

At our annual convention in 1981, where the electoral strategy was intensely debated, there was some opposition from members who have an inherent suspicion, based on historical facts, of such a strategy. The majority however were won to such a course of action by the soundness of the debate and perhaps to no little degree by our National Director of Publicity, Denny Morrison, who at the height of the debate asked: «Who objects to our liberating Ireland with an Armalite in one hand and a ballot paper in the other?»

Since then we have participated in several elections. In the elections to the Stormont Assembly in Belfast in October '82, Sinn Fein gained 64,191 votes, winning five seats. This represented 35% of the nationalist vote in the occupied six counties. In the Westminster elections in June '83, we increased that vote by 60%, gaining 102,701 votes or 43.5% of the nationalist vote in the six counties. The remaining 56.5% of the nationalist vote went to the reformist Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP). Our electoral strategy must, of course, involve Sinn Fein in attempting to replace that party as the majority nationalist voice. We can never, of course, hope to totally erode the SDLP vote as a substantial part of their electoral vote comes from the nationalist middle class whose interests cannot be served by a radical republican party.

Sinn Fein has also won three out of four municipal by-elections which we have contested in the past fourteen months.

In June of this year, we contested the direct elections to the EEC parliament on the basis of opposition to EEC membership and NATO. We contested the elections both in the occupied six counties and in the Free State. In the six counties we maintained our percentage share of a reduced poll, getting 91,000 votes. The SDLP leader had a substantial increase in his vote as a result of 30,000 unionist voters casting their votes for the nominally nationalist SDLP to ensure a defeat for Sinn Fein. However we do not believe that they can sustain that vote and especially not in next year's municipal elections when we shall witness the most important election to date in the struggle for political representation of the nationalist people in the six counties.

In the Free State we polled 54,672 votes in the EEC elections, giving us an all-Ireland total of 146,148 votes, representing 8.09% of all first preference votes cast throughout Ireland. Fianna Fail, which is the largest party in the country and which gained most votes in the EEC elections, polled 438,946 votes, representing 24.31% of all first preference votes cast. So clearly we still have much work to do both organisationally and in making our policies relevant to all our people, especially in the Free State.

IRA operations have continued abreast with Sinn Fein's electoral strategy and it would seem that there is an ongoing refinement of their operations for maximum overall political effect.

On international solidarity...

Irish republicanism has always been internationalist in its outlook, an outlook which is probably best summed up by James Connolly who was executed by the British for his part in the 1916 rising against British rule in Ireland: «We mean to be free, and in every friend of tyranny we recognise our enemy, though he were as Irish as our hills.» And it is probably best evidenced in the IRA volunteers who gave their lives in the International Brigades fighting the fascists in the Spanish Civil War.

Today we correctly identify with oppressed and nationally dispossessed throughout the world. Solidarity, because of resources and geography, is all too often restricted to publicis-

ing other struggles and moral support which we recognise as being of little comfort to the victims of Shatila, Kassinga or British imperialism in Ireland.

We particularly identify with our Palestinian brothers and sisters whose national dispossession, like our own problems, is rooted in the imperialist duplicity of the British government.

We have had a shared history: imperialist oppression.

We have a shared experience: struggle

We shall have a shared future: victory.

What has been the British response to the growing strength of the Republican Movement?

British policy in Ireland has meant the gradual combining, over a period of years, of all parts of the British government machinery in pursuit of its desired objective which is the maintenance of the status quo in Ireland for ideological, strategic and economic reasons. This has meant the employment of political, social, economic and military initiatives backed up by a well-developed psychological warfare apparatus.

Politically it appears to bring about a settlement in the six counties, which it hopes to secure through agreement between the SDLP and the unionist parties - the consent of the Dublin government requiring no more than SDLP agreement. Initially this meant the introduction of some of the more obviously necessary political reforms, which in no way threatened the British occupation itself, in an attempt to gain nationalist support and politically isolate republicanism.

Militarily they set about attempting the total defeat of the IRA. In its politico-military relationships the British army was in the ascendancy with disastrous results for the British government's plans. British army excesses against the nationalist population, in combination with a murder campaign directed against nationalists by loyalist murder gangs, destroyed any benefits which the minor reforms may have gained for the British government.

Despite this, the SDLP's desperation for a share of power led them, with the support of the Dublin government, into an alliance with a section of the unionists in 1974. Ironically this attempt at a settlement suitable to British requirements was thwarted by loyalist paramilitaries and the ultra-reactionary section of unionist politicians who had maintained the six counties for the British government for over fifty years. In the intervening years all other efforts at bringing such a situation about again failed, although at present another attempt is in embryonic form.

Over that period the British have refined their politico-military strategy but with the same ultimate objective. Politically they have continued to seek the support of the would-be opinion makers of the nationalist middle class while attempting, to some extent, to be more selective in their application of oppression; with republican political and military activists being more accurately targeted for assassination and the prison camps. The activities of the loyalist murder gangs, over which British intelligence either has control or strong influence, were tailored to meet British intelligence goals: their attempted assassination of Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams and five other members of Sinn Fein some months ago being an example.

«The Law» according to Brigadier Gerard Kitson, the chief theorist of British counterrevolutionary action, «should be no more» than a cover for the disposal of «unwanted members of the society». And so, in several variations, it has been used in Ireland to remove those who are opposed to the British occu-