From the Bomb to the Ballot Box:

Sinn Fein’s Political Transformation during the Northern Ireland Troubles

“For centuries, Britain has sought to conquer, dominate and rule Ireland. For centuries, the Irish people have sought to free Ireland from British rule. Britain, a large, powerful and ruthless colonial power, was able to defeat the numerous and sustained efforts of the Irish people to liberate themselves.” –Sean MacBride, Sinn Fein

“The British government has no selfish strategic or economic interests in Northern Ireland.”
–Peter Brooke, Secretary of State of Northern Ireland, 1990.

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Introduction:

In early March 2009, Europe and the rest of the world awoke to a startling realization: violence was still prevalent in Northern Ireland. Two British soldiers were murdered by splinter groups of the Irish Republican Army in Northern Ireland; more than a decade after the historic Good Friday Agreement was signed, with the hope that a power-sharing executive government would be able to maintain a peaceful society after decades of violence between secular communities. The reversion to violence in March 2009 demonstrates that the peace process is not yet completely stable. Northern Ireland has an 800 year legacy of conflict between the citizens of the region. There has been immense research regarding the conflicts in the region, on various subjects: general history, the British influence in the region, and the education, health care and economic conditions of the region. While all of these topics are important to understanding the overall conflict in the region, it is the history of the contemporary situation and prospects for peace which are paramount for understanding Northern Ireland.

Throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, Northern Ireland faced a civil-war known as the “Troubles.” Much of the current research on Northern Ireland has focused on the events and the effects of the Troubles as they developed into the peace process. Specifically, the research has focused on the paramilitary operations and the quality of life during the Troubles. In this paper, I will address a topic that has received little attention. While the Irish Republican Army, more commonly referred to as the IRA, has been heavily researched, their political wing, Sinn Fein, has just begun to receive attention. This is largely because many scholars have

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1 The term “Troubles” refers to the span in Northern Irish history of this paper. While there is not a specific date that begins this time in history, it is generally agreed to begin in late 1969 early 1970. The term could also be substituted for civil war, but most scholars simply refer to the “Troubles.”
remained adamant that Sinn Fein is a function of the IRA, and not its own organization. Despite this recent attention, there is no specific work that discusses why and how Sinn Fein transformed itself from a political wing of a paramilitary operation to a successful political party.

In order to understand the changes in Sinn Fein, I have established six specific points throughout the Troubles in Northern Ireland which have allowed for Sinn Fein to develop as a political party. They are, briefly, a ground-work phase in the early 1970s, which began with a grass roots campaign movement and the first initial split from the IRA, followed by the failure of the 1973 Sunningdale Agreement, which was the first attempt at a negotiated peace agreement but did not include Sinn Fein as a result of their relationship with the IRA. After the failure of the Sunningdale Agreement, there was an intellectual movement during the period of internment throughout the 1970s and 1980s. During the mid-1970s, Gerry Adams, the current president of Sinn Fein emerged, and influenced the intellectual movement with his written work. The 1981 Hunger Strikes gave Sinn Fein the international attention they needed to increase their support base. The Huners Strikes led to the 1980s campaign of “Armalite and the Ballot Box,” which demonstrated the difficulty the party had with their political and paramilitary ties. The sixth and final stage of Sinn Fein’s transformation was the internal divisions that led to a split within the political party in 1986. These six things helped create Sinn Fein in to the political party it is today, and they also led to the peace process. These events and specific points in time were largely influenced by the leaders of the movement themselves, specifically Adams, but also Martin McGuinness, who currently serves as the current first deputy minister of Northern Ireland. In addition to these events and the internal leadership, Sinn Fein was influenced by the British, but also, and perhaps more importantly, the American and South African governments to pursue a political program. The IRA and Sinn Fein have a long standing history that has
immense ties to the republic of Ireland, which also influenced the political campaign, as Sinn Fein is also a political party in the republic of Ireland.

In order to fully understand current events in Northern Ireland and what the future of the region will be, one must comprehend the birth and growth of Sinn Fein in Ireland and Northern Ireland, and how this has changed the current course of politics in Northern Ireland through the subsequent peace process. While some argue that the peace process allowed Sinn Fein to become a political party, I will argue that this is not the case. Yes, the two organizations are linked, as Sinn Fein was originally born out of the larger republican movement. However, as a result of Sinn Fein’s development of a political program, and an increasing separation from the IRA’s paramilitary campaign, Sinn Fein allowed the peace process to truly begin, and has continued to pursue a peaceful political campaign beyond the signing of the historic Belfast Agreement in to the new millennium.

**Historical Background:**

To better understand the IRA and Sinn Fein individually, it is important to understand a basic knowledge of the events in Northern Ireland which led to the outbreak of the Troubles. While the history of Northern Ireland is extremely extensive, the most important aspects for this paper are the events that specifically led the outbreak of the Troubles. The region of Northern Ireland, also referred to as Ulster, is one of four ancient provinces belonging to the island of Ireland. The conflict in the region of Northern Ireland stems from the arrival of the British on the island of Ireland, which dates to the 1100s. British rule in Ireland has been fiercely opposed

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2 The other three are Munster, Connacht and Leinster. Within each province, there are a specific number of counties. For a general history of the island of Ireland, see T.W. Moody, F.X. Martin and F.J. Byrne’s *The Course of Irish History*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005). This dates back to ancient Irish civilization. For a history of the twentieth century, see Tim Pat Coogan, *Ireland in the Twentieth Century*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004).
from the Irish population, largely stemming from the religious differences among the two
groups, the British being Protestant and the Irish Catholic, after the Protestant Reformation. As
the British established their control over Irish government, housing, and business, a population
from the United Kingdom was placed in Ireland by the British Crown to spread Protestantism.
This group became identified as Ulster Scots. This population was largely Scottish
Presbyterians, and in an effort to maintain their presence in the region, settled a plantation in
Ulster, known as the Ulster Plantation. When the British government established the Plantation,
they insisted that the Plantation could only be a Protestant plantation, to “keep down and if
possible expel the Roman Catholic ‘natives.’” The region became economically successful as a
result of the Industrial Revolution. In 1801, when the Act of Union was passed, the whole of
Ireland effectively became known as part of the United Kingdom, controlled politically by the
Westminster government in England. This ensured the control of the Ulster-Scots population in
Ulster, and throughout the whole of the island. By the time the Ulster Plantation was established,
the conflict had become a “Catholic-Protestant” confrontation. The Irish Catholic population
was slighted in many different ways, most notably from their exclusion in government and land-
owning rights. The Act of Union encouraged Protestant Evangelicalism and anti-Catholicism.
The strongest populations of Ulster-Scots were concentrated in the region of Ulster.

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3 At the height of their influence, there were 100,000 Protestants in the region of Northern Ireland, beginning with
20,000 original settlers. See John Darby, *Northern Ireland: The Background to the Conflict*, (Syracuse NY:
Syracuse University Press, 1987).
4 An older source on this subject is Constantine Fitzgibbon, *Red Hand: The Ulster Colony*, (Garden City NY:
Doubleday, 1972). See page 15 for this section, in which Fitzgibbon describes the Ulster Plantation. Some other
sources on the formation of Ulster and its earlier history are: Tom Wilson, *Ulster: Conflict and Consent*, (New
York: Basil Blackwell, 1989); Frank Wright: *Northern Ireland: a Comparative Analysis*, (Totowa NJ: Gill and
Books, 1973). The book was originally published in 1936. It provides a glorified examination of the English in the
region.
Beginning with the 1798 United Irishmen battle, the Irish rebelled against the British presence in Ireland. The modern republican movement traces its beginnings to the early nineteenth century, with the Young Ireland movement in the 1840s led by Daniel O’Connell, and the Irish Republican Brotherhood’s Fenian Movement of the 1860s. These republican efforts were born out of frustration with the British government and the horrific experiences in Ireland during the Irish Famine. By the late 1800s, the Irish, rather unsuccessfully, rebelled against the British, in what is known as the Home Rule Battle. This movement led to the birth of the republican movement, most notably throughout the southern portion of the island of Ireland, mostly in the regions of the west of Connacht. This republican movement was based upon the ideological notions that it was necessary to remove the British from the island, at any cost. This republican movement was able to form an army, which became known as the Irish Republican Army in 1916. Versed in guerilla warfare tactics, they waged a battle against the British Army during the early 1900s. Their strategies of guerilla warfare were successful and by 1920, the British granted 26 counties in Ireland with dominion status, similarly to Canada. As the British prepared to transfer a minimal amount power to the Irish people, the question of Ulster became a matter of debate, as the Anglo-Irish population in the region identified with being British, not Irish.

In 1905, Arthur Griffith founded the political association Sinn Fein, meaning “We Ourselves” was comprised of various nationalist groups who supported the republican cause and were nationalist members of the Irish Parliamentary Party at Westminster. Founded in 1905, this

7 There are 32 counties total on the island of Ireland. Today, 26 remain in the Republic of Ireland, while Northern Ireland is comprised of six. The region of Ulster is nine counties, so three overlap both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The border areas in Northern Ireland would become particularly important during the Troubles, as they comprised the border between the two countries.
makes Sinn Fein the oldest political party in Ireland, and most present day political parties in Ireland have been a result of splits from the Sinn Fein party.⁸ In 1916, the Easter Rising marked the first incidence of large-scale rebellion by the Sinn Fein members, and was therefore also referred to as the “Sinn Fein Rebellion.”⁹ By 1917, the party underwent its first reorganization, (the first of many) and won the General Election of 1918 in Ireland, and promptly established the Dail Eireann, which means Assembly of Ireland. The Dail Eireann remains the name of the seat of the Irish government today. As the Sinn Fein and the Irish Republican Army had similar goals to remove the British presence from Irish society, in all sectors of society. Throughout the next several decades, Sinn Fein would remain a political party; however, it adapted the policy of abstention after the departure of Eamon de Valera from the party in 1926.¹⁰ The abstention policies would be important to the development of Sinn Fein in Northern Ireland. As the Irish gained dominion status, the focus turned to Northern Ireland, specifically the British government’s interest in the Ulster-Scot population in the region.

**The Development of Northern Ireland’s Troubles:**

In 1920 the Government of Ireland Act was created, and Northern Ireland along with it. At the time of partition, Northern Ireland’s population was two-thirds Protestant, while one-third was Catholic. The Anglo-Irish treaty, signed one year later in 1921 in Ireland resulted in the

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creation of the Irish Free State and the separate partition of Northern Ireland. The Anglo-Irish treaty resulted in a civil war in Ireland, with Eamon de Valera and many other political figures upset with the concessions of the treaty. According to the Anglo-Irish treaty, the partition of Northern Ireland would be temporary, with the boarders reexamined in the future. After the Irish Civil War, Ireland began to pursue several governmental transformations which began with the Irish Free State and eventually becoming a republic in 1947, after the ratification of the Irish constitution in 1937. The Irish constitution stated that Ireland had claim to the region of Northern Ireland and wanted Northern Ireland to be reunited with Ireland in the future. Once Ireland became a republic, they officially were no longer a dominion state of the United Kingdom, but were heavily reliant on them for economic and financial aid. From this point further, I will refer to Ireland as the 26 counties in the southern portion of the island, the republic. The term ‘island of Ireland’ includes both Northern Ireland and the republic. While Ireland was focusing on their new found freedom, the Irish Catholic population in Northern Ireland was struggling with the British government’s control over social and economic conditions in the region.

The partition of Northern Ireland demonstrated the legacy of the British influence throughout the entire island, as they were able to maintain control of the Ulster region. The

11 For a basic history on Northern Ireland, scholars Jonathan Bardon and Paul Bew, et al, provide lengthy neutral descriptions of the history of Ulster region, while Jonathan Tonge and John Darby, et al, and provide a more specific history of Northern Ireland, with a focus on more contemporary history, leading up to the Troubles. Many scholars have analyzed the conflict in Northern Ireland in its earliest stages of becoming a state. See Jonathan Bardon, A History of Ulster, (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1992); Paul Bew, Henry Patterson and Paul Teague, Northern Ireland: Between War and Peace: The Political Future of Northern Ireland, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1997). For an analysis of contemporary Northern Ireland, see Jonathan Tonge; Northern Ireland, (Cambridge UK: Polity Press, 2006); and John Darby ed., Northern Ireland: the Background to the Conflict, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987).
12 For more information on this period of Irish history, see Moody, Martin and Byrne’s The Course of Irish History, 2005.
imposition of partition has led to a “permanent insurrectionary situation in the six North Eastern counties of Ireland.”\(^{13}\) From the 1940s to the 1960s, the British government effectively created a “Protestant State” in the region in Northern Ireland, allowing the interests of Protestant Ulster-Scots to dominate the government. Throughout all sectors of society, housing, education, employment and voting, the Catholic Irish population struggled to achieve the same privileges as the Protestant communities. Education was segregated by religion, which instilled extremely sectarian views in young children, on both Protestant and Catholic sides, adding to the tensions between the two groups.\(^{14}\) Poor living and working conditions plagued the small nation. The Ireland Act, which was passed in 1949, stated that Northern Ireland would remain part of the United Kingdom for as long as the majority wishes them to be. This document also granted British citizenship to the Northern Irish population, who can also receive Irish citizenship if they want it.

In addition to the Ireland Act of 1949, the Welfare State that was established from 1945-1960 made the state responsible for security, financially responsible for secondary schools, social security, and health care. The Welfare State angered many nationalists, as they believed that Britain was trying to cover up the conflicts between the two populations in Northern Ireland as well as weaken the link between Northern Ireland and Ireland. After the Ireland Act and the development of the Welfare State, a revival of Irish republicanism began in Northern Ireland.

\(^{13}\) This statement was made by Sean MacBride, a notable historical figure within Sinn Fein and the recipient of the 1983 Nobel Peace Prize. See “Freedom: The Conflict in Northern Ireland. A Sinn Fein Education Publication” p. 3, Official Sinn Fein Website, <http://www.sinnfein.org/documents/freedom.html> (accessed April 1, 2009)

\(^{14}\) Education in Northern Ireland has been religiously segregated since the conception of the state. Education in Northern Ireland is an increasingly important topic as the peace process maintains vitality in the future. For more on this subject, see Dominic Murray, Worlds Apart: Segregated Schools in Northern Ireland, (Belfast: Appletree Press, 1985) and for an earlier perspective, see Donald Harman Akenson, Education and Enmity: The Control of Schooling in Northern Ireland, 1920-1950, (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1973).
spearheaded by many republicans in Ireland, who began to fight for independence from the United Kingdom. The conflict between the two groups in society has been described as “inter-communal, almost tribal.” 15 The notion that the conflict is “almost tribal” refers to the immense polarisation between the two communities. When studying Northern Ireland there are two perspectives, Nationalist and Loyalist. However, both of these perspectives look at the same information as a mirror image of each other. The polarisation of the two groups increased immensely throughout the Troubles, as each side blamed each other for the violence. While the Nationalists believe that they were provoked by the Loyalists through state repression in a territory that is legally not theirs, the Loyalists equally believe the territory is theirs and therefore have to fight against the threat of losing the territory.16 As a result of the increasingly unfair social and political policies by the dominant Protestant class, by the mid 1960s, a group of Catholics emerged to form a Civil Rights movement which eventually led to violent civil war.17

The Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland was largely based on the American Civil Rights Movement. The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, NICRA, spearheaded the movement, wanting to accomplish several things. First, they wanted an end to political gerrymandering which had ensured that elections would be heavily dominated by the Anglo-Irish class, even in areas of Catholic majority. Electorally, the Catholic populations were extremely slighted. If they did not own or rent a house, they were unable to vote. Only the name on the

15 Frank Gaffikin and Mike Morrissey, Northern Ireland: The Thatcher Years (Highlands, NJ: Zed Books, 1990), 1. 16 Robert White argues that the IRA was provoked by state repression as well as cultural and social identification. See Robert White, “From Peaceful Protest to Guerrilla War: Micro-mobilization of the Provisional Irish Republican Army,” The American Journal of Sociology, 94, 6, (May 1989): 1277-1302, 1277. 17 As the outbreak of conflict draws closer, it is important to clarify useful terminology. While it is true that most members of the nationalist movement in Northern Ireland were Catholic, it is important to remember that not everyone was Catholic. On the other side, it is the same situation, where all of the Anglo-Irish population was not necessarily Protestant, but a majority was as well. For more clarification on this point, see John Whyte, Interpreting Northern Ireland, (New York: Oxford University, 1990). His second chapter discusses the religious aspects of society in Northern Ireland and explains the religious divisions and history within the region.
lease or property, plus one spouse was given the privilege to vote and since many families lived together due to high unemployment and low wages, many of them could not participate in elections. The NICRA also wanted to end the discrimination occurring within housing projects and hiring practices. In addition to these social conditions, the NICRA was particularly concerned with the “B-Specials,” an entirely Protestant division of the RUC and wanted them to be disbanded. What started out as a peaceful Civil Rights movement led to a series of violent outbreaks, known as “The Troubles.” As the violence escalated in Northern Ireland, the Civil Rights campaign was replaced with violence through the paramilitary organizations. In Derry and Belfast, two of the largest cities in Northern Ireland, a revitalization of the IRA began to occur, spreading through these cities. The NICRA continued to protest, and thus began a downward spiral between the police forces, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and the B-Specials, and the minority populations of Northern Ireland. By 1969, the British Army had

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18 For more on gerrymandering and the electoral status of the Catholic minority before the outbreak of the Troubles, view The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association section on the CAIN website. <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/>. (accessed, April 23, 2009). The CAIN website stands for “Conflict Archive on the Internet.” It provides one of the most detailed databases on the Northern Ireland troubles. Sponsored by the University of Ulster, the Arts and Humanities Council for Research and the Economic and Social Research Council of Northern Ireland, the website includes key events, key information, research and primary documents on every facet of the Troubles.

19 Robert White, “From Peaceful Protest to Guerilla War” 1989, 1277. White argues that the Catholic population, the “victims of state repression” saw the state deeming them illegitimate and the attempts at peaceful protest were ineffective. In his sociological study he concludes that throughout history, those who engage in political violence do so because of economic inequality.

20 Belfast, the capital of Northern Ireland is a city that is divided much like the rest of the nation. West Belfast is a notorious republican hub, while East Belfast is primarily Anglo-Irish, protestant neighborhoods. The city center itself is considered neutral ground and has recently become much safer with the increasing development and building. There is a peace wall that runs along a portion of the city, separating the Irish and British sides. To this day, there are several places in which one cannot cross over the line after a certain hour. In addition to the divisions in Belfast, the city of Derry’s own name is contested, as the Irish population referring to the city as Derry, while the British know it as Londonderry. The city itself has a high population of Irish Catholics, and as a result, was a catalyst for the development of the Civil Rights Movement, the revitalization and recruitment of the IRA and the reorganization of Sinn Fein.

21 The Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) was the main police force in Northern Ireland during the Troubles. Almost completely comprised of Protestants, it seems that their interests were in protecting the Protestant populations and maintaining the Protestant control of the State. The RUC was directly run from the state level and at times seems to be engaged in particularly violent actions, much like any other protestant paramilitary organization, despite the fact
been deployed to the streets of Northern Ireland, with the rationale that they were “peace keepers.” The organization of the IRA was continually building, as they actively recruited from the Catholic areas of cities, demonstrating that guerrilla warfare was going to be necessary for the nationalist cause.

With the reorganization of the IRA came the redevelopment of Sinn Fein as well. At this point, many scholars specifically focus on the development of the IRA, as the IRA began through a series of changes in the early 1970s, to form the Provisional Irish Republican Army, the PIRA, which was the most influential group of the IRA during the Troubles. The military campaign of the PIRA took one to two years to organize and become effective. The IRA’s strategy of military defense, retaliation, and offense became the focus of the movement. The Provisionals have been a subject of immense study, complete with historical accounts of the paramilitary campaigns, as well as insider interviews and exclusive information. Tim Pat Coogan, Richard English, Ed Moloney and Peter Taylor all provide excellent insight into the that they were a police service. As previously mentioned, the B-Specials were an elite, entirely Protestant faction of the RUC. The RUC has since become the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) in 2001 in accordance with the Belfast Agreement and have worked consistently to change their reputation with the Catholic population, beginning with the incorporation of new policemen who were not a member of the RUC and more Catholic policemen.

22 The Provisional IRA was a result of a split between leadership in 1970. The Provisionals, or “Provos” as they are also referred to, were a younger generation of nationalists, who split from the older members of the IRA, who were originally members in the 1940s and 1950s and had a different strategy than the younger generations. The Officials, as they were known after the split, remained a splinter group of the IRA for several years, but were nowhere near as effective as the Provos. From this point further, when discussing the Provisional Irish Republican Army, I will refer to them as simply the IRA.


24 Part of the difficulty in understanding the IRA is the secrecy within the organization. There are huge limitations with information in the study of the IRA. Information at times is questionable due to the secrecy in the organization. In finding primary sources particularly, it is difficult to obtain official information directly from the IRA or other secret meetings and talks. However, within secondary sources, scholars have been able to use interviews and some documents to search for insider information regarding the IRA. There are still many things which are unknown about the IRA, as a result of the level of secrecy needed to maintain a viable armed campaign.
organization.25

In his text, English refers to the IRA and Sinn Fein as one organization, and places the focus of the study on the IRA, referring to Sinn Fein as a mere politicization movement of the IRA, but that the politicization of the movement allowed for the peace process to begin.26 The six points of transformation within Sinn Fein allowed for the separation of Sinn Fein from the IRA. This, in turn led to the peace process. It is a recent phenomenon that scholars refer to Sinn Fein as a separate political organ from the IRA.27 Most of these texts focus on the history of Sinn Fein and the development of the party in Northern Ireland, but fail to explain why the change occurred. 28 Brian Feeney argues that the political leadership of Sinn Fein began to “run down:
the military campaign of the IRA through their actions in society beginning in the early 1970s.\textsuperscript{29}

As Sinn Fein began to form a stronger coalition, the early 1970s saw an intensifying violent IRA campaign. This resulted in a wave of counter attacks from newly formed Unionists paramilitary groups.\textsuperscript{30} The most notable were the Ulster Defense Association (UDA), Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF) and Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF). As Agnes Maillot explains, the Unionists in Northern Ireland mistrust republicans for their failure, as they see it, to engage wholly with peaceful methods in a “transparent manner.”\textsuperscript{31} As a result of this, unionist paramilitary organizations were developed to counter the armed campaign of the IRA. Attacks and Bombings from both sides were commonplace.

In 1972, one of the most publicized events during the Troubles, Bloody Sunday occurred in Derry. Thirteen Irish citizens were murdered by the British Army after twenty-seven were shot, in the midst of a NICRA rally. The event was significant for several reasons, primarily because the attack was by the British Army and not the paramilitary operations. This event exposed the conflicted society, and served as a catalyst for the Troubles. Bloody Sunday increased the membership and awareness of the IRA, and the nationalist cause. At this point, Northern Ireland became governed under military law. Conditions in Northern Ireland after this point were somewhat similar to a military state. Strict curfews were enforced by the British

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\textsuperscript{29} Feeney, \textit{Sinn Fein: A Hundred Years}, 2003, 15.
\textsuperscript{30} Loyalist and Unionists are two terms that refer to the population in Northern Ireland who identify themselves as being British, most of them decedents of the Anglo-Irish population who first settled in the region. Therefore most loyalists are Protestant. In addition to the Protestant paramilitary, there are many other Protestant sects of society, which date back to the Ulster Plantation. One of the most famous, the “Orange Order,” is an extremely Anti-Catholic society, evangelical secret society that promotes British history and Protestantism in Northern Ireland to this day. While they are not a paramilitary organization, their influence during the Troubles was important, as they campaigned for the success of Loyalism and the Protestant paramilitaries.
\textsuperscript{31} Agnes Maillot, \textit{the New Sinn Fein}, 2005, 1.
Army, and this added to tension in neighborhoods and fueled the IRA’s campaign of rioting, burnings, and bombings. After Bloody Sunday in 1972, direct rule was imposed by the British government. The Northern Ireland Assembly ceased to exist, and Northern Ireland would be governed directly from the Westminster Parliament, which ensured that the British government would be able to examine and attempt to control the events in Northern Ireland more closely. As a result of Direct Rule, the Irish population was even less likely to have political success. The imposition of Direct Rule also added to the difficulty that Sinn Fein had in making a viable political program.

**Ground Work Phase (1970-1973):**

The first phase of Sinn Fein’s development occurred in the early years of the Troubles. Much like it took the IRA to organize itself; it is legitimate to state that Sinn Fein took much longer to organize itself in to a political party. As a result of this increasingly violent IRA strategy that has been studied by these scholars, Sinn Fein developed first, not as a political party, but as a function of the IRA to be a message board for the IRA, and spread information among members as well as recruit new ones.32 In the “Handbook for Volunteers of the Irish Republican Army,” the role of politics is exactly what Sinn Fein was during the early stages of the Troubles: “The use of civil political committees among the people whose function it would be to agitate against the oppressor, get new members for guerrillas, organize supplies for columns…and lead the people in a campaign of active and passive resistance to enemy occupation.”33 In the early stages of Sinn Fein’s development, members were primarily women.

33 One of the most puzzling and informative sources about the IRA is a small 32-page handbook published in 1985. The instructions inside are from much earlier, 1956. This leads me to believe that the information has been around
Their role has been described as “agitation and publicity,” or better known as “Agit-prop” by Brian Feeney.34

This stage of Sinn Fein is the groundwork stage, as they began to lay the foundation for their future as a political party in Northern Ireland. For a political party to be successful electorally, they must have a base of support. Much of the original support for Sinn Fein was from IRA members and their families but as the campaign for Sinn Fein increased they were able to expand their base, which was mostly comprised of working class Catholic and nationalist families in Belfast and Derry who were not members of the IRA, but nationalist in their beliefs.35 In addition to Belfast and Derry, most of the south-western and western-most boarders of Northern Ireland were Sinn Fein supporters. This was because most of the people in these regions had closer ties to Ireland, and were thus more likely to support Sinn Fein. This support base would last throughout the political changes within Sinn Fein, which would be important as the political party changed expanded their ideology but remained adamant in their core beliefs of self-determination and freeing Northern Ireland from British control.

Sinn Fein raised their support through a grassroots campaign, especially during the early 1970s, since the political organization was illegal in Northern Ireland as a result of their relationship to the IRA. In this introductory stage of development, Sinn Fein began publishing An Phoblacht, in English Republican News. A nationalist newspaper, Republican News became a vital organ for both Sinn Fein and the IRA. As the two organizations began to grow, the newspaper could relay information throughout members. By starting An Phoblacht, the IRA was

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34 Brian Feeney, Sinn Fein: A Hundred Years, 2003, 260.
35 Brian Feeney, Sinn Fein: A Hundred Years, 2003, 260.
able to ensure that the information released would be accurate, from a legitimate source and there would not be any confusion among members.  

Still in existence today, An Phoblacht publishes a weekly edition with information concerning Sinn Fein and the nationalist cause.

The groundwork phase demonstrated that Sinn Fein could use the Republican News to be their voice, but perhaps they needed more to have their voice heard. The creation of An Phoblacht added to the success of Sinn Fein’s grassroots movement to solidify their supporter base.

The Sunningdale Agreement:

There was an attempt for peace in 1973 with the Sunningdale Agreement. Also known as the White Paper, the agreement created the notion of “rolling devolution,” which was the first stages towards a power-sharing government in Northern Ireland without actually guaranteeing power-sharing, and outlined constitutional proposals for the future in Northern Ireland. The Sunningdale Agreement marks the second turning point for Sinn Fein, as they were excluded from the talks leading to the Agreement because of their close alliance with the IRA. It became necessary for the Sinn Fein government to alter their political campaign to ensure they would not be excluded from diplomatic efforts in the future. The Social Democratic and Labor Party, SDLP, were included as they provided an alternative nationalist perspective, but were not affiliated with violence and paramilitary operations.

36 This point of accurate information was also emphasized in the “Handbook for Volunteers,” Boulder: 1985, 20.
37 Brian Feeney, Sinn Fein: A Hundred Years, 2003, 165.
38 The relationship between Sinn Fein and the SDLP is quite interesting, and just recently, Gerard Murry and Jonathan Tonge published Sinn Fein and the SDLP: From Alienation to Participation, (London: C. Hurst, 2005). This book looks at the relationship between the two parties and the fundamental difference between them, that the SDLP did not endorse violence throughout the Troubles. John Hume, former leader of the SDLP was chastised by the IRA throughout his tenure as SDLP President, and the book also discusses Hume’s relationship with Adams and
The Agreement failed, because there was a lack of support from the Unionist parties and the IRA and Sinn Fein were not involved, and thus the IRA campaign subsequently continued. While there was an attempt for a brief ceasefire in 1973-1974, it lasted for only a short time. At the time of the Sunningdale Agreement, Sinn Fein issued a document entitled, *Eire Nua*, New Ireland, which laid out a vision for their desire for a united Ireland. The party itself lacked the credibility for this plan to work. As a result of this, they needed to gain in political credibility to effectively make successful change.\(^{39}\)

In 1974, directly after the Sunningdale Agreement, Merlyn Rees, the Secretary of State, legalized Sinn Fein. This was an enormous political victory for the party. Rees explained that if the IRA ended all offensive operations, the army would slowly be reduced to peacetime levels and ultimately withdrawn, provided the IRA would ceasefire. The British and the IRA had agreed that the truce would be monitored through a series of incident centers which would be maintained by Sinn Fein. These incident centers gave many active service volunteers their first taste of politics. Among them, Martin McGuinness emerged as a figure in Sinn Fein. McGuinness represents some of the core conflicts between the IRA and Sinn Fein, which are explored in his biography by Liam Clarke and Kathryn Johnston.\(^{40}\) For several years McGuinness neglected to confirm rumors he was a member of the IRA, stating “I am not a member of the IRA. I was an activist in Free Derry. I make no apology for the fact that I stood in the other leaders of the two parties. It is an important subset of studying Sinn Fein, as the power-executive government begins to be established by the Good Friday Agreement, it is necessary to understand the history between the two parties as they begin to work together more closely. See pages 42-62 for information on the Sunningdale Agreement and its failure to cumulate successfully. Also see Brian Feeney, *Sinn Fein: A Hundred Years*, 2003, 309-310, in which Feeney explains the difficulty and paradoxes SDLP faced in rejecting the Sunningdale Agreement, as they did not want to appear to be siding with Sinn Fein, but Hume was adamant about rejecting the document because it did not guarantee devolution.\(^{39}\)


total occupation to the British Army and the RUC” in 1992. In 2001, he admitted that he was a member of the IRA, and was second-in-command of the Derry IRA at the time of Bloody Sunday. McGuinness rose through the ranks of the IRA, and eventually switched to politics, serving as an extremely influential member of Sinn Fein and of the state of Northern Ireland, as he has served as the Minister of Education and currently holds the First Deputy Minister post.

Clarke and Johnston write to confirm the fact that McGuinness was a high-ranking official in the IRA. As a result of his decision to pursue political roles in Sinn Fein, he has received immense criticism from the British government for being a member of a terrorist organization, meaning he has no place in politics. Clarke and Johnston provide an account of McGuinness’ childhood and involvement in the IRA, of what is known.

Through Clarke and Johnston’s book, it is apparent that McGuinness represents the conflict between the ideological struggles between the IRA and Sinn Fein. While it was obvious that both organizations had different methods of how to achieve their goals, their goals throughout the Troubles were similar, as both of them wanted to achieve a reunited Ireland free from British control. McGuinness has strayed from his direct involvement in the IRA since he has become a member of Sinn Fein, but remains emotionally connected to the IRA, as he and Gerry Adams both continued to carry coffins of IRA members at funerals throughout the Troubles which sent a message to the British and the world that the two organizations have deep connections to one another. This complex relationship remains a testament to the difficulty that Sinn Fein has had in developing a political program.

Intellectual Movement, Imprisonment and the rise of Gerry Adams:

With the emergence of the Incident Centers, another movement swept throughout the members of the IRA and Sinn Fein with the change in internment policies. As a result of the new internment policies, political prisoners were now treated as common prisoners. This change resulted in a huge uproar of protests throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s as prisoners rebelled against their prison guards, refusing to wear the prisoner uniform and using a variety of tactics to increase the squalor of prisons, including defecating on the walls of prison cells. This change in attitude led to numerous protests in prison, and a group of previously political prisoners who wanted to use their experiences in prison to advance their political plans as much as possible.

This group of people, led by Gerry Adams of West Belfast, created an intellectual movement in prison which encouraged the prisoners to read history, philosophy and politics. Adams, much like McGuinness rose through the ranks of Sinn Fein rapidly, but Adams himself has never admitted his involvement in the IRA, insisting that he has never been a member. Adams has been the driving force in Sinn Fein since the beginning of the intellectual prison movement. His own personal desire to see Catholics not be treated as second-class-citizens, and

42 This has been a point of contention for many scholars, who find it difficult to believe Adams has never been in the IRA. His father was a member of the IRA in West Belfast and was wounded by the police force after shooting a policeman himself. Adams has adamantly denied that he was a member of the IRA. In his unofficial biography by David Sharrock and Mark Devenport, Man of War, Man Of Peace: the Unauthorized Biography of Gerry Adams, (London: MacMillan, 1997) the two authors explain that they do not believe Adams was not an IRA member. In addition to Sharrock and Devenport, Ed Moloney, Peter Taylor and Richard English, three scholars whose works are referenced in this paper all believe that Adams was a senior member of the IRA at some point. During the years leading up to the peace process, and subsequently the peace process, Adams has been in an unclear area when discussing the IRA and their campaigns. He is consistently unapologetic of their actions, as well as never condemning their actions. This point of contention seems to stem from his staunch republican beliefs. While he has dedicated himself to political action, he still recognizes the power of guerrilla warfare in society. This is a difficult position to understand, and is one of the reasons why many people do not believe that he was never a member of the IRA. Since he does not apologize or condemn the IRA, it is an enigma to understand why he so actively pursued a political campaign. Through reading his literature and others, it seems as if Adams, while himself a believer in change through political action, he also recognizes the importance and history of the IRA in Irish society.
his belief that Northern Ireland, in its own right, belongs to the Irish people, not the British has consistently driven Adams’s political career since he was a young man.\textsuperscript{43} Adams stressed the importance of a political party, in different ways. At the early stages of his career, Adams described Sinn Fein as the “poor second cousin” to the IRA.\textsuperscript{44} Republican in outlook, socialist in policies, Adams developed his political beliefs during his periods of imprisonment, publishing a weekly article in \textit{Republican News}, under the pseudonym Brownie which focused on the “politicization of the struggle.”\textsuperscript{45} He educated other prisoners in the native Irish language, and studied the works of many Irish political figures, including James Connolly, the leader of the first republican movement in Ireland as well as the Easter Rising of 1916. In addition to the works of Connolly, he studied American history and philosophy, writing “If we had a document like that [the United States Constitution], I’d never have spent a day in Kesh.”\textsuperscript{46} Adams personal desire and intellect would fuel the political movement, as he claimed that social progress will eventually lead to national liberation.\textsuperscript{47}

Adams literature provides an important background to understanding his personal beliefs, but also the ideology behind Sinn Fein. While Sinn Fein draws much of its core values and beliefs from Irish republicanism, it is Adams who has modernized that information for the newest generation of Sinn Fein supporters. Adams literature chronicles his experiences in the Troubles, but also the history of the Troubles itself, from the nationalist perspective. His works, \textit{Falls Memories},(1983), \textit{Cage Eleven} (1990), \textit{Before the Dawn} (1997), \textit{A Farther Shore} (2003),

\begin{verbatim}
\textsuperscript{44} Agnes Maillot, \textit{New Sinn Fein}, 2005, 5.
\textsuperscript{46} Gerry Adams, \textit{Cage 11}, New York: Sheridan Square Press, 1990, xiv. Long Kesh was one of the most notorious prisons in Northern Ireland, outside of Belfast. It has been described as “Britain’s Concentration Camp.”
\textsuperscript{47} Agnes Maillot, \textit{New Sinn Fein}, 6.
\end{verbatim}
An Irish Eye (2007) which represent only a fraction of his written work all seek to explain his personal role in the Troubles and his beliefs for a reunited Ireland. In his autobiography he explains: “I am not a violent person. I have often been accused of being the IRA. It is a charge I have always rejected. I have been a member of Sinn Fein since my late teens. Sinn Fein is not the IRA, though the two organizations are often erroneously lumped together. The IRA is an armed organization, an army which pursues its objectives through armed actions. Sinn Fein is a political organization which pursues its objectives through peaceful political means.”

Gerry Adams inspired the intellectual movement in prison. Sinn Fein now had their voice, but there was still much work to do, as they remained closely affiliated with the IRA.

The 1981 Hunger Strikes and International Attention:

One of Sinn Fein’s major goals was to increase international support during this time period. It was not until 1981 that they began to receive major press coverage, from another notable member of Sinn Fein and a martyr for the cause of nationalism during the Troubles. Robert, “Bobby” Sands began a hunger strike while imprisoned in 1981. The Hunger Strikes began after the Blanket Protests at a time of change in Northern Ireland. The Troubles had been rampant for the last ten years, and 1980 saw a change at the helm of the British government. Margaret Thatcher, the conservative Prime Minister from England began a hard-lined approach to Northern Ireland, referring to the IRA, and Sinn Fein members, particularly Gerry Adams, as

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“terrorists.” Thatcher had little support or remorse for the nationalist cause, whereas British leaders in the past had been less hard-lined. Sinn Fein had a difficult time during this period proving their distance from the IRA, and with Thatcher’s approach it became even more necessary.

When Sands began his Hunger Strike, he began to receive attention internationally. Before his death, Sands was elected as a Member of Parliament (MP) with the rationale that Prime Minister Thatcher surely would not let a MP starve to death. In fact this was not the case, and after 66 days, Sands’ death surged IRA recruitment, Sinn Fein support and international attention. The elections of Sands were important for several reasons: first, because it demonstrated to the British government that Sinn Fein could be successful politically. It also demonstrated that despite the fact Sinn Fein had been able to win politically, the British government remained hard-lined in their approach. The Thatcher administration would remain hard-lined throughout the 1980s. Both Michael Cunningham, Frank Gaffikin and Mike Morrissey have researched the Thatcher administration and her political decisions in Northern Ireland, which support the argument that the British government, particularly the conservative Thatcher administration made it difficult for the development of Sinn Fein’s political program.\footnote{50} The Thatcher administration’s unwillingness to negotiate with Sinn Fein or the IRA made conditions in Northern Ireland during the 1980s extremely dangerous and somewhat hopeless for peace.

\footnote{50} Michael Cunningham, \textit{British Government Policy in Northern Ireland, 1969-2000}, (New York: Manchester University Press, 2001); Frank Gaffikin and Mike Morrissey, \textit{Northern Ireland: The Thatcher Years} (Highlands, NJ: Zed Books, 1990). Gaffikin and Morrissey’s text supports the examination of Sinn Fein’s transformation because it examines social and economic conditions of Northern Ireland exclusively during Thatcher’s reign in Britain, while Cunningham examines a larger period of time, and looks as the legislative and institutional initiatives of the British in Northern Ireland, including Direct Rule, the Internment Policies, and the social and security policies of the different British governments during the time.
The Armalite and Ballot Box:

Bobby Sands, posthumously, and the Hunger Strikes led to the development of the Sinn Fein strategy “Armalite and the Ballot Box.” This strategy was outlined at the 1981 Ard Fheis, (Sinn Fein national convention,) and the term was coined by Danny Morrison, the third member of the leadership trio of Adams and McGuinness, when Morrison asked “Is there anyone here who objects to taking power in Ireland with a ballot paper in one hand and an Armalite in the other?” In John Hannigan’s analysis of the Armalite and the Ballot Box strategy, he concludes that the strategy was built around the belief that military action and political mobilization are not inherently contradictory but rather may be pursued jointly with reinforcing the other. The long term goals of military action and political mobilization are often similar but the tasks vary significantly, much as the situation with the IRA and Sinn Fein.

The Armalite and Ballot Box strategy officially welded violence and politics together. For several years, the IRA had been the primary force for trying to make change in Northern Ireland, while Sinn Fein was a subset of the IRA, a function of the larger campaign. With the Armalite and the Ballot Box, Sinn Fein was raised to an equal status with the IRA, demonstrating the belief of many IRA and Sinn Fein members that both organizations were going to be important for making change in Northern Ireland. Hannigan argues that the conflicts between the IRA’s military struggle with Sinn Fein’s desire to become more politically mobile in Northern Ireland, were a result of the Armalite and Ballot Box specifically because of internal debates.

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51 Armalite refers to a type of rifle used by the IRA. Most of them were imported to Northern Ireland from the United States and Libya. The arms trade is mentioned in conjunction with Martin McGuinness’s role in the IRA throughout Clarke and Johnston, Martin McGuinness, 2001.


The ArmaLite portion continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s by the IRA, both in Northern Ireland but also expanded to England. As a result of this new-found campaign abroad, in England, Sinn Fein leadership began to question how viable their political program would be if they were closely associated with the IRA. The IRA’s campaigns in England were particularly devastating for public image, as many of the targets targeted civilians or backfired as a result of miscommunication between members.

The 1986 Split of Sinn Fein:

In addition to the increasing dissatisfaction with the IRA’s campaign in Ireland, a great source of contention as Sinn Fein developed their political program was the principle of abstentionism. For several years, dating back to the republican struggle in Ireland, Sinn Fein had practiced a policy of abstentionism, having elected officials abstain from their elected seats in parliamentary bodies that the political party did not deem legitimate. Adams, in particular, believed that if abstentionism changed, political progress for Sinn Fein could be made faster. The issue of abstentionism is another key point in the development of Sinn Fein, as it led to a split among Sinn Fein in 1986. The internal divisions between Sinn Fein members demonstrated the need for a more clearly defined political mission. As Sinn Fein developed as a political party, there were several conflicts of interest among the leadership of the party.

The split between the leadership of Gerry Adams and Ruairi O’Bradiagh signified a tremendous change in Sinn Fein. O’Bradiagh wanted to remain significantly connected to the IRA, while Adams believed that distance was necessary. Adams knew that public opinion was going to be necessary for the success of Sinn Fein and the public opinion after the IRA’s campaigns against civilians and miscommunications were viewed very negatively. Adams
believed that this could threaten the vitality of Sinn Fein. The two also clashed on abstentionism. Adams work during this time solidified the fact that he would be a leader of the party. Once the split from O’Bradiagh and Adams occurred, Adams became the President of Sinn Fein, the modern political party and O’Bradiagh’s splinter group became known as Republican Sinn Fein.  

The best way to understand Sinn Fein’s stance on politics and the history of Northern Ireland is to examine their numerous documentations throughout the Troubles. The reports from yearly *Ard Fheis*, and the development of Sinn Fein Manifestos serve as means to understand the 1986 split and the current Sinn Fein philosophy. Throughout the development of Sinn Fein, they have believed that Loyalists are the minority in society, because Sinn Fein members view Northern Ireland as part of Ireland. In their document, “Freedom,” which was originally published in 1991, Adams states “The Irish people have never known freedom.” He further describes the British presence in Northern Ireland a violation of the United Nation’s Covenants of 1966, since people have the right to self-determination.

**The Peace Process and Sinn Fein Today:**

As Sinn Fein transitioned to a more stable role in Northern Irish politics and society, the peace process began to gain in international awareness and scholarship. These works do not

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55 Ruairi O’Bradiagh’s Republican Sinn Fein, of which he is still currently the president, is affiliated with the Continuity IRA, a splinter group from the Provisional IRA. The Continuity IRA is a small organization that is designated a terrorist operation in the United Kingdom and the United States. Comprised mostly of former Provisional IRA members, the members of the Continuity IRA also split in 1986, when the Provisional IRA decided to begin discussing the principle behind abstentionism. For more, see Tim Pat Coogan, *The IRA*, New York, 2000, 704-709. The Continuity IRA has just accepted responsibility, along with the Official IRA, another splinter group, for the violent murders which took place in Northern Ireland in March 2009, which are mentioned on page 1.


specifically focus on the peace process, as a major limitation for all of them was that the peace process was just beginning. As the peace process began, many more scholars began to focus on Northern Ireland. Ryan explains that the peace process occurred because “traditional Irish nationalism died with the development of Sinn Fein, the future of Loyalism was uncertain and the British establishment had become exhausted and divided as a result of the Troubles.” Ryan argues that as Sinn Fein developed, and the Cold War ended, they allied themselves with many strategic countries: the United States, Palestine, and South Africa. In doing so, Sinn Fein broadened their sphere of influence, which in turn, also encouraged the development of the peace process. As a result of the end of the Cold War, the United States also became increasingly invested in various worldly conflicts. In Stevenson’s book, he labels Sinn Fein as “A stubborn novice” [in politics] and states that although Sinn Fein expects change from the British, they themselves will not stop “demonizing the British government.” While Stevenson does not advocate for Sinn Fein, their progress has been truly remarkable.

After the 1986 split, Sinn Fein’s political campaign was more solidified, but violence

58 These texts are complex, as the combine several topics within each book. For the majority, these texts discuss the Northern Ireland Troubles in a comparative context. At the point of publishing, the peace process was on the brink in Northern Ireland, and thus this literature is important because it represents an in-between stage of history in the region. They are as follows. Mark Ryan, War and Peace in Ireland: Britain and the IRA in the New World Order, (Boulder CO: Pluto Press, 1994); John Whyte, Interpreting Northern Ireland, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) and Jonathan Stevenson, We Wrecked the Place: Contemplating an end to the Northern Irish Troubles, (New York: Free Press, 1996). Whyte examines possible solutions for the future beyond the constitutional option, including legalizing integrated education or the possibility of a united Ireland by consent among several others. His study is rather scientific and includes several tables and subsequent analysis. Stevenson
59 Ryan, War and Peace in Ireland, 1994, 162
60 Ryan, War and Peace in Ireland, 1994, 34
61 In addition to Ryan’s examination of the end of the Cold War and Northern Ireland, Michael Cox examines the IRA ceasefire of 1997 with the end of the Cold War. See Cox, “Bringing in the ‘International’: The IRA Ceasefire and the End of the Cold War,” International Affairs, 73, No. 4 (1997): 671-693. Cox argues that the end of the Cold War allowed for the IRA to ceasefire because of changes in the wider international order, in regions like South Africa and Palestine.
62 Jonathan Stevenson, We Wrecked the Place, 1996, 183. Stevenson, an unapologetic Loyalist-American, bases his work on interviews from loyalist and nationalist camps, people he describes who “did most of the killing.”
remained commonplace throughout Northern Ireland. Under Adams, McGuinness and Morrison, Sinn Fein continued to strengthen their base of support, but there was still chaos in terms of their relationship with the IRA. In 1986, the Thatcher administration instituted a broadcasting ban on Gerry Adams and Sinn Fein, and the Irish government signed the European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism, made extradition of suspected offenders to Northern Ireland.63 Only a year before, the Irish government had signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement which formally allied the Irish and British governments together to create a solution in Northern Ireland. The Anglo-Irish Agreement built off the Sunningdale Agreement, both of which would contribute to the Good Friday Agreement. The Unionist parties in Northern Ireland were furious with the document, and refused to take their seats in Westminster Parliament.64 As the Irish government became officially involved with the Troubles in Northern Ireland, many nationalists demonstrated their frustration with the Irish government for not becoming involved sooner. The Irish government’s involvement in the Troubles is a puzzling one. While many Irish officials had ties to Northern Ireland and nationalist sympathies, the government did little to fight to regain the territory or support the nationalist population throughout the Troubles. Irish citizens were involved in the nationalist cause during the Troubles, in 1970; a former IRA member in Ireland formed Irish Northern Aid, “Noraid”, which raised thousands of dollars throughout the troubles for the IRA.65 However despite the efforts of Noraid, the Irish government had little state intervention with the exception of the Sunningdale and Anglo-Irish Agreements, until the 1990s.

For Sinn Fein, their relationship with Fianna Fail, the largest political party in Ireland has been a complicated one, much like their relationship with the SDLP. Catherine O’Donnell

64 Brendan O’Brien, the Long War, 1999, 133-4.
65 Peter Taylor, Behind the Mask, 1997, 104.
has explored Fianna Fail and Sinn Fein’s relationship from 1968-2005.\textsuperscript{66} She concludes that there are two basic principles that have guided Fianna Fail on Northern Ireland since the outbreak of the Troubles: natural affinity towards the nationalist community in Northern Ireland and the interests of Irish government in general. At several points, Sinn Fein has proven to be a threat for Fianna Fail in elections, and both parties claimed ownership to the fundamental goals and ideas of the 1916 Irish revolution.\textsuperscript{67} In 1988, with the succession of Albert Reynolds, Fianna Fail became more invested in the Northern Ireland question, and Sinn Fein.

The late 1980s and early 1990s brought a series of changes for Sinn Fein. They continued to distance themselves from the IRA, but without completely letting their ties to the organization die. During this time period, the IRA had reorganized in to smaller cells, and placed new cells in England to continue bombing campaigns there.\textsuperscript{68} The IRA cells in Britain proved to be more ruthless and careless than before. In 1987, an IRA bombing at Enniskillen damaged the IRA and Sinn Fein’s public opinion immensely. When a bomb prematurely detonated at a service honoring British Army soldiers on Remembrance Day, eleven civilians died. The IRA acknowledged a “tactical error.”\textsuperscript{69} This was one of many IRA campaigns gone-wrong. It was clear that the traditional IRA strategy was no longer working the way it had previously. According to Jack Holland, as Sinn Fein continued to develop their political strategy, the IRA leadership would never admit it publicly, but their attempt to maintain their armed campaign was

\begin{footnotes}
\item[66] Catherine O’Donnell, \textit{Fianna Fail, Irish Republicanism and the Northern Ireland Troubles}, 2007. O’Donnell’s research is primarily about Fianna Fail’s decisions as a political party and how they relate to Northern Irish policy.
\item[67] Catherine O’Donnell, \textit{Fianna Fail}, 2007, 60.
\item[68] “The IRA Campaigns in England” \textit{BBC News}, 4 May, 2001. The idea behind small cells in England was that, if caught, they would not be able to jeopardize the larger IRA movement because they did not have knowledge regarding other nearby cells.
\end{footnotes}
proving to be a “disaster.”

In a strategic decision, the following year, Gerry Adams met with John Hume, the president of the SDLP for a round of secret talks, to discuss their goals and issues in working together. The talks were relatively unsuccessful as the two leaders demonstrated to each other that it would be extremely difficult for them to reach a conclusion. As a result of the Enniskillen attacks, in the 1989 elections, Adams and Sinn Fein lost seats to SDLP, which demonstrated that Sinn Fein would need to once again, reevaluate their involvement with the IRA.

As the political landscape in Northern Ireland was changing, the United States government became invested in developing a peace process for Northern Ireland. Under the new Clinton administration, he pledged assistance to the region. The American ties to Ireland and Northern Ireland cannot go unnoticed, as the largest Irish Diaspora settled in America during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The Irish-American connection is a subject of immense research as well. Gerry Adams and Sinn Fein in particular have had a tremendous amount of support from the Irish-American population, including a powerful Congressional lobby. In addition to this support, the IRA received funding and weapons from the United States throughout the Troubles. For these reasons, and the history between the two countries, the British, and particularly the Unionist population equate Americans as nationalist sympathizers. As a result of this, as the involvement of the American government increased, so did the tension.

70 A good history of the peace process is found in Jack Holland, *Hope against History*, (New York: Henry Holt, 1999), 206.


between the British and American governments.

The 1990s began a decade of change in Northern Ireland. Margaret Thatcher was replaced by John Major, who was much more liberal in his policies, and committed to finding a compromise in Northern Ireland. Sinn Fein continued to develop their political campaign, publishing “Towards a Lasting Peace” at the Ard Fheis of 1992. In 1993, Adams began secret talks with John Hume again, and in December of that year, another historic document was signed, known as the Downing Street Declaration, between Albert Reynolds and John Major. The document stated that the most urgent and important issue facing the people of Ireland; both North and South was to “remove the causes of conflict, overcome the legacy of history and heal the divisions from the past.”

The Downing St. Declaration also urged the fact that the majority population would ultimately be able to decide the self-determination in Northern Ireland, who the nation belonged to. The Downing St. Declaration, along with the increase of support from the American government resulted in a one week ceasefire by the IRA.

At the beginning stages of the peace process, Sinn Fein’s involvement becomes paramount. Because of their longstanding ties with the IRA, Adams and his leadership essentially became the communication between the IRA and British government. However, this relationship also limited Sinn Fein, as they were excluded from talks periodically because of their connection to the IRA. In 1994, the broadcasting ban was lifted, allowing Adams and other Sinn Fein officials to be seen and heard—legally since 1986. In addition to the lift of the broadcast ban, President Clinton allowed a visa for Gerry Adams to travel in the United States. This was an enormous triumph for Adams and Sinn Fein, as he had previously been denied visas.

73 Mark Ryan, War and Peace, 1994, 1.
based on his alleged membership in the IRA. The British government was furious and refused to speak to Clinton for a week. The IRA ceasefire subsequently followed in August of 1994, which was countered by a unionist ceasefire in October. These original changes were fragile, as the future remained extremely unsure. The ceasefire lasted two years, but erupted in another bout of violence, questioning the notion that peace could occur in Northern Ireland. 74

The peace process involved several groups, and the involvement of Sinn Fein was a necessary component to the cumulating Good Friday Agreement which was signed on Good Friday of 1998. 75 As a result of the Canary Wharf bombings, Sinn Fein had been excluded from the peace talks. It became imperative that they would be allowed to re-enter talks, and both Clinton and Tony Blair, the British Prime Minister, both admitted it. The Clinton administration pledged their communication with Adams because “it is hard to imagine a process making progress without him.” 76 The Good Friday Agreement was signed by all political parties in government in Northern Ireland with the exception of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). The process was facilitated by Senator George Mitchell, whom Clinton sent as an envoy. Mitchell presided over several talks and meetings to develop the document. 77 The Good Friday

74 The ceasefire ended in February 1996 with the bombing by the IRA of Canary Wharf, in England. This attack caused 85 million pounds of damage, and severely jeopardized the peace process as the British government insisted that Sinn Fein’s involvement with the IRA was allowing the reversion to violence. After Canary Wharf, the IRA had another internal split, with a splinter group known as the Real IRA formed. This group of militants followed James Connolly’s doctrine of republicanism, which stated that the only way to halt the British involvement is through an armed struggle.

75 The Good Friday Agreement is also often referred to as the “Agreement,” “The Belfast Agreement,” and sometimes the “Stormont Agreement” or “Mitchell Agreement.” It was signed on April 10, 1998, and passed in a referendum by the citizens of Northern Ireland on May 23, 1998.

76 Jack Holland, Hope against History, 1999, 206.

77 After George Mitchell’s experience in Northern Ireland, he published a book, Making Peace (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999). The book chronicles his involvement with peace process in Northern Ireland, through his personal experiences in the region over three years. It reads as a journal and provides admirable insight in to his involvement in the peace process. In January 2009 with the incoming of President Barack Obama, Mitchell was named an envoy to the Middle East. Much of his experiences from Northern Ireland will guide him there as he works to develop a peace settlement between Palestine and Israel.
Agreement itself has been a major source of research since 1998. The three-strand agreement focuses on a range of issues, the first focuses on internal political arrangements within Northern Ireland, the second strand examines bilateral relationships between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and strand three examines the multilateral relationships between Northern Ireland, the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic. There has been some considerable discourse on the document. For Sinn Fein, the document was one of triumph but also disappointment.\(^7^8\)

Colm Campbell, et al, examines the Agreement through a lens of legal analysis and constitutional law, concluding that the legal paradigm of the document does not capture the complexity of the Agreement or its politics.\(^7^9\)

While the document is widely speculated, the document provided the framework for Northern Ireland to work towards peace and to stop the violent civil war. For Sinn Fein, the document was the biggest political breakthrough for the political party. For Sinn Fein to accept the document along with the other political parties in Northern Ireland demonstrated the changes that the political party has developed throughout the Troubles. Sinn Fein has remained supportive of the initiatives the Good Friday Agreement proposed in to the new millennium. One of the most important roles Sinn Fein has played throughout the peace process is encouraging the decommissioning of weapons by the IRA. This was a lengthy process, and despite criticism Sinn

\(^7^8\) While the Good Friday Agreement provided many concessions to Sinn Fein and their supporters, like the disbandment of the RUC and other social policies, there was also a crucial component of the document that jeopardizes Sinn Fein’s success in the future. The Irish Constitution which originally claimed ownership to the territory of Northern Ireland, suggesting that for Northern Ireland to reunite with Ireland was no longer a top priority of the Irish government. While this was probably true for many years during the Troubles, the fact that this clause of the Irish Constitution was altered demonstrates another obstacle for Sinn Fein in the future as they continue to pursue their goal of a reunited Ireland. See Rick Wilford, *Aspects of the Belfast Agreement*. (New York: Oxford University press, 2001.)

Fein remained connected to the organization in an effort to facilitate and ensure the decommissioning. In February 2005, both McGuinness and Adams denied accusations that they sit on the guerrilla group’s seven-member command.\textsuperscript{80} The two Sinn Fein leaders remained the voice of the IRA, insisting they received their information from IRA members. The issue of IRA decommissioning was proclaimed successful on September 26, 2005 by the Independent Commissioning Committee Chair, General John de Chastelain.\textsuperscript{81}

Today Sinn Fein is the second largest political party in the Northern Ireland Assembly, and currently holds four ministerial seats. One of which is held by Martin McGuinness, who is Deputy First Minister of the Assembly. In 2002, McGuinness stated “My war is over. My job as a political leader is to continue to ensure a political set of circumstances which will never again see British soldiers or members of the IRA lose their lives as a result of political conflict.”\textsuperscript{82} McGuinness and Adams continue to lead Sinn Fein successfully today. Their history has made them revered by nationalists and disgusted by loyalists. However, the key difference today, is that despite the core differences between the two communities, they have come together in an effort to create a more peaceful society through political means.

Sinn Fein and the overall peace process hold great implications for other regions of the world, particularly the conflict between Palestine and Israel, which is also largely based on religious differences and over the rights to territory. It is hard to imagine a two-state solution for the region of Palestine; however, this is what many scholars and citizens believed about Northern

\textsuperscript{81} Despite the fact that Chastelain and the members of the independent committee have announced decommissioning has been successful, many Loyalists believe that this is not true due to the lack of photographic evidence. See “Timeline: Northern Ireland’s Road to Peace” \textit{BBC News}, 27 January, 2006. Also present at the decommissioning were missionaries from both Catholic and Protestant churches in Northern Ireland.
\textsuperscript{82} Agnes Maillot, \textit{New Sinn Fein}, 2005, 84.
Ireland. As early as 1993, Ian Lustick published a book that examined a comparison between the two regions, and also included the conflict between France and Algeria. As the peace process in Northern Ireland developed, so did the scholarly research regarding the comparison of the Northern Ireland context with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. If Sinn Fein was successful in Northern Ireland there is hope that similar practices can evolve in other regions of the world.

**Conclusion:**

As Agnes Maillot explains, Sinn Fein has become so successful because it presented itself as the voice of radicalism while fitting in to the mainstream. Their process of integration into Irish political life has been a slow and difficult one. Their overarching goals of a united All-Ireland has remained at the core of their political drive, but as the political party developed, they have incorporated many new goals and political strategies. The future of Sinn Fein is promising. From their earliest days existing in the “agit-prop” phase, from a sophisticated political platform, the party has gone through immense development, as a result of the six key points which are outlined in this paper. Much of Sinn Fein’s success has come from the internal push among its leaders. The duo of Adams and McGuinness has remained at the core of the political strategy, and they remain dedicated to serving the interests of members of their community. Their political service has changed the course of history in Northern Ireland.

The conflict in Northern Ireland is not over. However, it is milestones from where it was twenty years ago. The introduction of a power-sharing government has begun to demonstrate that with time, progress can be made. On May 2007, McGuinness and Rev. Ian Paisley, leader of the Democratic Unionist Party were sworn in to government, in a historic moment. McGuinness

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claimed “I believe we are starting on a road to bring us back to peace and prosperity.” People do not forget their past, and unfortunately, this suggests that the legacy of the conflict in Northern Ireland will take more than a power-sharing government.

Northern Irish society must continue to become integrated, particularly through education. An increase of independent schools in Belfast demonstrates that children are beginning to learn in environments that are not dominated by religious instruction. In addition to independent schools, after-school activities for children have become more common, which bring children together from different neighborhoods and diverse backgrounds. Change must occur within the younger generations in Northern Ireland, to not repeat the decisions of their parents and grandparents. The murders that occurred by the Real IRA at the beginning of March 2009 demonstrate that violence is not over in Northern Ireland. Both the Real IRA and the Continuity IRA remain active, even after the Provisional IRA has decommissioned its weapons. These attacks have prompted attention from throughout the world, and echoes from leaders throughout Northern Ireland have commented [the attacks] “will not halt our peace efforts.” “The political process will not and never can be shaken” was the message from Gordon Brown, British Prime Minister. And as the peace process continues to develop, Sinn Fein will remain adamant in their republican beliefs, as they have replaced the IRA as the voice of Irish republicanism. As Sinn Fein continues to pursue their political campaign, the peace process will continue to endure whatever it may face. As long as the peace process endures, the Northern Irish population—all of the population, despite their contrasting backgrounds—will be able to work together to heal the

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wounds from their bloody past.
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