

The Sinn Fein Policy

The Policy Foreshadowed.

"I had come to the conclusion that the whole system ought to be met with resistance at every point; and the means for this would be extremely simple: a combination amongst the people to obstruct and render impossible the transport and shipment of Irish provisions; to refuse all aid in its removal; to destroy the highways; to prevent everyone, by intimidation, from daring to bid for grain or cattle if brought to auction under distress (a method of obstruction that had put an end to church tithes before); in short, to offer a passive resistance universally, but occasionally, when opportunity served, to try the steel."

The above lines were written by John Mitchell in 1847 when the Irish Confederation refused to endorse his policy of immediate resistance to the collection of rents, rates, and taxes. The portion relating to the transport and shipment of Irish goods referred to the exportation of Irish produce in a time when the country was devastated by famine and thousands were dying of starvation.

Parnell's proposition to the Nationalist members, "to withdraw from the British House of Commons and organise the people in Ireland to resist English rule at every point" was defeated on a vote of the party.

The idea of carrying on a campaign of passive resistance to British rule in Ireland is therefore not by any means new, but the Sinn Fein Party is the first party that has attempted to organise the people for this object. It has already succeeded in winning over the youngest and most ardent of the Irish race; it has converted four of the official Nationalist members of Parliament including one of their whips, Sir T. G. Esmonde. At a meeting of the Nationalist Party in the House of Commons it was proposed and seconded that the Party adopt the Sinn Fein policy and withdraw from Westminster. In North Leitrim the member, Mr. Dolan, having embraced the new doctrine, is about to contest the seat against the official Nationalist candidate.

The Movement Realised.

The Sinn Fein Party claim to have a majority in favour of their policy in the County and District Councils in the country, and Mr. Sweetman, chairman of the Meath County Council, at the meeting of councillors from various counties proposed and caused to be discussed at length a resolution to this effect: "that we refuse to collect any more rates or taxes". Thus we see that the Sinn Fein policy will probably in the future be the method adopted throughout Ireland to resist and if possible destroy the domination of "the thrice accursed British Empire".

What is the nature and origin of the Sinn Fein movement? The words Sinn Fein mean "ourselves alone", and those who are acquainted with Ireland know that within the last ten years a movement was set on foot for the restoration of the Irish language, customs, industries, music and art; started and organised by the Gaelic League it was at first strictly non-political and non-sectarian, its ultimate object was an Irish Ireland, everything in language, clothing, manner and sport which was not originally Irish was

banned and ridiculed, and the offenders were termed "Shoneens", "Flunkeys", and "West Britons". The Gaelic League was a decided success and it did not exist long before it had a political party formed independent of all others and having for its object "Ireland a Nation", not in the sense of a British colony, but independent of all external authority. This party was formed on the same basis as Wolfe Tone a century ago formed the "United Irishmen", and like Tone it wanted "to unite Catholic, Protestant, and Dissenter under the common name of Irishman". "Our independence must be had at all hazards; if the men of property will not support us they must fall; we can support ourselves by the aid of that numerous and respectable class of the community, the men of no property". Thus we see the Sinn Fein Party is the child of the Irish education movement, and is alluded to by the Parliamentarians as the "crowd of intellectuals", "armchair agitators", etc.

It sees the Futility of Compromise

The Sinn Fein Party is now possessed of several weekly journals that voice its views. It has also published a large number of pamphlets that have aided considerably in bringing the Party to its present position. In their weekly journals the Sinn Feiners riddle the arguments of the Parliamentarians, they point to the fact that in 1847 the population of Ireland was 9 millions, while today it is about 4 millions after over half a century of labour on the "flure of the House". That the Land Acts were fraudulent and did not even touch the question of the poverty problem, that a Liberal Government is now in office but not officially pledged to Home Rule; in short, that the Nationalist Party is ineffective as a weapon against British misrule in Ireland.

The Sinn Fein Party propose the immediate withdrawal from Westminster of the 82 Irish members and that the £30,000 now annually spent in maintaining this useless weapon be spent in sending consuls to foreign countries to open up markets for Irish goods. That all monies invested in the banks of Ireland at the present time be withdrawn and a People's Bank be formed to lend money and transact all business at interest to cover only the cost of management. That a National Stock Exchange be formed in Dublin. That the people refuse to pay rent, rates, or taxes, and that the County Councils and other such bodies responsible refuse to collect same. That, if possible, no articles from which the British Government derives a revenue be consumed by the people. That the money saved in rent, rates, and administration be used in fixing machinery and starting the disused mills and factories, to revive dying industries and introduce new ones. That, in short, by common consent, by means of duly elected members or a general council of the County and District Councils the people of Ireland will refuse to recognise English law, authorities, or customs, and that henceforth Ireland shall be ruled only by the will of the people of Ireland.

Some of the chief spokesmen of this movement are large land owners and capitalists. Mr. John Sweetman owns a large tract of land in C. Meath, is a county councillor, railway director, etc. Edward Martyn is a landowner of County Galway, a J. P. and the exact reflex of the English capitalist. Sir T. G. Esmonde, Bart, M. P., is a bank director, railway director, and landlord. These and many other connected with the Sinn Fein movement give as their principal reason for supporting it the insecurity of their stock, the railways are not making any profit worth speaking of, the canals are idle, and so on.

But is itself Futile,

From this it is quite evident that if the Sinn Fein movement succeeds profits are intended to rise at the expense of the Irish worker. The Irish capitalist class is still to remain the proud possessor of the land, factories, mills, railways, etc., and readers of this journal know what that means for the poor wretches employed.

The proud boast of the Sinn Fein Party is that Hungary was placed in much the same position as under Austria as Ireland is under England, and that when Hungary established her independence in exactly the same manner as the Sinn Fein movement proposes Ireland should, her trade increased by leaps and bounds, her population increased and new industries were developed, yet we know that today the Magyar is as much a slave as ever, and that there are in Hungary workhouses, prisons, asylums, unemployed, and all the other characteristics of the capitalist system. We know that the trade of Great Britain was greater last year than ever before, and that last year was nevertheless for the workers a year of great unemployment, poverty and privation. Even regarding the present success of the Sinn Fein movement it may be pointed out that the prospect differs vitally from that of Hungary in the important fact that Hungary was almost the equal in population and strength of Austria, and so was able to command political success. Hungary was also helped by the important tactical position it occupied as a barrier against Russian and Turkish advance. But as far as the condition of the people is concerned the Hungarian worker is not one whit better off than the Irish worker, whilst emigrants from Hungary may be counted by the hundred thousand, by whom, it is evident, the foreign exploiters are found at least no worse than the Hungarian masters from whom they flee.

For only Socialism can help the Workers.

In view of these facts it is our duty to warn our fellow-workers in Ireland of the futility of the Sinn Fein policy as far as they are concerned. There can be no relief for the oppressed Irishman in changing an English robber for an Irish one. The person of the robber does not matter—it is the fact of the robbery that spells misery. National divisions are a hindrance to working-class unity and action, and national jealousies and differences are fostered by the capitalists for their own ends.

The crowd of hungry "intellectuals" clamouring for jobs both within and without the Irish parliamentary party do not represent the interests of the working class in Ireland. They do not, indeed, profess to favour other than capitalist interests, provided that the landlord or capitalist be Irish, but the Irish capitalist is in no wise more merciful than the English exploiter. The national sentiment and perennial enthusiasm of the Irishmen are being exploited by the so-called leaders in the interests of Irish capitalism, and the workers are being used to fight the battles of their oppressors. The Irish capitalist rebels against the English capitalist only because the latter stands in the way of a more thorough exploitation of the Irish workers by Irish capital. Let the thieves fight their own battles! For the worker in Ireland there is but one hope. It is to join the Irish wing of the international Socialist working class and to make common cause with the Socialist workers of all countries for the end of all forms of exploitation; saying to both English and Irish capitalists: "A plague on both your houses". For the true battle-cry of the working class in broader, more significant and more inspiring than mere nationalism, and that rally cry is: **THE WORLD FOR THE WORKERS!**

(September 1907)