

The Third Sinn Féin Party: 1923-1926

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I: Narrative Account

THE recent commemoration of the fiftieth anniversaries of the Easter Rising and the meeting of the First Dáil Éireann have done much to focus attention on this stormy watershed of modern Irish history and politics. The Civil War, for so long a topic of polemical argument, is becoming the subject of serious study and unbiased analysis. So far, however, remarkably little original research has been undertaken in the shadowy area of history and politics stretching from the end of the Civil War to the emergence of Fianna Fáil as a constitutional opposition party in Leinster House. The history of the post-1923 era obviously needs a considerable amount of research of a primary sort; and on top of that, additional synthesis in order to put the raw material in proper arrangement and perspective. This article is offered only as an investigation of a preliminary nature, for synthesis must await the study of all relevant sources. This study may shed some light on one aspect of a period during which the future of the Free State, and indeed constitutional democracy in this country, were by no means assured. The first part of the account examines the events which led to the establishment of the Republican political party after the Civil War and traces the history of this party until its collapse in 1926. Part II (which will appear in the next issue) analyses the reasons behind the decline of Sinn Féin and the schism of 1926 which was to destroy it.

The establishment of the Third Sinn Féin Party

While "Sinn Féin" has been used as the name of an Irish political party for over sixty years, it would be incorrect immediately to assume that the body so named was an organization with unbroken continuity. In fact the evidence suggests that

in a twenty-one year period between 1905 and 1926 there were at least four successive parties each bearing the title "Sinn Féin". These parties, which correspond to four distinct periods in modern Irish history, can be conveniently described as Monarchical, Nationalist, Republican and Extremist or Fundamentalist, in that order, using these adjectives merely as labels and not as complete descriptions of the different parties. The differences between these parties outweighed such factors as they had in common. Each differed from its predecessor or successor in such matters as leadership, membership, aims and the means of attaining them.

The members of the small Sinn Féin party which existed from 1905 to 1917 would, for example, have been satisfied with independence within a dual monarchy system. Circumstances after 1916 caused this party to amalgamate with more radical groups like the Liberty Clubs, the Nation League and the released 1916 prisoners, to form a much larger, composite body which can be described as the Nationalist Sinn Féin party. This organization lasted until 1922, when it perished in the flames of the Civil War. While it nominally sought the establishment of a Republic by a combination of military and political action, the Treaty was to show that many of its leaders and members were motivated more by the desire to achieve independence than to establish a Republic.

The Third Sinn Féin party was organized after the Civil War as the political organ of those who opposed the Treaty. This party was committed unreservedly to working towards Republican status by political means alone; but, as the 1926 split showed, both leaders and members were to differ on whether or not this could be achieved by a policy of abstaining from Leinster House. The Fourth Sinn Féin party, which existed from 1926 on, though also dedicated to the Republican idea, soon retired from active political life, its small membership feeling more at home in devotion to activities of a social, cultural and propagandist nature.

What happened to the Sinn Féin party, that band of brothers which had united all in the struggle against Britain, after the Treaty had been signed in December 1921? Like the Cabinet, the Dáil, the IRA and the people themselves, the Sinn Féin party was to be riven from apex to base by the Treaty dispute. The rise of the party from the embers of the 1916 Rebellion had been a demonstration of growing unity in the face of the British onslaught. To the need of unity every other need, social and economic, had been subordinated. The struggle for self-government had been the only cement linking disparate groups together in the quest for variant goals, all of which were easily subsumed under the abstract goal of independence. During the nationalist phase disunity had been condemned, but now competition and rivalry were to be expected, especially since the norms of the new system were democratic.

Though badly split by the end of 1921, a special Sinn Féin *Ard-Fheis* (annual conference), held in February, 1922, managed to preserve the precarious unity of the party for a few months longer. How did the organization divide on the Treaty issue? Evidence from the voting for a new Standing Committee in January suggests that, contrary to the commonly held view, Sinn Féin was overwhelm-

ingly pro-Treaty at this juncture.¹ Party delegates reassembled again in May, for what was to be the last occasion, to give the Collins-de Valera pact their blessing. This agreement provided for a national coalition panel with pro-Treaty and anti-Treaty candidates represented on it in proportion to the existing strength of these groups in the Dáil. Democracy was preserved by allowing other groups the right to contest the elections. It is indicative of the party's loss of power and prestige that the agreement was negotiated outside its framework, and not until negotiations were completed was the pact placed before the delegates. Despite attempts to paper over the cracks, by May, 1922, the party was well on the way to collapse. The local organization had already begun to fall to pieces. Feelings were becoming too high for the pro- and anti-Treaty members of *cumainn* (local party organizations) to meet together. Branch meetings became irregular and those in favour of the Treaty tended to stay away. The announcement of the pact put a shot of new life into the party, and for a short period both sections tried to give effect to its terms, canvassing for the panel candidates as a whole.² Had the pact confined the election to Sinn Féin candidates alone, it might have led to another uncontested election like that of 1921, but its terms expressly provided that other interests could go forward. A considerable number did so, and as individual Sinn Féin canvassers began to press the claims of their own side only, the split in the organization widened.

The result of the June, 1922, general election was that about a quarter of the deputies returned were Republican, while the remainder could be relied on to support the Treaty. Before the new Dáil could meet, the Civil War began with the attack on the Four Courts. Sinn Féin, which had been badly weakened by the division within its ranks over the Treaty issue, was to be destroyed by the fighting, executions and reprisals that make up the history of this struggle. Many of those who had been prominent in the movement were now engaged in fighting, imprisoning and sometimes killing one another. In July, the party's offices in Harcourt Street were closed down and the permanent staff paid off. A few branches, Republican in sympathy, met secretly and were subject to frequent raids, with their members in and out of prison. During the autumn and winter of 1922 a number of Dublin branches endeavoured unsuccessfully to use the party to secure peace between the warring factions.³

De Valera and Austin Stack, the party's honorary secretary, seem to have been the only two leaders who were anxious to keep Sinn Féin in existence. They appreciated that, when the war was over, the people would look for their government, not to military men, but to civilian political leaders. Accordingly, in

1. Éire, High Court of Justice. *Buckley and Others v. The Attorney General and Charles Stewart Wyse Power* (1948). This case is commonly referred to as the Sinn Féin Funds Case, and will hereafter be abbreviated to S.F.F.C. See transcript of evidence (P.R.O., Dublin), Book 32, p. 23, and Book 47, pp. 20-23.

2. *Ibid.*, Book 32, p. 30.

3. *Ibid.*, Book 32, pp. 33, 37; *Freeman's Journal*, 16.2.1923. It probably would have proved impossible for an *Ard-Fheis* to have been held in the circumstances then prevailing.

November and December, 1922, and in January, 1923, they sent out circular letters which, though addressed to *cumann* in general were primarily a call to Republican members to reconstitute Sinn Féin along the lines which they regarded as the true interpretation of the old constitution.⁴ The optimism and enthusiasm of the president and honorary secretary of the party were not sufficient to revive Sinn Féin, and they seem to have been almost alone in their belief that the organization was still alive. By the beginning of 1923 only about 60 out of the party's former 1,500 branches remained in existence, and as the Civil War dragged on, this number declined even further, dropping to sixteen by June, 1923.⁵

While the pro-Treaty leaders were initially antagonistic to the development of political parties in the infant State, the Civil War and the polarization which it effected in the political life of the country led to their decision in December, 1922, to establish a party which would reflect their political views. As far as they were concerned, the Nationalist Sinn Féin party was dead and they preferred to found a completely new political organization. Early in January, 1923, a convention of pro-Treaty supporters was held in Dublin for this purpose. The new party, known as *Cumann na nGaedheal*, held its inaugural convention in the Mansion House in April.⁶ The split in the Second Sinn Féin party had now become institutionalized and there was no longer any hope of reuniting it.

In May, 1923, the fighting officially came to an end. A general election was expected within a few months. A pro-Treaty party was already in existence and the Republican political leaders were determined that their views should have adequate representation in the forthcoming electoral contest. After two informal meetings had been held in the house of Malachi Muldoon, a Republican supporter, in May, it was decided to reorganize Sinn Féin as a Republican party. At a public meeting held in the Mansion House on the 11th June, 1923, a resolution was passed calling upon "members or former members of Sinn Féin who adhere to its declared Republican object to resume their active support of the organization throughout Ireland." A Reorganizing Committee⁷ was appointed which proceeded to establish the new party on the basis of bringing together what had been the anti-Treaty element in the Second Sinn Féin party, while excluding or discouraging pro-Treaty elements from joining.

The efforts of the anti-Treatyite leaders of the Nationalist Sinn Féin party to reform the organization into a purely Republican body were not to pass without protests from former members of the party. In August, 1923, a statement was issued protesting against the misuse of the name "Sinn Féin" by persons who had not the sanction or authority of the old organization. The statement was signed by

4. S.F.F.C., Book 48, part 3, doc. nos. 1985, 2008, 2015, pp. 11, 15, 17.

5. *Ibid.*, Book 10, p. 1; *Freeman's Journal*, 16.2.1923; *Sinn Féin*, 8.12.1923.

6. Warner Moss, *Political Parties in the Irish Free State*, New York, 1933, p. 13; S.F.F.C., Book 47, p. 26; *Freeman's Journal*, 9.1.1923, 28.4.1923.

7. This committee was purely an ad hoc body, and was *ultra vires* the constitution of the Second Sinn Féin party. The proper bodies to reorganize the party would have been the 1922 Standing Committee or the *Ard Chomhairle* (National Executive).

prominent members of the old party who had taken the Treaty side.⁸ The leaders of the Third Sinn Féin party were not deterred by these protests. The Nationalist Sinn Féin party was regarded as dead, and much to the surprise of the Republicans the title and organization had not been appropriated by the pro-Treaty leaders when forming their new party.⁹ It was a shrewd and politically legitimate move to start a new organization with the old name, constitution and rules and much of the old personnel, directed solely to advancing the political interests of the Republican section of the old party.

The Reorganizing Committee of the new party had two principal objectives, although in practice there was a good deal of over-lapping between them. Its first task was to direct and control the Republican election campaign. At the same time it was seeking to establish the new party on a national basis. Contesting the general election was the most immediate task, so that it was not until polling was over that the work of reorganizing could begin on a large scale. Initially, de Valera was undecided whether or not his party should contest the election. He had no wish to commit the party to such a contest unless he was sure it would receive a reasonable amount of support from the electorate. Encouraged by public support for Sinn Féin, and by a \$100,000 (£20,000) campaign fund from the United States, he decided to enter the electoral fray.¹⁰ The party's election policy was basically a reflection of that put forward by its predecessor in the 1918 election. Sinn Féin T.D.'s would boycott the legislature and refuse to take the oath of allegiance. If the party won a majority it would re-negotiate a settlement with Britain. If returned as a minority party, it would not renew the civil war, but would aim at developing the "economic and material strength of the country."¹¹ The question as to how a minority, opposition, abstentionist party could achieve this remained unanswered. Here lay the seeds of the failure of the Third Sinn Féin party. Its leaders did not appreciate that circumstances in the post-civil war period were vastly different from those that had prevailed during the struggle for independence, and that changed conditions demanded a new policy.

Despite harassment by Free State forces, the arrest of de Valera and the internment of between 12,000 and 16,000 Republican supporters, the new party, much to everybody's surprise, won almost 300,000 first preference votes, or twenty-seven per cent of the poll. Forty-four Sinn Féin deputies were elected to the Fourth Dáil. They never took their seats during the lifetime of that Dáil, but were to meet apart, acting as a separate legislative and executive body claiming *de jure*, though not *de facto*, powers.

Inspired by their success at the polls, Republicans were now free to concentrate all their energies on the task of building up the new party. The fact that they

8. *Weekly Freeman's Journal*, 18.8.1923. See also letters from G. A. Lyons on this topic in *Freeman's Journal*, 22.6.1923 and *Irish Independent*, 2.7.1923.

9. Michael McNerney, *The Gerry Boland Story* (3), *Irish Times*, 10.10.1968.

10. Sean Cronin, *The Fenian Tradition* (13), *Irish Times*, 29.4.1969. See also *Sinn Féin*, 26.7.1924 and S.F.F.C., Book 47, pp. 40-41.

11. *Freeman's Journal*, 23.7.1923.

expected local elections to be held in November, 1923, provided an added stimulus to their efforts.¹² A number of factors contributed to the rapid expansion of the party. Because Republicans were now prepared to work for their objective through constitutional or semi-constitutional methods they gained the support of people who, while opposed to the Treaty, had been reluctant to support an armed struggle against the State during the Civil War. From the beginning paid organizers with a deep knowledge of their constituencies were employed. This undoubtedly helped the party to establish a strong country-wide organizational network.¹³ In addition, the Reorganizing Committee was aided in its work by the co-operation of the IRA and its female ancillary organization, *Cumann na mBan*.¹⁴ Individual IRA men who had evaded capture by the Free State forces joined the new party, though not specifically ordered to do so by the Army Council. Many Republican prisoners who had been interned during and after the Civil War were organized into party branches inside the gaols and prison camps,¹⁵ and some of these presumably continued to remain in the party after their release. Other factors which contributed to the growth of the party were American financial help, the morale-boosting success of Sinn Féin in the general election and the mass hunger strike by thousands of Republican internees, lasting for 40 days during October and November, 1923. This protest, resulting in the deaths of two prisoners, attracted to the party much sympathy and attention, dispelling some of the apathy that had hung over the Republican movement since its defeat in the Civil War.

One indicator of the success of the party can be seen from the fact that 680 branches were represented at the first *Ard-Fheis* held in October, 1923. By the end of November this number had risen to 729 (see appendix). The number of *cumann* continued to increase during the first part of 1924. The Republican weekly newspaper *Éire* reported in January, 1924: "The growth of the movement . . . is proved by the wonderful increase in strength and in numbers of the Sinn Féin clubs throughout the country. They have literally multiplied in numbers over and over again."¹⁶

In March, 1924, a number of officers in the Free State Army mutinied and presented an ultimatum to the government. In the resulting political crisis, two Ministers resigned from the Cabinet, one establishing a new opposition party within the Dáil composed of ex-*Cumann na nGaedheal* deputies. The Sinn Féin party, exulting in its growing strength, regarded the mutiny as symbolic of the inherent instability of the Free State regime. Many within the party were convinced that Republican accession to power would not be long delayed. *Éire* reported:

12. For a number of reasons these elections were postponed until 1925.

13. S.F.F.C., Book 48, part 1, minutes 7, 24, 26, pp. 2, 3, 4.

14. *Ibid.*, minute 5, p. 1.

15. Michael McInerney, *op. cit.*, 10.10.1968.

16. 5.1.1924.

The death rattle can already be heard in the throat of the Free State government. It is going to pieces from inherent and internal rottenness. . . . By the confession of friend and foe, the Republican movement is now on the crest of the wave.¹⁷

Despite gloomy Republican forebodings, the government did survive and the army was to emerge as henceforward firmly committed to the principle of political rather than military control. On the other hand, although no one suspected it at the time, the decline of the Sinn Féin party had already begun.

Before dealing with the decline of Sinn Féin it is important to realize that it represents an unique type of political party in the history of the post-1921 Irish State. It belongs to a comparatively rare species of political party, in that it not only refused to recognize the political legitimacy of the new order, (which was supported by a majority of the people) but attempted to duplicate many of the powers and functions of the State. The explanation for the rather distinctive role played by the party is connected with its doctrinal position. The Republican Sinn Féin party had, relatively speaking, a greater "ideological" emphasis than its more pragmatic Irish counterparts. It was more determined to push the revolution to its conclusion—the re-establishment of the sovereign "Republic" of 1919–1921. Refusing to recognize the legitimacy of the existing regime, it believed that the Republican minority was justified in spurning the majority will on the Treaty issue.

According to Sinn Féin doctrine, the free and independent Republic which existed from 1919 onwards had been offered a form of government which abolished its independence. While admitting that a majority of the electorate had voted for the Treaty, the party contended that a majority had no right to abolish liberty, the essence of nationhood. Majorities, according to Sinn Féin, could not be the deciding factor on a question of principle, nor could they rob the minority of the duty of upholding principle. The party did not see itself as a contestant in a give-and-take game of parliamentary politics, but as a partisan in a struggle between historic truth on the one side and fundamental error on the other. Having this conception of itself, it is not very surprising that the party attempted to set up a sort of Republican sub-State, to which its members could give their allegiance.

As early as October, 1922, while the Civil War was still in progress, the available Republican deputies had met secretly in Dublin, and constituted themselves the Republican parliament and government.¹⁸ During the lifetime of the Third Sinn Féin party, its deputies refused to enter the Free State Dáil, met apart in secret and regarded themselves as the legitimate legislature, owing allegiance to the only true government—the Republican Cabinet, which had been set up in 1922 and functioned as a sort of government-in-exile. The party, regarding its own government and Dáil as the *de jure* administration and legislature of the country, attempted to isolate its supporters as much as possible from contact with

17. 29.3.1924. *Éire* cannot be regarded as an unprejudiced source.

18. Florence O'Donoghue, *No Other Law*, Dublin, 1954, pp. 277, 342–343; *Dáil Debates*, Vol. XLIV (1932), cols. 224–227.

what it regarded as a usurping regime. While this attitude was never fully spelled out in any policy statement and may have been a largely unconscious one, the fact remains that the party endeavoured to provide many services normally provided by the State alone.

In addition to the separate Republican government and parliament, the Sinn Féin party tried to establish a separate judicial system. A scheme for the setting up of arbitration courts to decide civil cases was approved early in 1925. Such a court was established in Dublin, and Republicans and others desirous of availing of its facilities were invited to use it for settlement of their claims.¹⁹ Here, as in similar undertakings, the party was trying to repeat the success of the first Republican administration. During the Anglo-Irish war, the system of Dáil law courts had been one of the strong points of the Independence movement. The fact that the Nationalist side had efficient and impartial courts, which were able to function during a period of political and social unrest, won the Dáil government much support from quarters which might otherwise have opposed it. In post-independence Ireland no great dissatisfaction arose with the judicial system. Republican efforts to initiate a separate system proved futile, and I have not come across any instances of the facilities of these courts being called upon during the lifetime of the Third Sinn Féin party.

However, it was not in the judicial sphere, but in the field of education, that the Republican party was most ambitious and unorthodox. Believing that the existing universities were not only un-Irish, but that they imparted an education that was defective and unsound, a group of party members attempted to establish a new university in 1923.²⁰ Classes in the new Republican "university" were held throughout the winter of 1923-1924, and, according to reports, were attended by a small but enthusiastic number of students. The term "university" is perhaps a misnomer here: "evening institute" might be a better description, as all classes were held at night, free of charge, in the Hardwicke Hall, Dublin. In 1924, a provisional governing body was constituted and preparations made to extend the range of subjects taught. It is, perhaps, a reflection of the almost mystical religious fervour characteristic of many of the more radical and uncompromising Republicans, that most of the courses offered could be described as theological or philosophical.²¹ The attempt to establish a Sinn Féin "university" met with little success, principally because the party lacked capital, and men who were both well-informed and had the time to give to the cause. Like other ancillary organs of the party, the "university" had drifted into obscurity prior to the schism of 1926.

Another interesting attempt by the party in the educational field involved a plan of 1925 to set up independent schools staffed by Sinn Féin teachers who had been dismissed or victimized because of their membership of, or support for, the party. While the initial response to this scheme encouraged the party "to seek at

19. S.F.F.C., Book 24, minutes 7, 40.

20. *Irish Times*, 15.12.1924.

21. During the 1924-1925 session the curriculum included history, Irish art and music, logic, ethics, general metaphysics, psychology and natural theology. *Sinn Féin*, 19.7.1924; *Éire*, 18.10.1924.

once a building where the new scheme of practical education may be given a trial", the project never became operational, most likely because the party's worsening financial position at this time forced it drastically to curtail expenditure.²²

A more orthodox venture into the field of political education was initiated early in 1924, when speakers from party headquarters gave lectures and talks at branch meetings throughout the country. It was hoped that the thousands of political prisoners who had recently been released from prisons and internment camps would not be lost to the cause "thinking that there is no work that counts but fighting", and that they would "be able to give a reason for the national faith that is in them".²³ In order to cater for the needs of the remote countryside where it was not always easy to send lecturers, a number of talks were printed and distributed in pamphlet form to branches requiring them. These pamphlets did not claim to be finished studies on the topics selected but rather were intended as a helpful educational weapon by provoking debate.²⁴ In addition to these arrangements, party branches were repeatedly told not to devote all their time and energy to purely political matters, but also to take into account the literature, history and economic conditions and needs of the country. They were advised to study the history of states who had freed themselves from foreign domination, to organize discussions on Irish history and to study economic text-books.²⁵

By 1924 the unemployment situation in the Free State was grim. The country was undergoing an economic crisis: there was little work to be had. What employment was available was reserved almost exclusively for demobilized soldiers of the National Army—an army whose ranks had been grossly inflated by the recent Civil War. The release of over 12,000 Republican internees further swelled the flood of workless. In the face of public and private discrimination in the field of employment, the Republican party reacted by setting up its own network of employment exchanges throughout the country. A specially constituted department of employment was established at party headquarters to control and co-ordinate the work of local bureaux. A central Republican employment exchange was set up in Dublin, financed by a contribution of three shillings per week from each branch in the Dublin area.²⁶ As the party had no funds available to create employment, the only function these bureaux could perform was to take advantage of any vacancies which occurred, and to fill these as far as possible with Republicans. Despite the disadvantages under which they were forced to work, some of these unofficial labour exchanges succeeded in getting temporary employment for ex-internees. Many, however, never functioned adequately. Most ceased to operate within a short period of their establishment.²⁷

22. *Sinn Féin*, 30.5.1925; 6.6.1925.

23. *Ibid.*, 16.2.1924.

24. S.F.F.C., Book 48, part 2, doc. no. 1580, p. 65.

25. *Sinn Féin*, 12.1.1924; *An Phoblacht*, 9.10.1925.

26. S.F.F.C., Book 17, p. 132; *Sinn Féin*, 5.4.1924.

27. S.F.F.C., Book 48, part 2, doc. no. 1580, p. 66.

The party did all it could to look after the material interests of its supporters. An economics department was established at headquarters to advise on the setting up of Irish industries. This department attempted to open up export markets on the Continent and in the United States for various Irish products such as cattle, horses, pigs, carrageen moss and refractory clays like kaolin.²⁸ The party mounted a campaign to support Irish produced goods as a means of increasing home employment. A general boycott of English goods was announced in September 1925.²⁹ Efforts were made to discourage emigration. For a period the party's department of economic affairs pursued a policy of attempting to divert intending Republican emigrants from the United States and Canada, where they were mostly lost to the cause, to temporary migratory labour in France. It appears, however, that conditions and wages in France were not good enough to attract people, and in addition there was, of course, the language problem.³⁰

Once the guns had fallen silent and the Civil War officially came to an end, tourism, a neglected industry since the outbreak of hostilities in 1919, began to flourish again. Conscious of the important role played by foreign public opinion during the independence struggle, the new Sinn Féin party attempted to win the sympathy and support of the increasing number of overseas visitors to Ireland, many of whom had come to see the 1924 *Tailteann* Games. In June 1924, a bureau was opened at party headquarters for the reception of foreign visitors. All tourists were cordially invited to call and were issued with specially prepared leaflets explaining the Republican position.³¹

The party did not neglect to make some provision for the social needs of its members. In 1924 it was decided to form a social club, "*Fionmarus na Feile*", to be the social centre of Republicanism in Ireland and a meeting place for party members from the country and from abroad. In order to finance the establishment of the club a limited liability company was formed which offered 4,750 ordinary shares for sale at £1 each. Up to the time of the party's *Ard-Fheis* in November, 1925, negotiations to acquire suitable premises had proved unsuccessful, although the club did entertain the delegates on the eve of the convention.³² Like other party projects, the club faded away with the rapid decline in party membership after the 1926 split.

The Republican party was not unaware of the benefits to be derived from the publication of a newspaper reflecting its view. During its lifetime the organization brought out various weeklies. *Éire: The Irish Nation*, had been started in January, 1923, to give the Republican version of events in the closing stages of the Civil War. This proved a boon to the Reorganizing Committee in its efforts to build up the new party in the summer of 1923. A second party paper, *Sinn Féin*,

28. *An Phoblacht*, 24.7.1925; S.F.F.C., Book 48, part 2, doc. no. 1580, p. 71 and Book 17, pp. 170-171.

29. *Sinn Féin*, 28.3.1925, 4.4.1925; *Weekly Irish Times*, 22.8.1925; *An Phoblacht*, 18.9.1925.

30. *An Phoblacht*, 24.7.1925.

31. S.F.F.C., Book 23, pp. 23-24; *Sinn Féin*, 12.7.1924.

32. S.F.F.C., Book 23, p. 6; *Sinn Féin*, 3.1.1925, 30.5.1925.

originally appeared as a daily news-sheet during the August, 1923, general election campaign; but once the election was over it appeared only weekly. The new party had not been established very long before its leaders, eager to counteract the anti-Sinn Féin bias of the three national dailies, began planning the publication of a daily paper of their own with national circulation. They failed in their efforts to do this, the principal reason being, once again, lack of capital. The failure of the party here may have indirectly hastened its decline. Control of a national daily would have forced Sinn Féin to spell out its aims and policies in a more realistic and precise fashion. "A daily paper cannot be run on negatives. If it is to have any influence at all it must be constructive as well as critical."³³ At the end of 1924, *Sinn Féin* and *Éire* merged, probably for circulation reasons, to form a new weekly, also with the title *Sinn Féin*. This paper in turn ceased publication and was replaced by a new weekly, *An Phoblacht*, in June, 1925. The editor, P. J. Ruttledge, took the de Valera side in the 1926 split, and both factions struggled to get control of the paper. Neither had succeeded by May, 1926, when the paper became the organ of the IRA, under the editorship of Peadar O'Donnell.

In addition to providing, or attempting to provide, the various services already mentioned, Sinn Féin also maintained connections with ancillary organizations of a type common to many mass parties. Through the medium of the Republican government it was linked with a youth organization, *Fianna Éireann*, with a women's organization, *Cumann na mBan*, and with the IRA, the military arm of the Republic. The party was also connected with ancillary organizations abroad—the American Association for the Recognition of the Irish Republic (A.A.R.I.R.) in the United States; and in Britain first with the Irish Self Determination League (I.S.D.L.), and later the Irish Freedom League (I.F.L.). The principal function of these latter organizations was to provide funds for the Republican shadow government, which then allotted them to the party and to the Army, according to their needs. The A.A.R.I.R. also served as a strong pressure group for the Republican party in a country traditionally more sensitive to Irish grievances than any other country.³⁴

In common with many modern political parties Sinn Féin maintained a sizeable central office while it was financially able to do so. Indeed without a headquarters staff the party would not have been able to attempt to increase intra-party communication to the extent that it did through the medium of the projects it sponsored and the various organizations attached to it. The declining fortunes of the party were reflected by reductions in staff size. Like other sections of the organization, the staff was to split in 1926.

The Third Sinn Féin party was thus very different from other Irish parties, and, indeed, from most political parties anywhere at this period. It did not confine its attentions exclusively to politics of a parliamentary nature, but attempted to

33. *Irish Statesman*, 27.12.1924.

34. Largely through the lobbying of the A.A.R.I.R., the internment of de Valera by the Cosgrave government after the Civil War was raised in Congress, and a motion to appoint an American ambassador to the Free State was defeated.

isolate its adherents as far as possible from the influence of what it regarded as a usurping State.³⁵ With its own embryo executive, legislature, and judicial system, with the tacit support of the IRA and by the provision of economic, educational and social facilities for its members, the party was in fact attempting to duplicate, in so far as its resources permitted, many of the functions of the State. Sinn Féin aimed at creating an integrated environment within which the lives of its members could be encased by linked activities. Having achieved majority support the Republican *de jure* sub-State could then become the *de facto* State. This did not occur, one of the reasons being that Sinn Féin failed to win a majority vote in 1923. The fact that its support declined rather than increased from 1924 on led inevitably to the decay and collapse of most of the party's ancillary organizations and projects.

The decline of the party, 1924-1926

An analysis of Sinn Féin reveals that between 1924 and 1926 the party declined in strength and influence. The criteria employed are: the financial position of the party; the number of party branches; and the support received in the various elections contested by the organization.

Sinn Féin got into financial difficulties early in 1924, and its position continued to deteriorate from then on. The constant pleas from headquarters for funds, the curtailment of party schemes and projects and the pruning of expenditure to a minimum, all indicate a worsening financial position. Party members grew weary of the demands of the central office for extra subscriptions. A resolution before the 1925 Conference stated that the continuous begging for money was responsible for many members' lapsing, and had cost the party the support of numerous sympathizers.³⁶ Throughout 1925 the vicious circle continued, of declining membership leading to a decline in the party's funds, in turn leading to further loss of membership because the party could not afford to maintain an efficient organization. The party's weak financial position was partially responsible for its failure, for the first time since its foundation, to contest a by-election in February, 1926.³⁷

Had the organization not been so short of funds, it is unlikely that it would have initiated moves in the Free State courts in an attempt to secure the return of election deposits advanced by the Nationalist Sinn Féin party in the general elections of 1918 and 1921, and to contest the claim of the government party to Republican funds amounting to \$10,000, which had been subscribed in the United States and transferred to Ireland prior to the Treaty split. In the former case, the court eventually decided that the deposits should be returned to the

35. For example, Republicans attending Irish classes were forbidden to have any social intercourse with Free State officials who might also be attending, particularly civic guards. S.F.F.C., Book 23, p. 57.

36. Sinn Féin, 1925 *Ard-Fheis Clár*, Dublin, 1925, p. 17.

37. The by-election was in the Co. Dublin constituency.

candidates concerned; but by this time the Third Sinn Féin party had split. As the majority of deputies and former deputies to whom the deposits were returned then belonged to other parties (e.g. *Cumann na nGaedheal* and *Fianna Fáil*), the party did not profit very much from this decision. In the latter case, Sinn Féin failed in its claim to the ownership of the funds.³⁸ Leading members of the party, in their capacity as members of the Republican government, were also involved in a legal dispute over the ownership of Dáil funds in the United States, amounting to \$2.8 million. It was not until 1927, after the party had split, that the New York Supreme Court decided that the money should be returned to the subscribers.

Perhaps the best indication of the party's financial position can be found from a study of its audited accounts. During the first year of its existence, income amounted to £26,000, an impressive sum for an Irish political party at this period. The following year, 1924-1925, saw income drop by over a third to £17,000. The bulk of this consisted of grants from America. Between 1925 and 1926, income plunged to £3,800, roughly fifteen per cent of what it had been two years before. Almost two thirds of this sum had been subscribed in the United States.³⁹ The financial position of the party was, therefore, one of rapid decline from 1924 onwards.

Another indication of the party's state of health is the number of branches it had. While a record of these was kept at party headquarters, the figure was rarely publicly disclosed, except for an occasional reference at party conventions and meetings of the National Executive. Nevertheless, enough information does exist to show that the decline in the party's financial position was paralleled by a drop in the number of *cumainn* in the same period. Between June and November, 1923, over 700 *cumainn* had affiliated to the Sinn Féin party; and it appears that the organization continued to expand during the early part of 1924. The director of organization stated in June, 1924, that he expected over 1,000 branches to affiliate that year. However, almost one third of the 1,025 branches existing in June were unable to raise the affiliation fee by the time of the *Ard-Fheis* at the end of the year.⁴⁰ Thus by November, 1924, the party was slightly weaker in terms of the number of affiliated *cumainn* than it had been a year previously. The rapid expansion of party membership, begun in June, 1923, had levelled out sometime in mid-1924. Now the reverse process was beginning. (See Appendix).

By July, 1925, the number of fully and partially affiliated branches was just over half the total of the year before. The honorary secretaries reported to the party executive:

The *Ard Chomhairle* will, at once, see that, judged by these figures our organization is weak; that it does not adequately represent the Republican population; and that its influence is restricted and limited, and its funds necessarily small for want of proper organization.⁴¹

38. *Irish Times*, 14th February, 17th, 24th, 25th July, 1st August, 1924; *Éire*, 9.8.1924; Dorothy Macardle, *The Irish Republic*, New York, 1965, p. 986.

39. S.F.F.C., Book 48, part 3, doc. nos. 3511, 3522, 3536, pp. 105-113.

40. *Ibid.*, Book 17, pp. 169, 173 and Book 48, part 2, doc. no. 1577, p. 47.

41. *Ibid.*, Book 48, part 3, doc. no. 1901, p. 5.

While there can be little doubt that the Third Sinn Féin party was declining internally (in the sense that its membership and income were dwindling away) from 1924 onwards, what of its relationship with the electorate during this period? Between October, 1923, and February, 1926, the party contested 20 by-election seats, winning 4 and losing 1, making a net gain of 3 seats. This performance, from what was the second largest and probably the best organized party in the country, could hardly be interpreted as a vote of confidence from the electorate. Disappointment in the party's ranks over by-election defeats amounting almost to despair gave de Valera and his chief lieutenants cause for anxiety about the future of the party. Indeed, lack of support for Sinn Féin in the March, 1925, by-elections brought home to de Valera the necessity for abandoning the abstentionist policy of the party.⁴² In June, 1925, took place the first local government elections to be held since the Free State had been established. While Sinn Féin contested these elections on a party platform, the *Cumann na nGaedheal* party remained aloof from the contest. This made the defeat of the Republican candidates in most areas all the more serious. According to a Labour party newspaper, Sinn Féin succeeded in winning only about eleven per cent of the seats.⁴³ In addition to by-elections and local elections in the Free State, the Republican party also contested two general elections in Northern Ireland (one for Stormont and one for Westminster), with even more disastrous results.

The Third Sinn Féin party, while initially successful, began to decline steadily within a year of its foundation. Its membership was dwindling, its financial position growing steadily worse, and its performance at the polls showed little likelihood of its receiving an overall majority from the electorate in a future general election. On the other hand, the Free State was functioning, was internationally recognized, and retained the support of a majority of the people. It was not surprising, then, that various elements within the Republican movement began to question the party's performance and the efficacy of its policies.

The reappraisal of party policy and the schism of March, 1926

After his release from prison in July, 1924, de Valera and some of his associates began to question the effectiveness of abstentionism, but reached no immediate decision. Despite frequent official denials by Sinn Féin that it was reconsidering policy, discussions were held on the course the party should follow in the future. From March, 1925, onwards de Valera was contemplating a plan to unite the people behind Sinn Féin in a drive to abolish the oath of allegiance so that "the destiny of Ireland would be worked out in Leinster House".⁴⁴ In May, 1925, the party's Standing Committee adopted the following resolution: "That the president may act on the assumption that the question of Republicans entering the

42. See letter from de Valera to Joseph McGarrity, March 1926, in Sean Cronin, *op. cit.*, 29.4.1969.

43. *Voice of Labour*, 4th, 18th July, 1925.

44. Seán Cronin, *op. cit.*, 29.4.1969.

Free State 'parliament' if the oath were removed, is an open question, to be decided on its merits when the question arises as a practical issue".⁴⁵ This decision was not made public; but throughout 1925 the press suspected that the party was considering abandoning abstentionism.

Republican deputies were not the only ones to ponder on the failure of the political movement. By July, 1925, it seemed that sections of the IRA had become disillusioned with the party and were convinced that the political movement had proved its futility.⁴⁶ The Republican collapse in the local government elections of June, 1925, when the Sinn Féin candidates were beaten by groups with little or no organization, had confirmed the Army's view that the party stood no chance of capturing the country. At the first post-civil war convention of the IRA in November, 1925, it was decided that the Army should withdraw allegiance from the Republican government and that henceforth the control of the Army should be vested in the Army Council. The Republican movement, which had been united since the establishment of the Republican government in October, 1922, was again divided into a political and a military wing.

There is a number of reasons behind this split in the Republican ranks. The IRA was opposed in principle to attendance in the Free State parliament, a policy which General Aiken, the Chief of Staff, admitted that some members of the Republican government were considering. Furthermore, the military leaders, anticipating that the political movement would divide on this issue, wished to forestall such a split spreading to the Army. The IRA had not been very happy under political leadership. Only when it realized that it was not going to win the Civil War was it decided to give allegiance to a Republican government. The military leaders felt that it was wrong for a revolutionary body like the IRA to be under the control of a semi-constitutional body and that it would be able to adopt more flexible tactics if it threw off political leadership.

While Army men felt superior to the politicians, and though the IRA never had any real respect for the Republican government, it was prepared to give allegiance to it as long as the government was able to provide it with funds raised abroad. In 1925, however, the flow of American money dried up very quickly and there was a tremendous necessity for economy in both the Army and the party. The IRA had now little to lose financially by severing its connection with the political executive. Finally, it had now become quite apparent that Sinn Féin had failed to live up to expectations. For a period after the Civil War, the IRA, beaten and demoralized, was content to let the political wing make the running. The party, however, was obviously collapsing. Two years after the ceasefire the prospect of a Sinn Féin government gaining effective power seemed further away than ever.

Sinn Féin's failure to make any significant advances after the 1923 general election, together with the break-up of Republican unity caused by the decision

45. S.F.F.C., Book 49, minute 19, p. 12.

46. See statement from the Midland Battalion headquarters of the I.R.A. in the *Irish Independent*, 27.7.1925.

of the Army to sever itself from the political movement, made inevitable a critical reappraisal of the party and its policies. Members of the IRA were not the only Republicans who were dissatisfied with the progress of the political movement. Throughout 1925 rumblings of discontent with party policy—or lack of it—were echoed in the Republican press and in letters to sympathizers abroad.⁴⁷ By far the most devastating criticism of the party was penned, not by rank-and-file members, but by Seán Lemass, a member of the party's Standing Committee and Minister for Defence in the Republican Cabinet. In a series of five articles appearing in *An Phoblacht* between September, 1925, and January, 1926, Lemass analysed the shortcomings and deficiencies of the party, suggesting the need for improved organization and new policies. Lemass, who was more of a political pragmatist than most of the Sinn Féin leaders, realized that, unless radical changes were made, the organization would continue to decline until eventually it would be reduced to the status of a minor party with no hope of ever forming a real government. His advocacy of the policy that Sinn Féin should concentrate on an immediately realizable political objective, such as the abolition of the oath of allegiance, caused a considerable furor within the party, and Lemass and his views were attacked in the columns of *An Phoblacht*.⁴⁸

Party members were becoming increasingly confused by the rumours and controversy that surrounded the organization's future. In an attempt to force a decision on future policy, the Caherciveen *cumann* tabled a resolution at the 1925 *Ard-Fheis* definitely committing the party to abstentionism until an Irish Republican parliament for all Ireland had been formed. Presaging a split in the organization, this resolution overshadowed everything else and occupied the Convention for the best part of two days. Eventually a compromise resolution was passed, stating that policy remained unchanged for the time being, that the discussion of alternative policies was permissible, but that before any new policy could be adopted it would have to be democratically accepted at an *Ard-Fheis*. The Caherciveen resolution failed to get the party to take a definite stand on the abstentionist issue because de Valera and his followers had not yet made up their minds on the question, and wanted to postpone a decision. Yet inside two months, this same group was committed to abandoning abstentionism and to entering Leinster House provided the oath of allegiance was removed. Why should such a change of policy have been proposed so soon after the 1925 *Ard-Fheis*?

The signing of the Boundary Agreement on the 3rd December, 1925, by the governments of the Free State, Britain and Northern Ireland, seems to have been the factor chiefly responsible for a decision, by a section of the party's leadership, to abandon abstentionism under certain conditions. The agreement confirmed the partition of Ireland into two separate States, and, as such, was anathema to all Republicans. Yet there was nothing Sinn Féin could do to prevent this. The ratification of partition underlined the helplessness of the Third Sinn Féin party

47. *Sinn Féin*, 21.3.1925, 25.4.1925; Seán Cronin, *op.cit.*, 29.4.1969.

48. 19.2.1926. Perhaps an analogy can be made with Lemass's advocacy of a "New Departure" in Fianna Fáil economic policy and relations with the North from 1957 onwards.

to play any worthwhile political role in the governing of the country while it remained outside Leinster House.⁴⁹ The only practical step open to the party was to enter the Dáil and record its opposition to the measure. In fact, a considerable section of the deputies, including Austin Stack, was prepared to go in, vote against the Bill and then withdraw.⁵⁰ De Valera was strongly opposed to entry at this time, firstly because the party's deputies had been elected on an abstentionist ticket. He therefore felt that to enter the Free State Dáil, even temporarily, at this stage would be breaking faith with the party's electors. Secondly, any decision to enter Leinster House, for whatever purpose, was bound to split the party, thereby reducing its effectiveness in opposing the Boundary Agreement. Finally, even if an united Sinn Féin party had entered the Dáil, it was still unlikely that the combined opposition would have been able to muster enough votes to defeat the Bill.⁵¹

The Boundary Agreement presented the Cosgrave government with its greatest crisis since the outbreak of civil war. Indeed, for a while it seemed that it was tottering to its fall and that a general election could not be far away. Yet the Sinn Féin party, isolated outside the national legislature, was unable to take proper advantage of its opponents' discomfiture. In any event, the normal length of parliament had been constitutionally limited to four years, so a general election would have to be held before August, 1927. For the Sinn Féin party to find itself suddenly faced with a general election, while its attitude towards abstention remained unresolved, would be disastrous. The boundary crisis thus impressed upon de Valera and his associates the urgency of arriving at a decision, one way or the other, on the subject of a new policy.

On the 6th January, 1926, at a meeting of the Ranelagh Sinn Féin *cumann*, de Valera publicly announced for the first time since the end of the Civil War that he was prepared to enter Leinster House if there were no oath to be taken.⁵² There was nothing radically new about the president's decision. He had advocated the policy of abstentionism for tactical reasons during the Civil War.⁵³ In negotiations with the Cosgrave government after the end of the war he had indicated that his party would take their seats provided the oath was dropped. In order finally to settle this issue it was decided to hold a special *Ard-Fheis* of the party. A resolution was circulated from De Valera to all branches in the following terms:

That once the admission oaths of the 26 and 6 county assemblies are removed, it becomes a question not of principle but of policy whether or not Republican representatives should attend these assemblies.

49. The Sinn Féin deputies met on two occasions to discuss the situation, but were unable to play any significant role during the crisis. *Irish Independent*, 11.12.1925; Michael McInerney, *op. cit.*, 10.10.1968.

50. *Ibid.*

51. In the event, the voting in the Dáil was 55-14 in favour. Many of those who opposed the Agreement would most likely have sided with the government had the Republican deputies voted against it.

52. *An Phoblacht*, 15.1.1926.

53. *Dail Éireann*, Stationery Office: *Correspondence of Mr Eamonn de Valera and others*, Dublin, 1922, p. 8.

For some of the party's leaders almost four years of abstentionism had elevated the issue to the level of inalterable dogma. For them, no compromise with Free State institutions, least of all its legislative assembly, was possible; and this fundamentalist section of the party, in the person of Fr. O'Flanagan, replied to de Valera's challenge by drafting the following resolution:

That it is incompatible with the fundamental principles of Sinn Féin as it is injurious to the honour of Ireland, to send representatives into any usurping legislature set up by English law in Ireland.

The party's local branches were free either to discuss these resolutions prior to the *Ard-Fheis* and to come to a decision to which their delegates would be bound, or, alternatively, to leave the delegates free to decide for themselves, having heard the arguments of both sides at the convention.⁵⁴ The battle lines had been drawn and the stage now set for the great debate that was to determine the future of the Republican party.

Over 500 delegates attended the special party conference which opened in the Rotunda, Dublin, on Tuesday, 9th March, 1926. Speaker after speaker rose to discuss either the president's resolution, or the vice-president's amendment. At 10.30 p.m., after 35 delegates had spoken, the *Ard-Fheis* adjourned until the following day. Wednesday morning was a repetition of what had taken place the previous day. After the luncheon recess each of the two chief protagonists wound up the discussion with a fifteen minute speech. Fr. O'Flanagan's amendment was narrowly carried, by 223 votes to 218. This amendment, with some minor changes, was later put forward as a substantive motion, but was defeated by 179 votes to 177. A confused convention adjourned at midnight until the following morning at eleven.⁵⁵

The "new policy" had been defeated at the *Ard-Fheis*, though only by a small majority. Although not sure which way the vote would go, de Valera had hoped to win majority support. Had he succeeded, it is possible that he would have retained the name "Sinn Féin" for his organization, and that the dissenting minority would have been forced to establish a new party. However, he was not despondent at the defeat of his proposals, and he could see the advantages of founding a new party.⁵⁶ Many of the delegates who had been instructed by their *cumainn* to vote against the president's resolution became convinced, during the course of the *Ard-Fheis*, that this resolution was the correct one in the circumstances. These delegates were instructed by Gerry Boland, one of de Valera's lieutenants who was anxious to see a new party founded, to vote, not for the new policy, but as they had been instructed. They would be contacted afterwards with a view to the formation of a new political organization in the event of the president's proposal being defeated.⁵⁷

54. De Valera preferred the latter alternative. S.F.F.C., Book 49, minute 11, p. 16.

55. See *An Phoblacht*, 16.4.1926 for a report of the proceedings of the *Ard-Fheis*.

56. Seán Cronin, *op. cit.*, 29.4.1969.

57. Michael McInerney, *op. cit.*, 10.10.1968.

When the convention reassembled on Thursday morning, 11th March, 1926, de Valera pointed out that it had by its votes showed it was opposed to his proposal as a policy, though not prepared to define it as contrary to the principles of the organization. Under the circumstances he felt obliged to resign as president of Sinn Féin. In the afternoon both sides agreed to the setting up of a joint committee to consider the means and extent of co-operation between the two wings of the party. The last *Ard-Fheis* of the Third Sinn Féin party then terminated.

The life of the party was now rapidly drawing to a close. Its two opposing factions marked time while the joint committee attempted, unsuccessfully, to bridge the widening gulf that separated them. The final break came on the 29th March, 1926, when the party's full Standing Committee, at what proved to be its last meeting, heard that the joint committee had failed to arrive at any agreement by which the unity of the organization might be preserved. Ten members of the Standing Committee then tendered their resignations.⁵⁸ The haemorrhage that was to bleed Sinn Féin of members had begun. In the weeks that followed, the resignation of prominent party members occurred with monotonous regularity. The Republican Dáil also split on the subject of de Valera's "new departure". A meeting of this body held on the 28th March, 1926, decided, like the *Ard-Fheis*, that while de Valera's proposals were not contrary to Republican principles, they were contrary to policy. De Valera then resigned as President of the Republic and his place was taken by another prominent party member, Art O'Connor.⁵⁹

How did the party split, and what sort of people supported the opposing factions? The orthodox, pro-abstentionist, Republican viewpoint had prevailed, though only a small majority, at the special *Ard-Fheis* and in the Republican Dáil. At all levels within the party the division seems to have followed the same pattern. Of the 47 Republican deputies who had been elected in the 1923 general election, and in subsequent by-elections, 21 followed de Valera into his new party, 22 opposed the new policy, while the attitude of the remaining four was not clear. Seventeen of the 37 members of the Standing Committee resigned as a result of the split.⁶⁰ Between March and April the number of affiliated *cumainn* dropped from 275 to 173.⁶¹ Even the office staff split. Some were to follow the ex-president into Fianna Fáil, while others remained with Sinn Féin, depending on where their personal loyalties lay. By April, 1926, the Third Sinn Féin party had disintegrated into two, nearly equal, factions. Many members and supporters who were still loyal to the party at this time were later to drift over to Fianna Fáil, attracted by its dynamism and the political acumen of its leaders. Of the 74 Sinn

58. *An Phoblacht*, 2.4.1926.

59. It is interesting to note that de Valera, and those deputies who followed him, did not cut themselves completely adrift from their former comrades at this stage. They remained members of *Comhairle na dTeachtaí* for nine months after they had left the Sinn Féin party. See *An Phoblacht*, 9th April, 2nd July, 30th July 1926, *Irish World*, 28.8.1926 and *Saorstát Éireann*, Stationery Office: *Two documents 'A' and 'B' found by the police on the 10th April 1928, during the course of a search of the premises, 27 Dawson Street, Dublin, Dublin, 1930.*

60. *An Phoblacht*, 28.5.1926.

61. S.F.F.C., Book 25, p. 51; *Irish World*, 11.12.1927.

Féin T.D.'s and candidates in parliamentary elections between 1923-1926, whose subsequent party affiliation it was possible to trace, 33, or less than half, remained with Sinn Féin by September, 1927.

Available evidence suggests that the split was largely based on temperament, and on loyalty to individual party leaders. It divided Sinn Féin into two camps: moderate Republicans and radical Republicans; pragmatists and idealists; party politicians and political transcendentalists. At the convention, rationality tended to be defeated by emotional appeals to the delegates.⁶² Some of the president's leading associates were anxious that Fr. O'Flanagan's amendment should obtain a majority in order that the practical and realistic element in the party could break away from the more "metaphysical" element and found a new organization.⁶³ Thus the division created by the March, 1926, *Ard-Fheis* appears to have been based on temperament and personal loyalty to leaders, rather than on economic, social or geographical factors.⁶⁴ Indeed the history of the Sinn Féin party after March, 1926, bears out the hypothesis that the split was largely between pragmatists and idealists, and that the post-schism party was composed mainly of impractical, though sincere, people.

While studies relating personality characteristics to political behaviour are unfortunately scarce, nevertheless:

There is substantial and rather compelling evidence of a regular and intimate connection between personality and the mode of political participation by individuals and groups within any one political system. In many different institutional settings and in many parts of the world, those who adhere to the more extreme political positions have distinctive personality traits separating them from those taking more moderate positions in the same setting.⁶⁵

Writing about the split in the Third Sinn Féin party, Dorothy Macardle, supporter of de Valera and historian of the Republican movement, stated: "The difference is largely one of temperament, and it is good that the members of each group should be relieved of the kind of work that makes no appeal to them and to be free to concentrate on the work to which they can bring enthusiasm and faith".⁶⁶

While Sinn Féin remained the same in name and in constitution after 1926 (except for a few minor changes), its spirit was different. The broad surge of national feeling which had characterized the movement in previous years was left far behind; the party's outlook narrowed and much of its energies were spent

62. Both Eamonn Donnelly and Fr. O'Flanagan, who were opposed to the new policy, were outstanding orators whose emotional style swung many of the uncommitted delegates against de Valera's resolution.

63. Michael McInerney, *op.cit.*, 10.10.1968.

64. This is in contrast to the 1922 split in the Nationalist Sinn Féin party which, to some extent, was based on geographical and socio-economic factors. See Part II in subsequent issue.

65. Alex Inkeles, "National Character and Modern Political Systems" quoted by S. M. Lipset, *The First New Nation*, London, 1964, p. 276.

66. *An Phoblacht*, 7.5.1926.

on matters of minor importance. The party was, for example, much less active in striving to increase its membership and found new branches, seemingly being more concerned with the holding of occasional public rallies and meetings at which numerous resolutions of a doctrinaire, Republican nature were passed. The documents which emanated from the party from this time onwards were of a less responsible character than had been the case prior to 1926.

The schism of March, 1926, marks the dividing line between the Third and Fourth Sinn Féin parties. Before the split Sinn Féin was a major party, with a reasonable expectation of becoming the government of the country at some future date. After March, 1926, the party known as Sinn Féin bore little resemblance to the party that had gone before it, being only a minor organization on the fringe of the political scene, with little prospect of ever gaining power by constitutional means. The Fourth Sinn Féin party was the last remains of a major party that had passed away, like a fossil telling of prehistoric times. Denied a reasonable chance of ever forming a government, with the responsibility which this would entail, it became more extreme and intransigent in its attitudes.

The importance of the Republican Sinn Féin party lies in the essential role it played in the development of a democratic Irish State. The party was one of the principal structures involved in the function of political socialization in the early years of the Saorstát. Political socialization, "which produces the basic attitudes in a society towards the political system, its various roles and public policy", is a continuous learning process not confined to early family experience.⁶⁷ Like learning in general, it does not terminate at the point of maturation, but is continuous throughout life. The War of Independence tended to inculcate attitudes of disrespect, contempt and defiance towards government and political authority in general. After the Treaty had been signed, attitudes regarding both the nature and locus of political authority in the new State were confused. There existed a sizeable minority who were not initially committed to the basic political framework. Their attempt to seize power was defeated militarily, but because post-Civil War Republicanism adopted, through the Sinn Féin party, a political manifestation, the edge was taken off its bitterness, and the net result was to associate those who had been opposed to the Treaty with national policies and responsibilities, which eventually had a broadening effect.

Through the new Republican party the anti-Treaty section of the electorate were to learn socially respectable ways of expressing their aggressiveness and hostility to the basic political framework. The party served an essential function in that it articulated the demand for a sovereign Republic. If no political party had arisen to serve this purpose, tensions and frustrations among Republicans might have increased the strength of the IRA and could have led to the appearance of other radical or anarchical physical force movements in the Free State.

67. In a modern western political system political parties are one of the structures involved in the function of political socialization, along with the family, church, school, etc. G. A. Almond and J. S. Coleman, *The Politics of the Developing Areas*, Princeton, New Jersey, 1960, pp. 26-31.

There are, however, distinct limits to which a political culture can be deliberately created in a short period of time: the combination of views and attitudes towards authority and politics which compose a political culture cannot be created overnight. The Sinn Féin party, by providing Republicans with a vehicle for legitimate conflict, began the process of integrating them into the Free State political system; but it is important to note that it did not consciously attempt to give them a basis for loyalty to that system. The party pronounced the Treaty, and all subsequent legislation, illegal. Republican deputies refused to recognize the legitimacy of the Free State, and were pledged not to enter its Dáil. Nor could Sinn Féin be described as a fully democratic party because such parties, by definition, exclude the creation of private armies, and recognize the monopoly of military force in the hands of the State. As far as Sinn Féin was concerned, the IRA was the only legitimate body of its kind in the country. Nonetheless the party, by providing Republicans with legitimate and constitutional means of obtaining their demands, began the process of integrating them into the body politic, a process which was ultimately to strengthen the political system of the new State. However, it was not until after the party had split, and with the entry of Fianna Fail into the Dáil, that the crisis of legitimacy, which had existed since December, 1921, was ended.