

Ireland

Interview with Sinn Fein

This interview with Gerry Adams, MP and President of Sinn Fein, was granted to «Democratic Palestine» in August. Since then, Gerry Adams was briefly detained by British security forces in their frenzy following the Irish Republican Army's October 12th bomb attack aimed against Margaret Thatcher and others of her cabinet. Gerry Adams has just been reelected as President of Sinn Fein at their November congress.

There has been talk of a move towards the left in the Irish Republican Movement. Would you comment on this and explain something about Sinn Fein's political and mass work?

First of all I should perhaps explain the composition of the Republican Movement. We are not an alliance of political organisations like the PLO. The Republican Movement is a loose title historically given to several branches of the movement for national liberation, which today share the common goal of establishing a Democratic Socialist Republic of all Ireland. Those branches are Sinn Fein, the IRA, Cumann na mban (women's section), Na Fianna Eireann (youth scouting organization) and An Cumann Cabhrach (political prisoners support organisation) as well as the National Graves Association which is responsible for the care of graves of our patriot dead.

The partition of Ireland was achieved by a combination of the British threat of «fatal war» and its acceptance in 1921, by a middle class section of the republican leadership, which was satisfied that its interests could be maintained in a 26 county Free State. In the counterrevolution which followed, the republican forces were defeated and «dumped arms» in 1923. A few years later another section of the movement, under the leadership of Eamonn de Valera, with a pluralist political outlook, broke away and involved itself in Free State politics. These two parties became known as Fine Gael and Fianna Fail.

Over the years with the consolidation of the Free State, the leadership of both parties became progressively more middle class and upper middle class, with politics to match... What they lacked in political policy, both parties made up for in widespread political patronage throughout the state.

Both, like their unionist counterparts in the six counties, have a vested interest in maintaining partition and the conservative nature of both states. The preponderance of Irish politics on both sides of the border, with, on the one hand, civil war alignments and on the other, maintaining the British border, has prevented the organisation of a serious socialist organisation in either state.

Republicans have consistently believed that the border - with British military occupation in the six counties - is the greatest obstacle in any attempt to organise towards a socialist society. In consequence, we have set about gaining the active support of the unborn working class, small farmers and rural workers by making our policies relevant to them. This is not solely on the national question but also in the areas of unemploy-

ment, housing, welfare rights, community organisation, culture, women, youth, etc. Organisationally this has meant the creation, over a period of years, of departments of women's affairs, trade unions, culture, etc.

In practice, the political work is carried out in over thirty Sinn Fein offices/advice centres throughout the country. These are involved in all areas of community politics with a wide scope of activities ranging from involvement in co-operative enterprises to assisting communities to organise to combat dealers in hard drugs, which is particularly prevalent in Dublin.

Wall painting in Northern Ireland.

