

pation. The latest variation has been the use of paid perjurers as «crown witnesses» against republicans in the special juryless Diplock courts. Several hundreds of people have fallen victim to this practice so far.

Militarily the British hope to reduce the intensity of revolutionary force to a level which is «acceptable», that is, to a level which cannot prevent the development of a political climate in which the SDLP and the unionists can successfully collaborate in a manner which alienates as few nationalists as possible.

The theory is good but the practice is somewhat different and underestimates the will of the Irish people to be free. The size of the Sinn Fein vote in the six counties and the active support of the people, that have sustained fifteen years of IRA armed resistance, testify to that. Nationalists are already alienated and will not lie down.

In the face of the British imperialist policy, can you comment on the political development and problems faced by the Republican Movement?

In the early years of this phase of the struggle for liberation, some thought that it would be short in duration. Events such as the British negotiated truces with the IRA in 1972 and 1975 tended to support this view. Indeed it was not for some years after this that it was fully realised that the struggle was going to be of a protracted nature.

Moreover, it took some time to realise that political work and military activity in isolation -sometimes even in contradiction- from each other could not bring about a British withdrawal and the establishment of a unitary Irish state. On top of this is the problem of the vastly differing conditions, created by partition, between the occupied six counties and the Free State. In the six counties British imperialism is evident every day in the presence of British forces patrolling our streets. In the Free State, while the majority of the population aspire to a united Ireland, successive governments, which the majority of people also view as legitimate, see such a state as a threat to their own power, privilege and wealth. So while the Dublin government pays lip service to Irish unity, in practice they set about the suppression of republicanism.

These are but some of the major problems which republicans have had to encounter in formulating policy and a strategy for national liberation. The first hurdle to be crossed was breaking out of the political isolation into which both the London and Dublin governments were trying to push us. This we have been fairly successful in countering in the six counties but as is evident in our vote in the Free State, at the European elections in June, we face a major political task there. It is there we have been concentrating a great deal of effort in building our organisation, reviewing and updating policies to make them more relevant to passive supporters of Irish unity whose more immediate concern -in the absence of obvious symbols of British imperialism- is daily economic survival: the working class and small farmers, the socially and economically deprived.

Militarily, the IRA has no illusions about their capabilities. In several interviews over the years they have acknowledged that they can never aspire to a military defeat of the British army. Rather, they say they have set themselves the task of making Britain's occupation as costly as possible in terms of both finance and British soldiers' lives in an attempt to bring about a set of circumstances where social and political forces, not least of which is the British population itself, will force a British withdrawal.

In brief, it is Sinn Fein's task to organise and mobilise the Irish people in active political opposition to British imperialism and all its effects on the Irish people. It is the IRA's task to persuade the British people and their government that it is time to leave.

What has been the policy of the Free State towards the Republican Movement?

Since the inception of the state, successive Free State governments have been consistently opposed to the Republican Movement. Throughout its 63 year history they have lent themselves to the suppression of republicanism in their effort to collaborate with the British.

In the counterrevolution of 1922-23, they arbitrarily executed 77 republican prisoners in direct reprisal for IRA actions. Republicans have been interned without charge or trial in the 20s, 30s, 40s and 50s. This is despite the fact that for decades now the IRA has strictly forbidden military action by its members in the Free State. In the last decade it has imprisoned hundreds of republicans through its special non-jury courts. Under Section 31 of its Broadcasting Act, it is illegal to broadcast an interview with a member of Sinn Fein or the IRA on television or radio. Other acts of collaboration include the arrest and trial of republicans for military activities conducted in the occupied six counties or Britain. Several republicans who escaped from Belfast Gaol in 1981 are now serving long prison sentences in a Free State gaol for daring to escape from a British prison. Gerry Tuite who escaped from Brixton Prison in London, is serving a long sentence for bombing operations carried out in London, while one of the 19 republicans who escaped from Long Kesh's H-Blocks last year was arrested some months ago and awaits a similar fate. More recently they have begun to extradite republicans into the hands of the British to face trial on allegations of involvement in military activities against the British forces in the six counties. For some time now the Free State government has been spending more money per head of population on protecting the British-imposed border than the British government itself does.

In 1921, the British Lord Birkenhead predicted that the creation of the Free State would «protect British interests in Ireland with an economy of English lives». He appears to have been right. The British government talks imperialist and acts imperialist. Free State governments talk nationalist but act imperialist. And the reasons are simple. The two major parties in the Free State -Fianna Fail and Fine Gael- are conservative, aligning themselves, for instance, in the European parliament with Gaullists and Christian Democrats, respectively. Government of the state has alternated between these two conservative parties with Fine Gael sometimes forced into coalition with the smaller ineffective Labour Party which is social democratic in outlook and an affiliate of the Socialist International. Politics in the Free State have not evolved into left and right as is the case with the rest of western Europe. Nor can they while the country remains partitioned. The conservatives' interests are best maintained in a partitioned Ireland.

Currently the Free State government is involved in discussion with the British government aimed at bringing about a settlement within the partition set-up, which they hope will cater for Irish nationalists in the occupied zone by providing some symbolic form of national identity in an ongoing bid to dilute the relevance of republicanism.

The Free State government's invitation to Ronald Reagan to visit Ireland earlier this year speaks volumes of its domestic and international outlook.