned the relationship between politics and communication, namely in determining Sinn Féin's presence in the news.

While this does not challenge the validity of Curtis' work and that of many others, such as Henderson *et al.* (1990), what it does implicitly suggest is that the findings put forward by these authors reflect a specific period in the troubled history of Northern Ireland. More importantly, it is also symptomatic of a previous phase of Northern Irish politics and Irish republicanism, dominated by a lack of compromise and respect for the different political aspirations. In other words, the political transformations which have taken place within Sinn Féin, and by proxy Northern Ireland, have created a new political environment in the Province, which ultimately

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter One.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter Four.

allowed for and facilitated the Good Friday Agreement. As the *Daily Record* commented, Ulster politicians ‘finally found a way to sit down together and negotiate’ (11<sup>th</sup> April 1998). This departure from the dominant Northern Irish paradigm of the 1970s and 1980s, characterised by violence, hatred and a sense of political insularity, towards a more pluralistic and inclusive political model has demanded a widespread re-examination of Northern Irish politics and Sinn Féin upon which this thesis has focused.

### ***The Republican Departure***

As numerous authors have previously emphasised (e.g. Adams, 1986; Bean, 1996 or Curtis 1984), during the 1970s and most of the 1980s, Sinn Féin and the wider republican movement were primarily concerned with a swift end to the British rule of Northern Ireland. Their strategy was based on the use of the armed struggle to force the British to abandon the six counties. As a consequence of this military emphasis and of the republican belief that only through the use of force could a united Ireland be achieved, in political terms, Sinn Féin remained a poorly-organised party, lacking in political skills and knowledge. In effect, as Gerry Adams (1986) has commented, Sinn Féin was seen merely as an inferior cousin of the IRA. Thus, the party remained and placed itself largely on the periphery of political legitimacy and action.

As a poorly organised party, Sinn Féin’s communicative efforts were initially limited chiefly to the publicising of IRA messages, although from the start of the 1980s it also began to focus on spreading the republican message to its own communities in an attempt to overcome the deep-seated bias of the news media and their failure to examine republican predicaments. This transition from communication efforts centred on the IRA to more proactive forms, not only marked the first major transition in republican communication, but it also signalled the first step in the long process of republican departure. As was argued in Chapters Four and Five, the failure of the IRA’s armed campaign to end the partition of Ireland coupled with the movement’s difficulties in sustaining support for the armed campaign, forced it to re-think its approach to the conflict. This slow process of transformation, which lasted throughout the 1980s and culminated with the start of the peace process, was further reinforced by the release of a new and radical generation of republican prisoners who had been politically educated and sensitised in the internment camps and jails.

As a result, the wider republican movement, and in particular Sinn Féin, became increasingly interested in developing their political status, and expanding its remit to beyond a ‘Brits Out’ party. Simultaneously, this growing political interest and aptitude forced the movement to develop new political structures, as well as invest and commit greater resources to the communication of the republican message as part of its newly found commitment to politics.



Increasingly, republican strategists began to realise that communication was also a vital element in the struggle. This was translated into a series of practical improvements in the Northern press office in an attempt to successfully convey the republican message to journalists and, ultimately, the wider public.<sup>3</sup> However, such efforts were repeatedly hampered by a deep-seated and dismissive news media who were interested merely in the activities of the IRA or the link between the IRA and Sinn Féin. Although this was partially a consequence of the movement's own focus on the armed campaign, media attitudes were also strongly influenced by the British government's approach to Northern Ireland and Irish republicanism. Thus, the British strategy of treating the Troubles as a problem of law and order and republicans as 'terrorists' devoid of any political rationale also influenced journalists attitudes. The news media emphasised and exacerbated both these aspects, and thus public opinion was largely misinformed.

While continuing to advance its political activities and commitment to developing a campaigning party, the continued media bias forced the party to focus on developing alternative forms to communicate with its own supporters and in the process by-pass the news media.<sup>4</sup> This was accomplished through the extensive use of print communication, although British attempts to subvert these took a significant toll on their production and effectiveness even if at no point in time was this sufficient to impede republican communicative efforts.<sup>5</sup> Thus republicans continued to target journalists, while also developing alternative forms of communication to avoid media bias. Moreover, their attempts to communicate not only with their own supporters but also with journalists progressively improved over time, reflecting both the party's commitment to communication and, more importantly, its increased political awareness.

At the same time, the political re-evaluation within Sinn Féin continued throughout the 1980s, and the party increasingly became more politically-minded and active, whilst also embarking on a joint search for peace with the SDLP. Sinn Féin continued to transform its strategies and political positioning and began to accept the failure of its past efforts in the search for a united Ireland. As Jim Gibney from Sinn Féin has commented:

such have been the political changes over the last six years, it is at times hard to remember what the political conditions were prior to the IRA's first cessation. [ ] Few republicans thought beyond the immediacy of their day-to-day work, whether political or military, as for most this was all-consuming. [ ] In the midst of the war, which had in effect become a military stalemate, there was little or no debate among republicans about how they were going to achieve their objectives. [ ] After 25 years of unbroken resistance, it is not surprising that for many republican activists and supporters, the struggle had become an end in itself. And while this involvement required bravery and selfless, such dedication and commitment, of itself, was not bound to lead to freedom. [ ] This challenged the republican leadership to consider how the struggle could be developed in a way which would maintain the potency and power of what had gone

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<sup>3</sup> See Chapter Three.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter Six.

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter Five.

before but which would break us out of the constraints imposed by the nature of the struggle and own political opponents. (Speech at Clones in Co. Monaghan, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2000 in *AP/RN*, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2000)

This implied the acceptance of the need to find a solution to the Northern Irish Troubles that did not necessarily translate into an immediate Irish unification. Instead, republicans started to acknowledge the need to be mindful and respectful of unionist predicaments while fomenting an all-inclusive process of negotiation where the grievances of both communities were addressed. This continued transformation of republican politics not only impacted on the party itself and the wider republican movement, but also extended once again to its communicative efforts. Thus, republican communication continued to evolve and to become more sophisticated and professional while also reflecting changed messages.

Equally important and in response to changes within republicanism, the British government also proceeded with the re-appraisal of its own positioning and strategy, in particular since Sinn Féin increasingly demonstrated a willingness to compromise. Thus, the British government started to recognise the republican departure and paid particular attention to the joint peace efforts being made by Gerry Adams and John Hume. In an attempt to move the process forward, the British finally stated that they had no 'selfish or strategic interests' in Northern Ireland (Peter Brooke, 9<sup>th</sup> November 1990), signalling a dramatic departure in governmental policy. Instead of maintaining the union by force, the British government presented itself as willing to participate in a political process which would decide the future of Northern Ireland. Not only had republicanism changed, but the British government was also adapting to these changes. Moreover, as MacDonncha suggested:

the evolution of the Sinn Féin peace strategy provided the best hope in over 20 years for the resolution of the conflict, the catalyst for the creation of a new political dispensations which, it was hoped, would take the gun out of Irish politics and ensure that no more young Irishmen or women had to lay down their lives for freedom. Five years on from the publication of *Towards a Lasting Peace*, the political landscape has changed radically. (*AP/RN*, 13<sup>th</sup> February, 1997).

Further reflecting the transformations within Sinn Féin, republicans started to use the language of peace, compromise and reconciliation (Shirlow and McGovern, 1988). This implied their acceptance of the fact that while Irish re-unification might not be an immediately attainable goal, a gradual transformation could commence in which republican grievances were addressed. This provided a new opportunity for republicans to advance their cause and move the peace process forward, while also seeking a solution to the long-standing questions of equality, policing and civil rights. Marking the politicisation of the republican movement and its commitment to a peaceful solution to the troubles, the IRA finally declared an historic cease-fire in 1994, which was to provide the first official republican commitment to negotiations. This also had ramifications for the British government itself, forcing it to move the peace process

forward, although for its own political reasons this was endlessly delayed.<sup>6</sup>

While significant transformations were taking place both within the politics of the republican movement, and by proxy in governmental strategy, media coverage of Sinn Féin continued to change and to provide republicans with further opportunities to put their message across in the news in a manner unseen before (Lago, 1998).<sup>7</sup> Coverage of republicanism increased and became less biased while unionist predicaments began to be challenged by the news media. This modification of the media's approach to Sinn Féin led to a further re-appraisal of republican communication. As republicans became convinced that journalists were less biased to republican messages and instead offered a secure and efficient form of communication, they began to focus their efforts in new areas, such as the Internet.<sup>8</sup>

This resulted in a decreased importance awarded to alternative forms of communication, namely print, and an increased focus on targeting republican messages at journalists and new audiences, such as the wider nationalist community both North and South of the border and Irish-Americans. Underlying the changed media approach to Sinn Fein was its belief that it was increasingly pertinent to examine nationalist and republican predicaments alongside unionists' concerns. However, what also accounted for this changed journalistic approach was the reformulation of the British government policy in response to republican changes, whereby it began to see Sinn Féin as a legitimate political party and the IRA as embedded with a strong political motivation. Also influential in this process were the party's successful attempts to portray itself as committed to peace.

Despite a number of delays imposed by the Conservative government's weakened majority in Westminster, the election of Labour to government brought a new impetus to the peace process. After a considerable and complex period of negotiation, a peace agreement was finally reached. This represented the culmination of a long and fastidious process and was the *epitome* of the dramatic transformations which had taken place in Northern Ireland, in which the media became ever more attuned to republican concerns as well as critical of unionist predicaments. On the one hand, Sinn Féin had presented itself at the negotiating table as a party willing to compromise and committed to dialogue, whilst unionists largely remained their intransigent selves. In the midst of the two deeply opposed communities with incompatible aspirations was the British government, no longer the protector of the union but who had instead become the facilitator and purveyor of peace.

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<sup>6</sup> See Chapter Eight.

<sup>7</sup> See Chapter Eight and Nine.

<sup>8</sup> See Chapter Seven.

## Communicating and Reporting Sinn Féin

In essence, the progressive transformation of the republican movement into a serious minded and fully committed political party has not only been recognised by the news media, but more importantly, it has been accepted by the British government.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, republican communicative strategies have mirrored the modification of the republican movement, having departed from a simplistic communicative enterprise to one which is now described as the most efficient communication machine in Northern Ireland.<sup>10</sup> While the process of the political transformation of Sinn Féin was crucial to the development of its communication strategies, there has always been an inherent interest in conveying the republican message. However, as discussed in Chapters Four and Five, what has changed is the professional and sophisticated approach in which this is done. Not only have republican practices of communication evolved over time, accompanying technological developments such as the emergence of the Internet,<sup>11</sup> but messages and the audiences at which these have been aimed have also changed.

Republican messages have largely mirrored the changes in the political face of the movement while the practices used to communicate its messages have become more widespread and applied in a more efficient manner.<sup>12</sup> This has allowed Sinn Féin to develop from a poorly organised and reactive venture into a successful and proactive communication operation which has delineated a professional and coherent strategy to ensure that its message is publicised to the largest and most widespread audience possible. As Audrey MacGee has commented:

they are highly sophisticated, there is no doubt about it. [ ] They work really hard at collectively getting their message across, and do so incessantly. [ ] I keep stressing it's not just in the way they deal with the media, but it is also in the way they do pretty much everything, the way they run elections. The whole management of everything they do, and I can ascertain that at every level, and the media is one of those aspects.<sup>13</sup>

In an attempt to ensure the future quality of its communication endeavours, at the 1999 Árd Fheis, two crucial motions were accepted by republican delegates. While one motion argued that it was vital for the party to appoint 'specific spokespersons for each government ministry in the 26 Counties, in order to achieve the greatest platforms for the Sinn Féin alternative', the second suggested that:

given the vital role played by AP/RN in spreading the republican message in Ireland and abroad, this AF commits head office to carry out an audit of the human and material resources of the paper, and to ensure adequate provision of staff, communication technology and the distribution network to allow the paper to be produced and distributed to its full potential. (Árd Fheis 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> May 1999, Sinn Féin, 1999).

Moreover, republican coverage in the news has also mirrored the political transformations

<sup>9</sup> See Chapters Eight and Nine.

<sup>10</sup> See Chapter Five.

<sup>11</sup> See Chapter Seven.

<sup>12</sup> See Chapters Five and Six.

<sup>13</sup> From the *Times*, in interview, 21<sup>st</sup> July 1998.

which have taken place both within and outwith the movement. Thus, coverage of republicanism increased in quantitative terms over time,<sup>14</sup> while journalists became progressively more interested in examining republican predicaments. Media coverage of Irish republicans changed and was even seen as providing an unfettered and effective avenue for disseminating the republican message, while republican politicians were increasingly portrayed as legitimate political actors invited to express their opinions.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, as was noted in Chapter Nine, it was not only the coverage of republicanism that had changed, but significantly, it was the manner in which unionists' concerns began to be exposed and challenged by the news media. This further reinforced the transformation of the normative parameters of coverage of Northern Ireland and Irish republicanism from the 1970s to the early 1990s, when republicans were initially dismissed from the news agenda as they were from politics, or portrayed as mad 'terrorists' intent on destroying civil society, to a situation in which they are now seen as moderate as opposed to the unionists, who are troublesome.

In effect, Sinn Féin has succeeded in transforming itself from a poorly organised movement, operating with limited resources, to a fully fledged active and politically adept party. Sinn Féin has also achieved acceptance as a legitimate political party, whose inclusion in any peace process is imperative for its advancement. One extreme instance in which this transformed environment can be seen is in the commercial interest which is now evident. A long time ago, the party and its representatives were repudiated by the public, fellow politicians and the news media, and were treated with contempt. This has now changed as Irish republicanism has almost become a commercial asset. For example, Gerry Adams' Internet name originally only cost £30, yet it was recently sold at an auction for over £7000 (Breen, *Belfast Telegraph*, 19<sup>th</sup> April 2000). In another instance, also involving the republican leader, he decided to take some photographs at Stormont Castle when the Northern Ireland executive met for the first time on the 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1999. He was caught on camera taking photographs with a *Canon Ixus* machine, an image which was reproduced across various newspapers. In the aftermath, *Canon* commented, 'yes we are quite pleased. There's no reason to think that this will have a commercial effect, but it is satisfying for us' (Brokes, *Guardian*, 6<sup>th</sup> December 1999). As the *Guardian* journalist stressed, 'thanks to Gerry Adams their product has leaped in status from (a) mere commodity to (a) fixture in the nation's collective memory' (Broke, 6<sup>th</sup> December 1999).

However, to simply state that the evolution of republican news and its improved portrayal in the media is a direct consequence of its professional and consistent communication efforts is misleading and incomplete. As suggested in this thesis, the relationship between political

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<sup>14</sup> See Chapter Eight.

<sup>15</sup> See Chapter Nine.

communication and news coverage is a deeply complex one, and although a professional approach to communication can assist an organisation in appearing on the news, ultimately, other aspects are more important in determining this outcome. This is particularly true in the case of small and marginalised political organisations, such as Sinn Féin, located outside the realm of political legitimacy. In the case of Sinn Féin and Northern Ireland, although the news continues to result from a complex process of negotiation, what has changed dramatically has been the role occupied by the negotiators and the power and status the party is now able to command. This means that it has been the republican political departure which ultimately forced a news departure. In many ways Sinn Féin is still a small party which nevertheless has had an increasing electoral success. Yet, in many other ways Sinn Féin is now part of the respectable political sphere which has offered Northern Ireland its best chance for peace.

### ***Suggestions for Future Research***

In terms of the future challenges which now face Sinn Féin, this thesis has argued that these relate mainly to its relationship with the IRA and the future links between the two organisations as ‘they will always going to get coverage, as long as the IRA exists in the background, as long as there is that menace in the background they are going to get coverage’.<sup>16</sup> Although the IRA is still a considerable focus of journalistic interest, the decommissioning of IRA weapons will necessarily impact upon this interest, which might mean that, ‘Gerry Adams has a shelf life, it might be that he just becomes another ordinary politician’.<sup>17</sup> The future result of this might be, as Mark Davenport put it that:

they will continue to foster their image as a political party entirely independent from the IRA. They will build on the kudos they attract from the peace process. They will continue to deploy to a large extent their two Westminster MP’s, Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness.<sup>18</sup>

Also as Martin Fletcher commented:

they have got to move on, assuming the assembly gets up and running, from constitutional issues, all sorts of questions about Irish unity, to ordinary bread and butter issues, and this is going to remove some of the glamour that they enjoy at the moment, so they have to find a new way to stay constantly in the limelight.<sup>19</sup>

While there have been dramatic political changes within Northern Ireland, and in particular the republican movement this process of transformation is still incomplete. At the time of writing, September 2000, the process of arms decommissioning is barely underway and the Northern Ireland Assembly and the devolved government is still coming to terms with the new political atmosphere that has emerged in the Province and its role in bringing peace to the people. Since the political transformation of republican strategy and politics is still on-going its impact on

<sup>16</sup> Martin Fletcher, from the *Times*, in interview, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1998.

<sup>17</sup> Martin Fletcher, from the *Times*, in interview, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1998.

<sup>18</sup> From the *BBC*, in survey, 29<sup>th</sup> September 1997.

<sup>19</sup> From the *Times*, in interview, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1998.

political communication and news coverage is also continuing to occur. As Jim Gibney stressed: the issue facing us now, as republicans seeking a united Ireland [ ] is how do we in these improved conditions struggle for freedom. [ ] We need to take on board a number of realities which are pressing and require a clear understanding and response from republicans. Of necessity the context within which republicans will make future progress must be peaceful. The IRA's cessation in practice means that politics alone are centre stage. [ ] the potential of the politics generated by the peace process and the Agreement in my opinion hold out the prospect, if properly handled, of a united and independent Ireland emerging peacefully and democratically. [ ] We require a substantial increase of support throughout this island to advance towards this goal. [ ] the party's further developments are twin-track: on the one hand increasing our share of the vote across the island while on the other maintaining our cutting edge as a campaigning party. (Speech at Clones, County Monaghan, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2000 in *AP/RN*, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2000)

Therefore, it would seem significant to continue to trace this evolution of republican politics and its approach to communication, observing how this impacts upon Northern Irish politics and media coverage of Sinn Fein. At the same time, as stressed, this will also imply an examination of how other political actors adapt to the continued development of republican politics, in particular now that the republican movement has become part of the ruling elite it once so despised. Future research should also continue to examine how Sinn Féin will move further into the realms of political legitimacy and thus contribute to a better understanding of the transformation of the 'terrorist' into a political diplomat. Equally important will be to consider how the path of Sinn Féin/IRA in their transition from 'terrorism' to diplomacy, can be adopted by other movements as an alternative to a long standing armed campaign. This seems particularly relevant in light of the recent developments in Spain where the separatist ETA group seems to be replaying the IRA's military strategy. Thus, a continued and detailed examination of Sinn Féin's transformation into a constitutional political party can assist society and politicians in understanding how democratic negotiation for conflict resolution can be reached, while also proving an example to other 'revolutionary' organisations of alternative avenues to pursue their struggle.

## *Appendices*



## Appendix One

### Questionnaire for the Media

1. In your view, what are the main formal means employed by Sinn Féin in communicating with you or your organisation? (e.g. press releases, video releases, information sheets, posters, pamphlets...)
2. From your experience as a journalist or editor, what are the main formal means employed by Sinn Féin in communicating with the public? (e.g. advertising campaigns, posters, party political broadcasts, leaflets...)
3. In your view, what are the main informal means employed by Sinn Féin in communicating with you or your organisation? (e.g. informal meetings, telephone conversations, business lunches...)
4. Why do you think Sinn Féin opts for the informal or formal tactics you mentioned in your answers to questions 1 and 3?
5. What are the most common themes explored by Sinn Féin in contacts with you or your organisation?
6. What are the most common themes you or your organisation reports on Sinn Féin?
7. Is there a difference, between the most common themes explored by Sinn Féin and the most common themes you or your organisation cover? Why is this?
8. If there is not a difference does this mean that Sinn Féin is successful in getting its message across?
9. Describe which specific issues raised by Sinn Féin have achieved a high level of exposure.
10. Which do you consider to have been the less successful issues which Sinn Féin have attempted to raise? Has this been a consequence of the issues or the techniques used to promote the stories?
11. Have you noticed a connection between the success in the exposure of the issues and the quality of the techniques chosen to communicate them?
12. On which issues do you think Sinn Féin have had positive media coverage in recent years?
13. How would you characterise the media coverage of Sinn Féin?
14. Do you think that Sinn Féin have an organised media strategy?
15. How would you characterise their strategy? Please choose five adjectives that are representative of your opinion.
16. How successful would you rate their overall media strategies?

extremely successful	
very successful	
successful	
unsuccessful	
very unsuccessful	

17. Do you think they could be compared in quality to any British political party or any other political organisation?
18. Are their publicity tactics similar to any other British political party?
19. Are Sinn Féin the 'Saatchi and Saatchi' of Northern Ireland Politics? If so, in what way?
20. In your opinion, what have been the major developments in Sinn Féin's media strategies since 1981?
21. How would you describe Sinn Féin's efforts:
  - a. towards the Irish/Northern Irish media?
  - b. towards the British media?
  - c. towards the European media?

(Please answer either a, b, or c according to whether your work for the British media, Irish or Northern Irish or are a correspondent based in Brussels)
22. How do you foresee Sinn Féin's developments in future campaign strategies?
23. Please provide a brief comment of your opinion on how Sinn Féin conducted their 1997 electoral campaign.

Thank you for your co-operation

## Sources of Information<sup>1</sup>

### Interviews formal and informal

- Mary,<sup>2</sup> Women's Support Group (POW families), Belfast, 31<sup>st</sup> July 1998.
- Martin Fletcher, the *Times* correspondent in Belfast, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1998.
- Bill Harp, Northern Aid Group, Chicago, USA, 13<sup>th</sup> July 1998.
- Mark Leron, press officer, Sinn Féin, Belfast, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2000.
- Audrey MacGee, the *Times* correspondent in Dublin, 21<sup>st</sup> July 1998.
- Anthony McIntyre, ex-IRA POW and Ph.D. student at Queen's University, Belfast, 5<sup>th</sup> August 1998.
- Robert Montgomery, Prisoners of War Department, Sinn Féin, Belfast, 29<sup>th</sup> July 1998.
- Karen Mullen, Falls Women's Centre, Belfast, 4<sup>th</sup> August 1998.
- John Mullin, the *Guardian* correspondent in Belfast, 8<sup>th</sup> July 1998.
- Martin O'Brien, Centre for the Administration of Justice, Belfast, 30<sup>th</sup> July 1998.
- Fergus O'Dea, *RM\_D* administrator, 1<sup>st</sup> October 1997, 12<sup>th</sup> November 1997 and 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1998.
- Donncha O'Hara, press officer, Sinn Féin, Belfast, 10<sup>th</sup> January 1996 and 27<sup>th</sup> July 1998.
- Michael Ritchie, Northern Ireland Association for Care and Rehabilitation of Offenders, Belfast 30<sup>th</sup> July 1998.
- John Sonnicks, *RM\_D* subscriber, 21<sup>st</sup> July 1998.
- Ken Wake, *RM\_D* subscriber, 10<sup>th</sup> July 1998.

### Letters

- Richard Ayre, controller editorial policy, *BBC*, 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1996.
- Jonathan Barton, journalist, *BBC*, 26<sup>th</sup> February 1996.
- Martha Kearney, journalist, *Newsnight*, *BBC*, 29<sup>th</sup> January 1996.
- Nelson Mews, deputy editor, *On the Record*, *BBC*, 24<sup>th</sup> January 1996.
- Jeremy Paxman, journalist, *Newsnight*, *BBC*, 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1996.
- Jonathan Rooper, journalist, *BBC*, 19<sup>th</sup> January 1996.
- Jon Snow, presenter, *Channel 4 News*, 6<sup>th</sup> March 1996.
- Peter Snow, journalist, *Newsnight*, *BBC*, 26<sup>th</sup> January 1996.

### Media Survey

- confidential source, an editor of the *Irish Times*, 30<sup>th</sup> July 1997.
- Deáglan de Bréadún, Northern Irish editor of the *Irish Times*, 13<sup>th</sup> March 1998.
- Vincent Browne, journalist, *Irish Times*, 7<sup>th</sup> April 1998.
- Mark Davenport, journalist in Northern Ireland, *BBC*, 29<sup>th</sup> September 1997.
- Lena Ferguson, producer, *Channel 4 News*, 28<sup>th</sup> April 1998.
- Chris Jones, Home News editor, *Channel 4 News*, 13<sup>th</sup> March 1998.
- Martin Kettle, correspondent in the USA, journalist, *Guardian*, January 1998.
- Ewen MacAskill, journalist, *Guardian*, August 1998.
- Martina Purdy, journalist, *Belfast Telegraph*, (specific date not provided) 1998
- Sarah Smith, journalist, *Channel 5 News*, (specific date not provided) 1998.
- unknown source, organisation and date not provided by respondent, 1998.<sup>3</sup>
- unknown source, organisation and date not provided by respondent, 1998.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The functions indicated for each contributor are those held at the time of correspondence.

<sup>2</sup> Surname was not provided by the interviewee.

<sup>3</sup> This respondent erased the identification number from the survey and returned it in an unmarked envelope.

<sup>4</sup> This respondent erased the identification number from the survey and returned it in an unmarked envelope.

## Appendix Two

### Chronology<sup>5</sup>

1905		SF is founded
1916		Easter Rising in Dublin
1917		SF reorganises itself
		De Valera elected as SF president
		SF wins a number of by-elections
1918	<i>December</i>	SF wins 73 seats in General Election
1919	<i>21<sup>st</sup> January</i>	Dáil Eireann is formed
		Oglaigh na hÉireann (IRA) emerges
1919-21		Anglo-Irish War
1920	<i>December</i>	British Parliament passes Home Rule Bill
		Government of Ireland Act provides NI with own assembly and government
1921	<i>7<sup>th</sup> July</i>	First NI Parliament opens
	<i>11<sup>th</sup> July</i>	Truce between IRA and British government
	<i>6<sup>th</sup> December</i>	Anglo-Irish Treaty
1922		Irish Free State established
		Special Powers Act introduced in NI
	<i>March</i>	IRA splits into pro-treaty and anti-treaty factions
	<i>April</i>	Anti-treaty IRA (irregulars) sets up Headquarters in Dublin
	<i>28<sup>th</sup> June</i>	Free State forces attack IRA (irregulars)
		Start of Irish Civil War
	<i>11<sup>th</sup> September</i>	Free State Parliament opens
1923	<i>27<sup>th</sup> April</i>	IRA cease-fire declared, end of civil war
		SF wins 44 seats in general election
1926	<i>16<sup>th</sup> May</i>	De Valera abandons SF and forms Fianna Fail
1931		IRA outlawed in Free State
1932		Economic War between Britain and Irish Free State
1936		De Valera declares IRA illegal
1937		New Constitution for Irish Free State
1938	<i>April</i>	IRA convention approves bombing campaign in England
1939	<i>12<sup>th</sup> April</i>	IRA ultimatum to Britain: war or withdraw from NI
	<i>16<sup>th</sup> January</i>	IRA begins campaign in England
1940	<i>January</i>	Irish government passes Emergency Powers Act and introduces Internment for IRA suspects
		IRA bombing campaign in England peters out
1949		Irish Free State becomes the Irish Republic
		Ireland Act guarantees NI within UK
1955		SF gains 152,310 votes in NI and wins two seats at Westminster
		IRA military campaign in NI starts
		NI government introduces internment
1959		SF's vote halved in British general elections
		IRA campaign in NI called off
		Cathal Goulding becomes IRA chief of staff
		IRA strategy reassessed
		Premiers of NI and Republic of Ireland meet at Stormont
1967		Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association is formed
1968	<i>5<sup>th</sup> October</i>	Civil Rights Marches and subsequent rioting
		Two days of rioting after a civil rights march in Derry is banned and broken up by RUC. Viewed as the start of the Troubles
	<i>30<sup>th</sup> October</i>	Taoiseach, Jack Lynch, calls for end of partition in an attempt to put an end to the unrest
	<i>4<sup>th</sup> November</i>	NI PM, Terence O'Neil, rejects transfer of power without the consent of NI Parliament
	<i>22<sup>nd</sup> November</i>	NI PM, Terence O'Neil, announces a reform plan to address some Catholic concerns: housing and council elections
1969		Civil Rights Marches and loyalist attacks on marchers

<sup>5</sup> (Based on Bew & Gillespie 1996; Darby 1997; Smith 1995 and [http://www.ireland.com/special/peace/troubles/troubles\\_chron.htm](http://www.ireland.com/special/peace/troubles/troubles_chron.htm), accessed on 11/11/99 at 17.19).

	<i>16<sup>th</sup> July</i>	Samuel Devenny, taxi-driver, dies following a police beating. Seen as first victim of the Troubles
	<i>August</i>	Arrival of British Army in NI
	<i>12-14<sup>th</sup> August</i>	Severe rioting in Belfast (14 August British) troops sent onto the streets of Derry
	<i>15<sup>th</sup> August</i>	British troops enter Belfast to end rioting
	<i>10<sup>th</sup> September</i>	British Army completes peace line in Belfast
	<i>December</i>	Opposition forms PIRA Army Council (here, PIRA is simply referred to as IRA)
<b>1970</b>	<i>11<sup>th</sup> January</i>	SF splits into Official and Provisionals (here, Provisionals are simply referred to as SF)
	<i>March/April</i>	clashes between British army and Catholics in West Belfast
	<i>July</i>	British Army imposes curfew on Lower Falls in Belfast
	<i>August</i>	SDLP formed
	<i>October</i>	IRA begins sustained bombing campaigns concentrating on economic targets
<b>1971</b>	<i>6<sup>th</sup> February</i>	First British soldier killed by Provisional IRA
	<i>June</i>	SF issue <i>Eire Nua</i>
	<i>9<sup>th</sup> August</i>	Internment is introduced in NI, 300 people arrested during dawn raids
	<i>September</i>	IRA determine a five-point peace plan
	<i>October</i>	DUP is formed
<b>1972</b>		Worst year of the Troubles: 478 people killed
	<i>30<sup>th</sup> January</i>	Bloody Sunday, Parachute Regiment shoots dead 13 men after a civil rights demonstration
	<i>2<sup>nd</sup> February</i>	British Embassy in Dublin burned down
	<i>22<sup>nd</sup> February</i>	IRA reprisal for Bloody Sunday kills 7 people at Aldershot Military Barracks
	<i>10<sup>th</sup> March</i>	IRA announces a three day cease-fire
	<i>20<sup>th</sup> March</i>	IRA kills 6 in car bomb in Belfast
	<i>24<sup>th</sup> March</i>	Abolishment of Stormont. Introduction of Direct Rule in NI
	<i>22<sup>nd</sup> June</i>	IRA announces cease-fire
	<i>26<sup>th</sup> June</i>	IRA cease-fire begins
	<i>7<sup>th</sup> July</i>	IRA delegation meets Secretary of State for NI, William Whitelaw, in London. No agreement is reached
	<i>9<sup>th</sup> July</i>	IRA cease-fire collapses
	<i>21<sup>st</sup> July</i>	Bloody Friday: IRA kills 9 people during 22 separate bombs in Belfast
	<i>31<sup>st</sup> July</i>	British Army launch 'Operation Motorman'
	<i>December</i>	IRA Christmas truce
<b>1973</b>	<i>March</i>	London car bombs
	<i>April</i>	NI Emergency Provisions Act is passed
	<i>July</i>	NI Constitution Act abolishes Stormont Parliament
	<i>31<sup>st</sup> July</i>	NI Assembly meets for the first time
	<i>21<sup>st</sup> November</i>	Power-sharing agreement is reached
	<i>November</i>	UVF Cease-fire (43 days)
	<i>December</i>	Sunningdale Agreement establishes the Council of Ireland
<b>1974</b>	<i>January</i>	NI Power Sharing Executive
	<i>14<sup>th</sup> May</i>	Sunningdale Agreement is sanctioned by Assembly
	<i>15<sup>th</sup> May</i>	Ulster Worker's council strike begins
	<i>17<sup>th</sup> May</i>	Loyalist bombs in Dublin and Monaghan kill 33 people
	<i>28<sup>th</sup> May</i>	Direct rule resumed and strike is called off
	<i>November</i>	21 killed by bomb in Birmingham
	<i>25<sup>th</sup> November</i>	Britain announces anti-terrorist measures. The PTA makes the IRA an illegal organisation in Britain
	<i>5<sup>th</sup> December</i>	PTA extended to NI
<b>1975</b>	<i>10<sup>th</sup> December</i>	IRA announces a Christmas cease-fire (22 Dec to 2 January 1975)
	<i>2<sup>nd</sup> January</i>	IRA cease-fire extended
	<i>16<sup>th</sup> January</i>	IRA cease-fire called off
	<i>10<sup>th</sup> February</i>	IRA suspends operations against security forces. New cease-fire issued
	<i>24<sup>th</sup> July</i>	Secretary of State, Merlyn Rees, promises to release internees before end of year
	<i>December</i>	Fair Employment Act is introduced
		Remaining internees released
<b>1976</b>	<i>1<sup>st</sup> March</i>	Special category for new prisoners removed
	<i>9<sup>th</sup> March</i>	NI Convention dissolved
		September protest in Maze prison against ending of special status
	<i>1<sup>st</sup> September</i>	Republic Of Ireland government declares state of emergency
	<i>28<sup>th</sup> October</i>	SF vice-president, Marie Drumm, shot dead by UVF
	<i>25-27<sup>th</sup> December</i>	IRA Christmas cease-fire

1977	May	Second unionist strike
1978	17 <sup>th</sup> February	IRA bomb at LA Mon restaurant, Co Down kills 12
	30 <sup>th</sup> November	IRA says they are preparing for a long war
1979	March	Airey Neave, Conservative NI spokesman killed by INLA
	August	18 soldiers killed by IRA at Warren Point, Co Down Lord Mountbatten killed by IRA
1980	2 <sup>nd</sup> July	British government publish document on NI devolution, but no agreement is reached
	October to December	First Hunger Strikes in the H-Blocks
1981	March	Second Hunger Strikes begins
	9 <sup>th</sup> April	Bobby Sands, IRA prisoner in H-Blocks wins MP seat for Westminster for SF
	5 <sup>th</sup> May	Bobby Sands dies on hunger strike
	20 <sup>th</sup> August	Owen Carron, SF, elected in replacement for Sands
	October	Hunger Strikes called off, 10 republican prisoners died
1982	July	NI Assembly set up Two bombs in London kill 8
	November	NI Assembly opens, SDLP boycott it, SF poll 10.1%
	December	INLA bomb kills 17 at a disco in Co. Londonderry
1983	30 <sup>th</sup> May	New Ireland Forum meets in Dublin
	9 <sup>th</sup> June	SF gain 13.4% of British general election vote and elect Gerry Adams to Westminster
	September	Mass break out from H-Blocks
	13 <sup>th</sup> November	Gerry Adams elected SF president
	December	IRA bomb in Harrods, London kills 5
1984	14 <sup>th</sup> June	SF gain 13.3% of NI vote for European Elections
	12 <sup>th</sup> October	IRA sets bomb in Grand Hotel in Brighton at Conservative Party Conference in an attempt to kill the then PM, Margaret Thatcher. Four killed
1985	February	Nine RUC members killed by mortar attack at Newry
	23 <sup>rd</sup> February	John Hume (SDLP) meets IRA at secret venue
	15 <sup>th</sup> November	Anglo-Irish Agreement is signed between Margaret Thatcher and Taoiseach Garret Fitzgerald
1986	3 <sup>rd</sup> March	Unionists strike against the agreement
	23 <sup>rd</sup> June	Unionists oppose agreement and NI Assembly dissolved
	2 <sup>nd</sup> November	SF Árd Fheis votes to end abstentionism. Splinter in the movement over the issue, forming republican SF
1987	8 <sup>th</sup> May	Eight IRA men killed by Special Air Services (SAS) at Loughall
	12 <sup>th</sup> June	SF gains 11.4% of vote at British general elections. Gerry Adams retains his seat
	October	IRA explosives from Libya seized in Cargo Ship, <i>Eksund</i>
	8 <sup>th</sup> November	11 killed at Enniskillen Remembrance Day ceremony by IRA bomb
1988	11 <sup>th</sup> January	Hume meets Adams for talks
	6 <sup>th</sup> March	SAS kill three IRA members in a shoot to kill action in Gibraltar
	16 <sup>th</sup> March	Loyalist gunmen, Michael Stone, kills 3 during the Gibraltar victim's funeral in West Belfast
	19 <sup>th</sup> March	Two British Army corporals killed when their car joined a republican funeral cortege in West Belfast
	2 <sup>nd</sup> September	SDLP- SF talks end
	9 <sup>th</sup> October	British Broadcasting Ban is introduced
1989	January	SF President, Gerry Adams, publicly cautions IRA over civilian deaths
	17 <sup>th</sup> May	SF win 11.3 at NI local elections
	September	IRA bombs Royal Marines School of Music at Kent killing 12
1990	31 <sup>st</sup> October	NI Secretary says talks are suspended, after months of failed attempts
	9 <sup>th</sup> November	Peter Brooke NI Secretary of State says Britain has no selfish economic or strategic interest in NI
1991	7 <sup>th</sup> February	IRA launches three mortar bombs at No. 10 Downing Street, during Cabinet meeting
	March	Brooke Talks announced
	25 <sup>th</sup> March	DUP; UUP Alliance Party and SDLP agree a new talks formula
	22 <sup>nd</sup> April	UVF and UFF announce joint cease-fire
	30 <sup>th</sup> April	Bi-lateral party meetings with Peter Brooke begin, but fail to find a solution to the impasse
	25 <sup>th</sup> May	UFF breaks cease-fire with murder of a SF councillor
	17 <sup>th</sup> June	Stormont Talks begin and end on 3 <sup>rd</sup> July
	5 <sup>th</sup> July	End to loyalist cease-fire
	16 <sup>th</sup> September	Brooke meets local party leaders in an attempt to restart talks, yet to no

		avail
1992	4 <sup>th</sup> February	Three men shot dead at SF office in Falls Road, by off-duty RUC officer
	5 <sup>th</sup> February	Five Catholics killed by loyalist gunmen in bookmakers in Belfast
	9 <sup>th</sup> March	Delegates from the four main parties meet at Stormont for first meeting of new strand of talks
	10 <sup>th</sup> April	Gerry Adams loses MP seat at British general election
	12 <sup>th</sup> June	Deadlock on strand 1 (NI internal government) Talks adjourned for summer but no prospect of future meetings
	6 <sup>th</sup> July	Political talks between constitutional parties in NI begin in London
	2 <sup>nd</sup> September	Strand 2 talks reconvene but DUP leaders abandon the process, returning weeks later to discuss Articles 2 and 3 of Irish Constitution
	10 <sup>th</sup> November	unionists abandon talks
1993	17 <sup>th</sup> January	8 Protestant workmen killed by IRA bomb in minibus in Co. Tyrone
	20 <sup>th</sup> March	IRA Warrington Bomb kills two children
	10 <sup>th</sup> April	John Hume and Gerry Adams meet in the first of the Hume-Adams talks. Later they issue a joint statement excluding internal settlement and asserting the right to national self-determination of Irish people as a whole.
	18 <sup>th</sup> June	Irish President, Mary Robinson, criticised for shaking the hand of Gerry Adams during a private reception in West Belfast
	4 <sup>th</sup> July	Interview with Gerry Adams in <i>Sunday Tribune</i> reveals that republicans might be prepared to accept joint authority
	29 <sup>th</sup> August	<i>Sunday Tribune</i> reveals that former Irish diplomat, Michael Lilies, has had two private meetings with Gerry Adams
	7 <sup>th</sup> October	John Hume gives the document agreed by Gerry Adams to Tanaiste and Taoiseach
	15 <sup>th</sup> November	Gerry Adams reveals that SF was involved in prolonged talks with the British government. <i>Belfast Telegraph</i> claims that face-to-face meetings have taken place between SF and British government officials
	28 <sup>th</sup> November	<i>The Observer</i> reveals that channels of communication between IRA and British government have existed for years
	15 <sup>th</sup> December	British and Irish governments publish joint statement on NI - the Downing Street Declaration
	23 <sup>rd</sup> December	IRA announces three day cease-fire
1994	5 <sup>th</sup> January	Gerry Adams invited to attend a New York conference
	7 <sup>th</sup> January	Gerry Adams writes to PM, John Major, and asks for clarification of <i>Downing Street Declaration</i>
	15 <sup>th</sup> January	Four Irish-American senators ask President Clinton for a visa to be granted to Gerry Adams
	19 <sup>th</sup> January	Irish government removes Broadcasting Ban
	29 <sup>th</sup> January	President Clinton authorises visa for Gerry Adams
	1 <sup>st</sup> February	Gerry Adams and John Hume address National Committee on American Foreign Policy in New York
	5 <sup>th</sup> April	IRA begins three day cease-fire to facilitate clarification on Downing Street Declaration
	13 <sup>th</sup> May	SF submits clarification questions to Irish government
	19 <sup>th</sup> May	Northern Ireland Office publicly responds to SF clarification questions
	24 <sup>th</sup> June	SF conference in Co. Donegal rejects sections of Downing Street Declaration
	August	IRA declares Cease-fire
	September	Adams meets Irish PM. British Broadcasting ban is lifted Re-opening of 10 border crossings
	October	Loyalists declare cease-fire USA lifts ban on official contact with SF
	November	European package of £240m aid to Peace Process
	December	SF and loyalist delegations enter into pre-negotiations with government at Stormont
1995	12 <sup>th</sup> January	British Army ends daytime patrolling of Belfast
	February	<i>Framework for Future</i> document launched by joint governments
	17 <sup>th</sup> June	SF abandons talks with the British government
	July	Confrontations during Orange marching season
	30 <sup>th</sup> November	American President, Bill Clinton, visits NI and shakes Gerry Adams' hand in a Falls Road cafe
	5 <sup>th</sup> December	Head of International Body on Decommissioning, Senator George Mitchell, invites submissions from all parties
1996	26 <sup>th</sup> January	Mitchell report is published, outlining 6 principles of non-violence for entry in all party talks

	<i>9<sup>th</sup> February</i>	IRA end cease-fire with Canary Wharf bomb	
	<i>4<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> March</i>	Proximity talks start	
	<i>30<sup>th</sup> May</i>	NI Forum Election to all-party talks, SF polls a record vote	
	<i>10<sup>th</sup> June</i>	Inter-party talks begin under chairmanship of Senator George Mitchell, SF barred from joining talks	
<b>1997</b>	<i>15<sup>th</sup> June</i>	IRA bombs in Manchester and Germany	
	<i>January</i>	IRA and loyalist attacks continue	
	<i>1<sup>st</sup> May</i>	SF elects two MPs to Westminster Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness. Labour wins British general elections and Tony Blair becomes new PM	
	<i>16<sup>th</sup> May</i>	Blair visits NI and authorises exploratory contact between the government and SF	
	<i>16<sup>th</sup> June</i>	Blair bans any contacts between government and SF following the killing by the IRA of two RUC officers	
	<i>June</i>	NI government elections, unionists lose control of Belfast City Council	
	<i>20<sup>th</sup> July</i>	IRA cease-fire announced	
	<i>26<sup>th</sup> August</i>	International Body on Decommissioning set up	
	<i>29<sup>th</sup> August</i>	NI secretary of State Mo Mowlam announces that SF can enter the talks	
	<i>9<sup>th</sup> September</i>	SF signs up to Mitchell Principles and enters all party talks	
	<i>17<sup>th</sup> September</i>	Ulster Unionists join the talks. DUP stay out	
	<i>13<sup>th</sup> October</i>	Adams and McGuinness meet Tony Blair for the first time at Stormont Castle	
	<i>9<sup>th</sup> December</i>	Adams and McGuinness visit Downing Street for historic visit	
<b>1998</b>	<i>17<sup>th</sup> December</i>	Stormont talks break for Christmas	
	<i>17<sup>th</sup> January</i>	SF rejects British and Irish government's proposals	
	<i>19<sup>th</sup> January</i>	republican leaders dash to Downing Street for urgent meeting with Tony Blair	
	<i>21<sup>st</sup> January</i>	IRA rejects Anglo-Irish paper	
	<i>26<sup>th</sup> January</i>	Peace talks move to London. UDP forced to leave, suspected of breaking cease-fire	
	<i>16<sup>th</sup> February</i>	Peace talks move to Dublin	
	<i>20<sup>th</sup> February</i>	SF suspended from talks, IRA suspected of breaking the cease-fire	
	<i>23<sup>rd</sup> March</i>	Peace talks resume in Stormont with SF allowed to return to negotiating table	
	<i>26<sup>th</sup> March</i>	Talks chairman Senator Mitchell announces deadline of 9 <sup>th</sup> April for an agreement	
			Negotiations start round the clock
	<i>7<sup>th</sup> April</i>	Unionists reject Senator Mitchell's draft for settlement Tony Blair flies to Belfast in last minute attempt to solve the crisis	
	<i>8<sup>th</sup> April</i>	Irish Taoiseach Bertie Ahern arrives in Belfast	
	<i>9<sup>th</sup> April</i>	Frantic activity in Stormont in a last a minute bid to find an agreement SF leader Gerry Adams says a deal is not possible	
<i>10<sup>th</sup> April</i>	All night negotiations to find a solution for the deadlock Good Friday Agreement is reached		

## Appendix Three

### *Sinn Féin's Press Releases and Publications*

Year	Number of Press Releases
date unknown but <i>circa</i> early 1970s	1
1974	1
1979	2
1980	2
1986	1
1987	2
1988	1
1990	1
1991	3
1993	2
1994	7
1995	8
1996	6

**Table 4: Sinn Féin's Press Releases by Year**

Date	Title
date unknown	Bobby Sands memorial lecture
January 1990	SF publicity director imprisoned on false charges – neutralising political opponents
July 30 <sup>th</sup> – August 4 <sup>th</sup> 1990	Review of the week

**Table 5: IPIC Press Releases**

Title	Date
<i>Irish Political Prisoners Information File</i> (Prisoner's of War Department)	undated
<i>Ireland Information Fact File</i> (Foreign Affairs Bureau)	1994 and October 1994
<i>Ireland International News Briefing</i> (Foreign Affairs Bureau)	n.2 February 1989; August 1993; n.15 May/June 1990, n.16 July 1990, n. 21 April 1990, n. 21 April 1991
<i>A Women's Voice</i> (Women's Department)	n.1 May 1988, n.2 September 1988, n.4 January/February 1989
<i>Coolock News</i> (SF Dublin)	March/April 1989
<i>Iris</i> (SF Dublin)	undated, n.4 November 1982, n.6 July 1983, n.8 August 1984, n.9 December 1984, n.10 July 1985, n.12 November 1988, n.13 August 1989, n.14 August 1990
<i>The Captive Voice</i> (Prisoner's of War Department)	vol.1 n.2 winter 1989, vol.2 n.1 Spring 1990, vol.2 n.3 Winter 1990, vol.8 n.3 Winter 1996, vol. 8 n.3 Winter 1996 <sup>1</sup>
<i>The Irish Worker</i> (Trade Union Department)	May 1990
<i>Sinn Féin West Belfast Bulletin</i> (SF West Belfast)	n.3 April 1990, n.4 May 1990, n.5 July 1990, n.6 August 1990

**Table 6: Sinn Féin's Publications**

<sup>1</sup> There were two different editions of *Captive Voice* which had the exact same volume and part number.



Date	Title
<i>circa</i> early 1970s	<sup>2</sup> ♦ (POW's)
22 <sup>nd</sup> July 1974	Correspondence with RTE
21 <sup>st</sup> April 1979	Conference on European political prisoners
23 <sup>rd</sup> April 1979	European political prisoners conference
4 <sup>th</sup> March 1980	SF councillors to initiate non-payment of TV licence fees
23 <sup>rd</sup> July 1980	Martin Meehan on hunger and thirst strike
1986	♦ (Hillsborough treaty)
26 <sup>th</sup> May 1987	(Hillsborough treaty)
<i>circa</i> 1987/88	♦ (job discrimination)
19 <sup>th</sup> January 1988	♦ Adams statement)
5 <sup>th</sup> February 1990	♦ (Adams statement)
10 <sup>th</sup> April 1991	Launch of 26 county local government reform policy document
14 <sup>th</sup> May 1991	♦ (Fracie Mollow, POW Spokesperson)
14 <sup>th</sup> May 1991	Unemployment conference report
4 <sup>th</sup> September 1993	Britain policy all things to all people
19 <sup>th</sup> October 1993	SF chairperson visits London
5 <sup>th</sup> April 1994	Hartley replies to Dr. Rodgers
6 <sup>th</sup> April 1994	♦ (Comments by Dr. Rodgers)
6 <sup>th</sup> April 1994	Comments by SF General Secretary Lucilita Bhreatnach
6 <sup>th</sup> April 1994	SF letter to John Major
31 <sup>st</sup> August 1994	This opportunity must be seized
5 <sup>th</sup> September 1994	British embassy picket
9 <sup>th</sup> December 1994	SF plans a series of demonstrations
2 <sup>nd</sup> February 1995	Crumlin roan closure welcomed
4 <sup>th</sup> April 1995	Harassment of Nolan family must end
2 <sup>nd</sup> May 1995	Man abused and threatened at Oldpark barracks
29 <sup>th</sup> August 1995	♦ (All party Talks)
23 <sup>rd</sup> October 1995	Compassionate parole decision slammed
29 <sup>th</sup> October 1995	Transfer opportunity must not be let slip
December 1995	Adams releases Montupet figures
14 <sup>th</sup> December 1995	Crumlin road closure welcomed
1996	Court decision on closed visits for republican prisoners in Britain
15 <sup>th</sup> January 1996	Adams rejects Major proposal
30 <sup>th</sup> January 1996	SF warn of jobs meltdown in Belfast
5 <sup>th</sup> March 1996	SF presidents calls for release of Pat Kelly
24 <sup>th</sup> July 1996	♦ (Martin McGuinness addresses international media)
22 <sup>nd</sup> October 1996	O hEára comments on latest Irish News poll

Table 7: Sinn Féin's Press Releases

<sup>2</sup> There is no title for these press releases.

## Appendix Four

### *Sinn Féin on the WWW*

Sub-Heading	Title	Date
INTRODUCTION TO SF AND IRISH REPUBLICANISM FREEDOM		05/1995 05/1991
THE BRITISH MILITARY GARRISON	Clickable map of the British garrison British Army RUC	09/1994
THE PEACE PROCESS, THE CURRENT SITUATION AND BACKGROUND		24/02/1997
IRA	IRA statement IRA statement IRA statement IRA statement IRA statement IRA statement IRA statement	31/08/1994 01/09/1995 29/09/1995 08/12/1995 09/02/1996 29/02/1996 04/04/1996
PEACE IN IRELAND-		
THE SF ÁRD CHOMHAIRLE	Profile of Gerry Adams Profile of Martin McGuinness Profile of Mitchell McLaughlin Profile of Pat Doherty	
PEACE IN IRELAND - AN AGENDA FOR CHANGE		
<i>AN PHOBLACHT</i> <i>REPUBLICAN NEWS</i>	Read the latest news from <i>AP/RN</i> Search back issues of <i>AP/RN</i>	
SF DELEGATION ITINERARY, COMMUNITY EVENTS		
UPCOMING REPUBLICAN EVENTS IN IRELAND, ENGLAND AND SCOTLAND		
ELECTION HEADQUARTERS	By-election 1998 Westminster 1997 Leinster House 1997 Six County 97 election results Forum election 1996	
ÁRD FHEIS '98	Express your support or opposition Presidential address Other principal addresses A gallery of photographs Putting people first Political hostages Justice & equality Putting people first (continued) International affairs Constitution & rules Organisation Environment & health policy documents At the centre of Irish politics Peace negotiations Demilitarisation A strong mandate Opening address Presidential address Address on Stormont negotiations Address on justice & equality section Address on the Amsterdam treaty Address on middle East peace process Closing remarks Political report: at the centre of Irish politics Photo gallery	1998
ARCHIVE OF DOCUMENTS	Introduction to SF Freedom: a SF education publication Evolution of a republican party - historical background to SF The British military garrison in Ireland Profile of Martin McGuinness Profile of Gerry Adams	05/1995 05/1991 04/1995 09/1994 09/1992 02/10/1995

	Eighteen months of British bad faith	02/1996
	Irish republican prisoners sentenced in England	02/1996
	The end of the IRA cessation: Adams writes	12/02/1996
	'Bad faith and dishonesty', an article by Gerry Adams	02/1996
	Presidential address by Gerry Adams to Árd Fheis 1996	03/1996
	Presidential address by Gerry Adams to Árd Fheis 1995	02/1995
	Presidential address by Gerry Adams to Árd Fheis 1993	02/1993
	Collected speeches from Árd Fheis 1996	
	Main speech at Bodestown commemoration by SF Director of Publicity, Rita O'Hare	06/1995
	Main speech at Bodestown commemoration by SF Árd Chomhairle member, Martin McGuinness	06/1995
	Main speech at Bodestown commemoration by SF General Secretary, Lucilita Bhreatnach	06/1994
	Main Speech at Bodestown commemoration by SF Árd Chomhairle member, Jim Gibney	06/1992
	Adams address to public meeting Mansion House, Dublin	10/1994
	Adams address in Conway Mill, West Belfast	02/1996
	Address on 80th anniversary of 1916 Rising by Chairperson of 26 County Chomhairle in Dublin, Joan O'Connor	04/1996
	Satellite address to Irish Diaspora in North America by SF President, Gerry Adams	05/1996
	Intended address to opening of all party talks by SF President, Gerry Adams	06/1996
	Join statements by John Hume and Gerry Adams	10/1995
	Join statements by John Hume and Gerry Adams	08/1994
	Join statements by John Hume and Gerry Adams	11/1993
	Join statements by John Hume and Gerry Adams	09/1993
	Join statements by John Hume and Gerry Adams	04/1993
	Joint statement by SF and the SDLP	08/1995
	SF submission to the Mitchell Commission	01/1996
	Working for peace and justice: political report to Árd Fheis '96	03/1996
	Building the economy – building the peace	05/1995
	Can business have confidence in the peace process?	02/1996
	International women's day statement	03/1996
	Vision in action: a new economic strategy for West Belfast	04/1996
	Police in transition: a legacy of oppression, an opportunity for justice	03/1996
	Collected policies adopted and rejected at Árd Fheis '96	1996
	Friends of SF mission statement	
PRESS RELEASES AND NEWS	Letter delivered by Gerry Adams to White House and US State Department	13/09/1995
	News update: SF conference	02/09/1995
	News update: Adams calls for dialogue with British	04/10/1995
	Statement by Gerry Adams regarding election of new unionist leader	09/10/1995
	News update: Adams calls for dialogue with unionists	11/10/1995
	News update: British/Irish meeting	18/10/1995
	News update: Clinton visit 'only dynamic'	25/10/1995
	McGuinness addresses breakdown in peace-talks	08/11/1995
	SF releases details of Hume-Adams proposals	08/11/1995
	News up-date: Adams to visit US	08/11/1995
	News update: McGuinness calls for lasting settlement	15/11/1995
	News update: crisis for peace process	22/11/1995
	Initial SF responses to Mitchell commission report	24/01/1996
	Adams responds to Major's remarks in the House of Commons	24/01/1996
	Adams rejects Major's proposal	25/01/1996
	British forces conduct raids and arrests on morning of US Senator Mitchell's report	25/01/1996
	Adams to meet Mayhew	29/01/1996
	British government must be challenged on Veto	29/01/1996
	Adams calls on Major to retract all preconditions	30/01/1996
	News update: Gerry Adams in United States	31/01/1996
	Major must meet with SF	01/02/1996
	Pat Doherty on Peace Forum Report	02/02/1996
	Adams responds to events in London	09/02/1996
	Adams responds to Dublin	09/02/1996
	Adams accuses Major of betraying the peace process	12/02/1996
	Adams comments on meeting between British and unionists	13/02/1996
	The return of the Royal Irish Regiment (RIR)	14/02/1996
	Adams expresses shock and sadness	19/02/1997
	Media have a responsibility	20/02/1996
	Election proposal will harden positions	21/02/1996
	Wexford SF expresses sympathy, support, on the death of Vol. Eddie O'Brien	02/1996
	Adams calls for fixed specific date	27/02/1996
	Cautious responses from SF to Major-Bruton proposals	28/02/1996
	Adams and Hume meet IRA	29/02/1996
	SF Árd Chomhairle discuss current situation	01/03/1996
	Adams responds to Major's remarks	01/03/1996
	SF barred from talks	04/03/1996
	SF describe alliance decision as disappointing	05/03/1996
	Doherty slams British decision not to grant parole	05/03/1996
	Scepticism reinforced by recent events	05/03/1996
	SF launch their proposals on dual taxation	12/03/1996
	SF call forum to meet	12/03/1996
	SF vice-president to contest by-election	13/03/1996

SF call retention of Ireland's position on neutrality	13/03/1996
Elections: another precondition and another concession	14/03/1996
Talks another British failure	14/03/1996
Saint Patrick's day message from Martin McGuinness	17/03/1996
SF describes Internet story as nonsense	25/03/1996
Police authority proposals meaningless	26/03/1996
Business realities in the border region	27/03/1996
Adams welcomes offer of help from South Africa	27/03/1996
SF reaffirm commitment to neutrality	27/03/1996
Adams restates implacable opposition to Stormont	29/03/1996
News update from Ireland:	03/04/1996
Easter commemoration, Dublin	07/04/1996
Blame lies with Major	08/04/1997
Easter speech by SF President, Gerry Adams	09/04/1996
SF address into fringe meeting	10/04/1996
Easter commemoration, Belfast	10/04/1996
TD and Senator support for Kelly welcome	10/04/1996
Adams responds to British government election paper	10/04/1996
SF express concern	12/04/1996
SF responds to British proposals	16/04/1996
Forum and elections a distraction- Adams	19/04/1996
Forum and election - a distraction	22/04/1996
Smyth's remarks "an implicit threat to violence"	24/04/1996
Adams responds to SDLP decisions on elections and forum	24/04/1996
Adams writes to Smyth	24/04/1996
80th anniversary of 1916 rising	24/04/1996
Leave Lebanon in peace	24/04/1996
McLaughlin confirms meeting with Labour	29/04/1996
Vote for peace	30/04/1996
Adams comments on Taisoeh's speech	01/05/1996
May day message from SF vice president Pat Doherty	01/05/1996
Onus rests with British	02/05/1996
Loyalists oppose change	06/05/1996
RUC Harassment of SF election workers	08/05/1996
British stand on Kelly Vindictive - Adams	09/05/1996
SF holds AGM	10/05/1996
Speculation unhelpful	13/05/1996
Howard's admission indicative of entire legal apparatus	14/05/1996
Adams welcomes Kelly transfer	14/05/1996
Adams responds to John Major	16/05/1996
Adams comments on Mitchell principles	20/05/1996
Doherty calls for repatriation of republican prisoners	21/05/1996
Urgency and Focus needed	22/05/1996
Adams amazed by Hendron's remarks	28/05/1996
'Unionists veto has no place at negotiations' - Dodie McGuinness	28/05/1996
Vote SF for positive change	28/05/1996
Eve of poll message	28/05/1996
SF's exclusion a mockery	05/06/1996
Initial response to British/Irish agreement	08/06/1996
Adams -SF prepared for the challenges to come	13/06/1996
Unionist forum opposed	13/06/1996
Adams shocked and saddened by Manchester attack	17/06/1996
More communication not less	19/06/1996
Newspaper article by Gerry Adams	20/06/1996
Adams responds to Bruton	21/06/1996
Kelly accuses the RUC	24/06/1996
Adams appeals for Smyth	25/06/1996
SF to launch lesbian, gay and bisexual policy document	25/06/1996
Major attempts to establish more pre-conditions	26/06/1996
British policy critical to restoration of peace process	27/06/1996
Options for a lasting peace in Ireland	28/06/1996
SF calls for written constitutional statement on neutrality	28/06/1996
Adams comments on attack on BA base	29/06/1996
Adams says gap must be 'narrowed'	01/07/1996
Adams comments on Orange Mar. tension	02/07/1996
Call for review of grants to Belfast City Council until West Belfast group is founded	08/07/1997
Adams accuses Trimble and Smyth	08/07/1996
McGuinness appeals for calm and vigilance	10/07/1996
Adams appeals to Trimble and Smith	08/07/1996
RUC decision shows nationalists have no rights	11/07/1996
End RUC curfew	12/07/1996
RUC unacceptable to nationalists	12/07/1996
Unionism's re-asserts political domination	13/07/1996
RUC fired shoots	13/07/1996
Gerry Adams comments on Enniskillen explosion	14/07/1996
McLaughlin comments on tomorrow's talks in Stormont	15/07/1996
Responses to Patrick Mayhern	15/07/1996

	Adams calls for new peace process	15/07/1996
	Mayhem's responses without substance	15/07/1996
	Plastic bullets - symbol of RUC bigotry	16/07/1996
	Crisis demands return of forum	17/07/1996
	SF meet with government officials and opposition front bench	17/07/1996
	Enniskillen bombing – suspicion continues	18/07/1996
	Boycott RUC call	18/07/1996
	Martin McGuinness speaks to international media	24/07/1996
	Equality and parity are needed	30/07/1996
	Churches' links with Orange Order challenged	01/07/1996
	Scrap RUC authority – Adams	02/08/1996
	Apprentice Boys must talk to communities	02/08/1996
	Unprovoked attack by RUC on nationalists in Newtownbutler	05/08/1996
	RUC decision not the answer	05/08/1996
	Adams appeals for "calm and restraint"	07/08/1996
	Internment lesson must be learned	08/08/1996
	McGuinness meets Bogside Group	08/08/1996
	Adams repeats call for calm and restraint	09/08/1996
	SF announces voluntary re-routing	09/08/1996
	Negotiations needed now	12/08/1996
	Adams expresses outrage at Nelson release	13/08/1996
	RUC mutiny - the question remains	13/08/1996
	Baker - 'cheap propaganda'	15/08/1996
	Nelson challenge – Maskey	16/08/1996
	McLaughlin calls on Trimble and Paisley to use their influence with loyal orders	20/08/1996
	Equality should top British agenda	21/08/1996
	New peace process needed	23/08/1996
	SF committed to peace through dialogue	27/08/1996
	SF welcomes historic council support for Irish	27/04/1996
	SF welcomes Bellaghy agreement	28/08/1996
	Adams attacks Belmarsh conditions	28/08/1996
	SF dismiss appointment on Flanagan	30/08/1996
	McGuinness calls for an entirely new peace process	30/08/1996
	A new initiative for peace	31/08/1996

**Table 8: Sinn Féin's WWW Inventory**

**RM\_D List (April and May 1997)**

	Irish News Round Up	Activist Bulletin	Other
1 <sup>st</sup> April	Tension in unionism highlighted at Belfast parade IRA cessation possible in return for negotiations A new home for Féile A gun pointed at detainee	US activist news Irish educational forum in Baltimore, Maryland	
2 <sup>nd</sup> April	IRA volunteers at rally: 'republicans ready, negotiations or no' Sinn Féin to make case for nationalists in London Oldest republican paper re-launched Women's rights as human rights Analysis: a bug-eyed turcoat and the ghost of Tail Gunner Joe	Francie Broderick's update on Matt Morrison anti-deportation campaign Urgent action alert on deportations Boston rally for Roisin	
3 <sup>rd</sup> April	Tories promise five more years of unionism Loyalist arms cache found in Carrickfergus Mother's pain at PR campaign for son's killers Analysis: Just cruising along		
4 <sup>th</sup> April	Bombs bring British motorway network to a halt Labour party manifesto low on details SF set sights on the negotiation table West Belfast man lucky to be alive Crown force police assault Maghera women Analysis: Labour must talk to SF		
5 <sup>th</sup> April	Arson suspected in church blazes LD policy challenged Sixty six POWs assaulted A beating described Bomb alerts lead to abandonment of British Grand National Largest Easter turnout for many years Feature: Easter inspiration for Basque nationalists History: Prelude to the Rising	Irish Northern aid, Boston event	
7 <sup>th</sup> April	Conspiracy of silence breaks in Aintree media frenzy Church burnings continue SF praises Kennedy's commitment Prisoner challenges catch-all charges Accusations of double standards Northerners firmly support inclusive talks -- poll SF's peace pledge Scottish solidarity for Roisin McAliskey	Petition to free Roisin McAliskey Calling all Irish American student activist/groups! Events in England	
9 <sup>th</sup> April	British Labour will not repeat Major's mistakes' – McGuinness SAS squad sighted in Lurganitary		

	Inclusive talks only way forward Equality for all citizens Kesh wardens stole prisoners property Legal action in Germany for Roisin McAliskey		
10 <sup>th</sup> April	Catholic survives loyalist murder bid after gun jams Antrim Orangemen reject agreement, refuse dialogue McAliskey refused bail again Northern election campaign moves south Crown forces come under fire in Fermanagh Feature: The incredible H7 tunnel		
11 <sup>th</sup> April	Adams calls for election pact RUC woman injured as Derry court attacked by IRA Loyalists in West Belfast kidnap bid 100 pound bribe to inform Loughgall trial finds SAS guilty Analysis: Labour's unionists	Demo for Roisin in Boston	
12 <sup>th</sup> April	SF rises to Paisley's challenge Asylum victory mean end of US deportation bid Destructive raids in Cappagh Adams expresses regret after Derry attack Fury at murder of ETA volunteer		
13 <sup>th</sup> April	Catholics evacuated after loyalist invasion Irish govt. announces plans to mark rebellion anniversary Deirdre McAliskey urges support for jailed anniversary Analysis: murder is murder is not murder Book review: by drum and trumpet History: special powers act		
14 <sup>th</sup> April	Armagh men tortured by interrogators Second night of clashes in North Belfast SF rejects attack on by SDLP Feature: Doing the business in Cavan Analysis: Travel warning UK: BSE, Road Rage and PTA		
15 <sup>th</sup> April	Fury in South Armagh after British assault Fourth arson attack on Catholic church POW treated in hospital Analysis: POW-wow on how west can be won Feature: The day the IRA made poor Jenny cry		
17 <sup>th</sup> April	Arrested men 'beaten senseless' Another church burned Loyalist feud blamed for Limestone road violence Irish television refuses right of reply on parades SF AF to gather in Monaghan	Activists gather in New York, PA to protest Thatcher	
18 <sup>th</sup> April	Blasts and alerts cause widespread disruption in Northern England		

	Killer soldiers 'may be out in 18 months' US honours hunger strikers Political report to SF's AF		
19 <sup>th</sup> April	SF's AF goes global Double standards on transfers Opportunity for peace 'smashed by Major' - Adams Fears of whitewash on official British discrimination British, not Germans are opposing McAuliskey bail	Benefit for Roisin McAuliskey in New Jersey	
20 <sup>th</sup> April	Elections the vehicle for peace' message at AF Tension high after shooting Analysis: Fina Gael attack on SF backfires Book review: The Irish Civil War – an illustrated history History: the IRA and the treaty	Baby shower for Roisin McAuliskey Participate in the SF AF <i>online</i>	
21 <sup>st</sup> April		Address to SF AF	
22 <sup>nd</sup> April	Sinn Féin office attacked Worst ever transport chaos in London after bomb alerts Former Irish PM received £1.3m from supermarket magnate Unionists will have to talk – Adams A campaign of energy and confidence		
23 <sup>rd</sup> April	SF leadership tours constituencies SF to open London office after election Your vote can help build peace, by Gerry Adams Fighting talk: SF battles for seat in Dublin South-West	Voter registration campaign in the 26 counties Vigil planned in New York for Roisin's labour Roisin McAuliskey baby shower in Portland, Oregon Irish groups rally to support Irish-American political deportees Irish hunger strike memorial week-end Protest for Roisin in Los Angeles	
24 <sup>th</sup> April	Life tariff overturned Adams appeals to unionists Causing a stir West of the Bann AF report Watching them watching us watching them		
25 April	SF manifesto Arrested men's families issue appeal Alerts close British motorways for second week BBC censors SF election broadcasts Denton affair end in propaganda stunt A new opportunity for peace: introduction to the SF manifesto		
26 <sup>th</sup> & 27 <sup>th</sup> April	US appeal asylum decision Pre-election censorship attacked Outcome of discrimination review 'unsatisfactory' – Adams Another church is burned as phantom loyalist cease-fire continues Adams to retire if mandate not won in election Analysis: we need to win the bloodless battles History: Arthur O'Connor	Urge Clinton to drop appeal against asylum	



28 <sup>th</sup> April	Battle to save sight of boy struck by plastic bullet RUC look on as Catholic is beaten Killer regiment back again Germany under pressure over McAliskey case Hope and history rhythm in mid-Ulster Optimism in West Belfast	Write to German government over Roisin Roisin McAliskey fund-raiser in Arizona
29 <sup>th</sup> April	Change the face of politics' - Adams Loyalist bomb defused outside SF advice centre London travel disrupted again Loyalist RIR soldiers attack nationalists in East Belfast Armed stand-off at Maghaberry prison Poll points to SF victory in West Tyrone Analysis: Poised for an historic breakthrough Thatcherism to end tomorrow	
30 <sup>th</sup> April	Roof-top riot by loyalist prisoners Last ditch bid for West Tyrone seat Profiles of the North's Westminster constituencies Analysis: Election without democracy, history without change	Remembering Bobby Sands in Sydney
1 <sup>st</sup> May	Voting underway in crucial election No tears as Maynew quits Ireland Jail tension continues as loyalists end rooftop protest £100 million losses from IRA actions Bloody Sunday libel case 'biggest ever'	Flash: Exit polls show landslide for Labour  Civil rights campaigners to speak in St.Louis Mother's day demonstration for Roisin McAliskey in St Louis Boston Mar. and rally for Roisin McAliskey
2 <sup>nd</sup> May		Election victory for British British election result quotes British election result timetable High turnout in the six counties Martin McGuinness elected for MP for Mid-Ulster Major resigns SF see 2 seats, maybe 3 Gerry Adams elected for MP for West Belfast Election special: a vote for peace
3 <sup>rd</sup> May		
5 <sup>th</sup> May	Republicans still not going away Labour government faces challenge over McAliskey US protest against Thatcher Racing star's family attacked Kesh escaper arrested for extradition Collusion claim in Derry	
6 <sup>th</sup> May	Tension increases on sectarian Mar.es issue POW's information missing Fine Gael attacks have stamp of Ireland's civil war past The hunger striker's constant champion	

7 <sup>th</sup> May	Bomb attack follows disclosure of loyalist death list Adams surprised by 'menacing' claim The West Belfast count SF sees progress in South and East Belfast Attempts to disrupt election criticised Courage of the hunger strikers Boost for Irish activists in Queensland, Australia SF MP to visit Róisín McAliskey; pressure on London Loyalist mocks Catholic victims with cease-fire claim British radioactive discharge now reaching Canada and Siberia Feature: Two days that shook the system	Thatcher protest in Chicago area tomorrow	
8 <sup>th</sup> May	Anger in Portadown after man dies from loyalist beating Tyrone sees slow progress on Orange parades RUC try to disrupt election - report Week of action in the US Analysis: Labouring in hope	Action alert for Róisín McAliskey	
10 <sup>th</sup> May	Pressure for independent inquiry into dealing death RUC man shot in Belfast Hopes for peace talks grow SF announces candidates for 26 county election SF candidates for Leinster House elections 1997 Quotes on the election results		
11 <sup>th</sup> May	US congress to hear deportation issue RUC man shot by INLA Feature: The BA's new training ground History: McGuinness wins South Longford	Urge US House representative to participate in debate	
			List of political prisoners Prison addresses When writing to Irish political prisoners Prisoner support organisations
12 <sup>th</sup> May	Unionist anger at report of SF office at Westminster New exclusion call rejected Priest targeted in sectarian attack The 126,921 record vote Music from the heartland		
13 <sup>th</sup> May	Miracle escape from loyalist death-squad Róisín's torture Orange law and Orange order Analysis: SF's triumph	Compendium of Róisín action contacts	
14 <sup>th</sup> May	Irish sports official murdered as blame game continues British Labour urged to direct human rights concern to Holloway jail Family of beating victim to sue RUC Analysis: Sex appeal, shy Alex and censorship	San Francisco events	

15 <sup>th</sup> May	Adams and Ahern in talks Stop the deportations call at US congress Loyalist gun victim misidentified as SF man by RUC SF denied facilities at Westminster Analysis: keeps the tide of change flowing Parade decision adds urgency to need for dialogue Call for Australian visa for Adams Adams welcome calling of election McGuinness calls for halt to sectarian attacks Peace hopes dim as Blair sides with unionists Clinton a 'significant element in search for peace' RUC admits loyalist cease-fire has ended RUC harass community Francis Hughes remembered SF in Talks with Dublin and London governments Feature: the fight for change in City Hall Analysis: The real numbers Remarkable Fenian		
16 <sup>th</sup> May		Bodestown USA Volunteer commemoration in Dublin Downing street picket	
17 <sup>th</sup> May			
18 <sup>th</sup> May			
19 <sup>th</sup> May	Defiant Paisley rejects dialogue as Mar. is blocked Adams and McGuinness at Westminster Loughall: ten year on and still seeking justice Analysis: Maybe Al and Tony can put it together for 2000 Talks must follow 'unequivocal' IRA cessation - Adams No republicans need apply at British parliament SF launches local election manifesto Analysis: Back to the ballot buster SF at Stormont for talks with British government Voting underway in North's local elections Repatriation of prisoners welcomed German confusions on McAliskey Letter from Roisin McAliskey	Irish people Belfast Mar. tour	
20 <sup>th</sup> May		SF representative to the US in LA Bloody Sunday remembered in Santa Monica exhibition	
21 <sup>st</sup> May		German petition for Roisin McAliskey Anti-deportation protest in Pittsburgh	
23 May	Huge gains for Sinn Féin in local elections Six county local elections round-up Dunloy residents express disappointment at parade stand-off Government parties behind in 26 county-pools Analysis: Looking at the small pictures		Response to Friday's comments by Brit. PM Tony Blair by SF President, G.A.
24 <sup>th</sup> & 25 <sup>th</sup> May	Roisin bailed from Holloway hell-hole SF election triumph confirmed SF's elected 6-county councillors - complete list Feature: The youth reclaim the Basque Country History: Internment 1922		
26 <sup>th</sup> May	Loyalist attacks continue with Dundalk bomb		

	Riots on the doorstep of dialogue Doherty calls for investment for Donegal Analysis: Taxing questions 26-County election manifesto		
27 <sup>th</sup> May	A baby girl for Roisin Elections throws spotlight on Irish government's northern policy Adams launches party's general election manifesto New loyalist group claims Dundalk bomb, plan more attacks	New York protest for Roisin Boycott for Roisin Card and flower for Roisin	
28 <sup>th</sup> May	Adams welcomed to Dublin central McCrea incites Mid-Ulster loyalists RUC slammed by Human Rights report British army invites children to base Dublin volunteer remembered Hunger strikers remembered in Scotland Analysis: Sham fights and real battles		
29 <sup>th</sup> May	British Sunday relatives meet Robinson Adams in Dublin - a visit from an old friend A question of citizenship	Events in Ireland, England, Scotland SF representative to US on Seattle radio	
30 <sup>th</sup> May	Adams welcomes Clinton support for peace Helicopter crashes in Derry Garvachy residents have 'mandate for dialogue' More cheers in City Hall - election report Analysis: SF train is getting up steam		

Table 9: RM\_D List Inventory

Appendix Five

Party Mentions in Newspapers 1996-1998

	SF		Gerry Adams		SDLP		JH		UUP		DT		DUP		IP		SF & IRA		IRA					
	1996	1997	1996	1997	1996	1997	1996	1997	1996	1997	1996	1997	1996	1997	1996	1997	1996	1997	1996	1997	1998			
the Daily Mirror	305	422	165	214	105	128	66	93	111	137	152	69	97	85	88	60	124	208	284	256	787	898	778	
the Daily Record	113	123	78	68	25	29	18	21	53	63	161	24	33	18	24	17	13	89	82	157	310	282	417	
Scotland on Sunday	58	34	42	22	25	28	9	16	20	40	43	27	11	10	15	17	9	56	32	46	109	75	76	
the Guardian	397	353	241	198	136	93	122	97	88	273	199	151	114	108	74	100	61	322	249	264	777	656	637	
the Herald	383	310	199	166	166	92	118	117	60	316	224	140	111	112	75	104	59	331	231	195	662	439	363	
the Irish Times	1981	1764	784	696	843	781	918	451	454	960	1276	596	486	506	457	350	284	1356	1025	945	2421	1762	1717	
the Observer	97	76	80	44	37	20	17	27	12	60	47	35	29	23	15	22	26	93	59	52	238	183	122	
the Sunday Mirror	48	73	30	37	5	18	23	4	15	8	21	6	12	9	23	17	15	41	54	41	126	157	123	
the Sunday Telegraph	91	90	61	61	29	12	27	19	8	35	10	28	18	14	2	15	9	80	76	97	196	158	186	
the Sunday Times	222	334	124	180	78	122	128	63	77	133	141	74	67	44	69	35	46	178	237	284	442	491	540	
the Telegraph	333	372	185	191	94	94	125	67	56	215	87	114	104	79	26	61	31	290	297	352	722	632	664	
the Times	323	324	184	176	79	71	102	66	54	212	188	105	97	81	79	66	54	251	213	245	752	638	638	
Total	4351	4275	2173	2053	1625	1469	1792	1017	918	2431	1965	1369	1179	1096	942	864	731	3295	2839	2934	7542	6371	6261	
Total 3 Years	13501		6878		4886		3048		7351		5468		3278		2701		9068		20174					

Table 10: Party Mentions in Newspapers 1996-1998

## Appendices Six

### Television News

	Nine o'clock News	BBC Main Weekend News	Newsnight	News at Ten	ITN Weekend News	Channel 4 News
3/4/98	√		√	√		√
4/4/98		x			x	x
5/4/98		x			x	x
6/4/98	√		√	√		x
7/4/98	√		√	√		√
8/4/98	√		√	√		√
9/4/98	√		√	x		x
10/4/98			Holiday –Good Friday x			
11/4/98		√			√	x
12/4/98		√			√	x
13/4/99		√				
			Holiday –Easter Monday x			
14/4/98	√		√	√		√
15/4/98	√		√	√		√
16/4/98	√		√	√		√
17/4/98	√		√	√		√

**Table 11: Television News Sample**

x indicates times that the archive failed to record the news bulletins.

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<sup>1</sup> All articles obtained from the Republican Mailing List do not have page numbers as the articles were obtained from the Internet.

<sup>2</sup> All articles obtained from the Internet do not have page numbers.

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