



This image depicts the Headquarters of an Irish Republican political party, known as Sinn Féin (meaning "Ourselves Alone"), on Parnell Street, in Dublin.

The Sinn Féin (shin FAYN) movement, originally started in 1905, seeks to transform Ireland into a single Republic governed entirely by Irishmen. Currently, Ireland is partitioned in two where:

- Twenty-six Counties form the Republic of Ireland; and
- Six Counties form what is commonly called Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland is a part of the United Kingdom (the UK), where Parliament is based in Britain. The Republic of Ireland's Parliament is based in Dublin.

People in Northern Ireland recognize the British monarch as their sovereign. People living in the Republic of Ireland have no monarch and recognize only the sovereignty of their own Republic.

Before 1998, Sinn Féin supported actions of the IRA (Irish Republican Army) even when IRA members engaged in violence (such as the Brighton Bombing which targeted Margaret Thatcher, then Britain's Prime Minister).

When leading members of the British government approached Sinn Féin to join peace talks, in 1997, leaders of Sinn Féin agreed—on September 9, 1997—to declare they would no-longer support IRA violence or use violence as a political tool.

After the Irish Peace Process resulted in 1998's Good Friday Agreement—achieved on the 9th of April that year—Sinn Féin declared they would rely on a political process to seek changes in Ireland:

*The party led by Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness is the largest of the modern parties which emerged from Sinn Féin. It says it seeks the establishment of a new Ireland based on sustainable social and economic development; genuine democracy, participation, equality and justice at all levels of the economy and society; and a lasting and meaningful peace with unity of purpose and action.*

So ... what do those words really mean? How are we to understand what Sinn Fein members mean when they say "We Ourselves" (or "Ourselves Alone")? Frontline, a PBS series, offers this observation:

*They mean that we can go and achieve our own freedom, we don't need the help of anyone else to do it, but that we have to be a free-standing nation among the nations of the world, and therefore the only answer is Irish unity.*

While Ireland is still split, between the 6 and 26 Counties, how does Sinn Féin view Irish unity? We learn the following from Sinn Féin online:

*Sinn Féin is an Irish Republican party. Its objective is to end British rule in Ireland. It seeks national self-determination, the unity and independence of Ireland as a sovereign state.*

*Sinn Féin is committed to the transformation of Irish society and to a negotiated and democratic settlement. It knows that peace is not simply the absence of violence. Real peace - a lasting peace - is based on democracy, justice, freedom and equality.*

*Sinn Féin has a vision that sees beyond the present conflict and beyond the present phase of Irish history. The party's vision foresees the unity of the people of this island. It is a vision for the redistribution of wealth, for the well-being of the aged, for the advancement of youth, for the liberation of women and for the protection of Irish children. It is a vision for a free Ireland and a free people.*

*Sinn Féin is committed to its peace strategy. It has sought with honesty and integrity to construct a peace process which reaches out and embraces everyone on the island on the basis of equality. Its objective must be for an agreement that will earn the allegiance and respect of all sections of the Irish people.*

Put differently, Sinn Féin does not want the 6 Counties, in the northern part of Ireland, to be a separate country, or nation, or province or to be part of the United Kingdom in any official way.

How could it happen that people in Northern Ireland—who may be heavily Unionist (favoring their Union with the United Kingdom)—would ever want to become part of the Irish Republic instead of being part of the United Kingdom? Sinn Féin has a political plan to accomplish this transformation via peaceful means:

*To achieve these objectives, Sinn Féin backs the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, which the party reached with the other northern parties and the Irish and British governments following multi-party negotiations in Belfast. These negotiations arose from the Irish Peace Process, itself initiated in discussions begun several years ago.*

*Sinn Féin's peace strategy was supported by the end of the armed campaign by the Provisional Irish Republican Army and was endorsed again by the decisions taken at the party's annual Ard Fheiseanna [annual conferences].*

*Through its leadership, the Ard Chomhairle, Sinn Féin says it maintains its goal of a just and lasting peace as part of its agenda for change.*

*In the Six Counties, Sinn Féin is the leading nationalist party. It has four Westminster Mps [Members of Parliament serving in London], 28 MLAs, and 105 councillors. In the 26 Counties, the party currently has 14 TDs and 158 councillors.*

In short, Sinn Féin hopes to change the minds of Unionists by means of a political process. That political process would convince the majority of Northern-Ireland voters that they would be better-off with Northern Ireland becoming part of the Republic of Ireland (thereby severing their ties with the United Kingdom).

The political process also includes an effort by Sinn Féin leaders, such as Martin McGuinness, to encourage people in Northern Ireland, who are upset with British rule and the presence of British police, not to respond to violence with violence.

Despite the change in tactics, since 1998, the threat of violence is still present in Northern Ireland. That is especially true during times of national elections when Sinn Féin candidates have received death threats or have had their homes damaged (with things like paint).

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