

After Nationalism...

On leaving Sinn Féinn for Anarchism

James McBarron

2005

I joined Sinn Féin in the mid eighties with many others on the back of what we saw as a radical shift to the left and a commitment to build a 32 county Democratic Socialist Republic. I find myself outside that movement now, thoroughly disillusioned with it and its shift to a left nationalist and social democratic electoralist future.

We are many years into the Irish peace process — how many depends on your perspective — but we can at least agree that the Good Friday agreement of 1998 is a key point in the evolution of the process. The current impasse centres largely on the question of accommodating Sinn Féin into the political establishment north and south. Though the IRA was defeated and Sinn Féin began the journey towards an accommodation with imperialism and the southern state, many of the activists and indeed many in the communities from which the republican movement drew its most hardcore support have had a difficulty adjusting to the new realities. This has arisen primarily because of the lies that the leadership of that movement have fed the grassroots in order to keep them on board.

Mostly this has consisted of pretending that the road they are now on is something new and innovative that will lead them to the Republic. But time has taken its toll and the British and Irish states have become impatient of the Adams leadership's slow softly approach and want the open capitulation of the republican movement, an end to the IRA and the full integration of SF into the system.

This isn't easy either for the republicans or the unionists who have to also abandon their stated hardline approach. (Unionism represents the politics of the former ruling class in the north, almost exclusively protestant and pro the union with Britain, they monopolised power after partition and used this power to build a sectarian little state. Unionist politicians enjoy the support of the vast majority of the protestant working class at election time. Unionists are a majority in the north. The unionist leadership has realised that a carve-up of power with nationalism is their only future hope of any power). The various crises around the process have revolved around these issues.

Of course it is inevitable that Sinn Féin in its current manifestation will go in to the system and fully endorse policing, the courts the prison system, the civil service etc. Sinn Féin have always believed in the use of the state and the division of people into leaders and lead. All institutions of the state will be accepted and Sinn Féin will become the new and more organised SDLP of the

north. They will share in power eventually with a pragmatic and realistic unionist leadership which will emerge more strongly as the old guard die off or become marginalised with time. What we will have then will probably be a government in the north enjoying a large degree of acceptability or at least benign indifference amongst the population. Sinn Féin in the south will follow the well worn path to participation in administering power in the Dail. Outside of the mainstream republican movement some few of those embittered by their experience will hang onto the old politics and recruit, drill, train, fundraise and prepare for another round at some day in the future.

And us, the working class, well we will again be faced with the same old problems of exploitation, oppression, inequality and constant struggle that we always are. But we will have to fight a movement that once proclaimed itself revolutionary and keen to abolish capitalism north and south but that is now bought and part of the structure. How many good sincere activists will be destroyed, buried in the bullshit of parliamentary politics, trying to get the odd pot-hole filled whilst the whole show goes on as before and past dreams of social revolution slowly ebb away to “a favour here or there” and a few dry empty commemorations of past deeds.

If all the peace process had done was end the armed struggle that would have been great, but it has done far more than that. It has strengthened the states north and south. The struggle for social justice continues. Today fighting the Water Tax in Belfast, on a picket line in Dublin, pushing for abortion rights in Cork, fighting racism in Galway, demanding housing in Derry. All these struggles and many more push our class interests forward. Unifying them in ideas of self reliance, mass democracy and direct action, libertarian ideas, anarchist ideas — that is where the struggle is at. Republicanism will rise again, taking many good young activists to the grave, prison and despair unless we popularise truly revolutionary ideas to act as a positive pole of attraction.

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