

“Why do People Become Dissident Irish Republicans?” John Morrison, University of St Andrews

“A central tenet of the approach below is that our primary objective should be to *understand* those who engage in the behaviour. It is not our job to condemn, to condone or to find some objective ‘truth’.”¹

Introduction

The Northern Irish peace process is internationally recognised as being a success; however it is unmistakable that the Republican threat is still prominent across Ireland, both in the north and the south, as well as in Great Britain. In contrast to the ‘war’ waged by the Provisional IRA the foremost modern day threat to be faced is that posed by small violent dissident groupings, with little or no public support. These dissidents are utilising a different variety and combination of tactics and strategies from those of their Provisional predecessors. In recent years there has been the stated specific targeting of Catholic members of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and members of the British armed forces. However alongside the threat to the security forces the dissidents are also targeting their former comrades in Sinn Fein and across ‘mainstream’ Republicanism. The armed dissident groups who epitomise this current threat are the Real IRA, the Continuity IRA and Oglaiigh na hEireann. With the present and increasing danger posed by these groups it is more important than ever to achieve a greater understanding of the organisations involved as well as the motivations of their individual members. One facet which must clearly be acknowledged is the assessment of why individual Irish Republicans choose their organisational affiliation, in essence why they choose the violent dissident republican route as opposed to ‘mainstream’ or non-violent Republicanism. In light of this the current chapter aims to outline the reasoning behind an individual’s affiliation with a dissident Republican organisation.

¹ White, R.W. (2000). Issues in the Study of Political Violence: Understanding the Motives of Participants in Small Group Political Violence. *Terrorism and Political Violence, Vol. 12, No. 1, Spring, 2000*, pp.95-108. (p.95)

Similar to the work of Rapoport and others the present author has placed a great emphasis on how the individual actors understand and portray their actions and those of their group.² The viewpoints represented throughout this chapter originated as the result of a long series of interviews with both dissident and ‘mainstream’ Republicans which took place between October 2007 and March 2009. This research was carried out as part of the author’s doctoral studies. Throughout the process both leadership and rank and file members of the mainstream and dissident groups were interviewed. These encapsulated interviews with members of the armed as well as the political factions, with some interviewees being active in both. While the PhD primarily assessed why and how the four major splits in the Republican Movement between 1969 and 1997³ took place one of the fundamental facets of the research was to assess why and how individual members made their choices regarding their organisational affiliation. It is the individual elements rather than the organisational factors which are predominantly focused on in the present chapter, specifically why individuals become dissident Republicans. As the opening quote from Robert White suggests the purpose of the chapter is not to condemn or condone any individual’s choices, it is merely to take a step closer to understanding the reasoning behind people’s dissident affiliation. This understanding should in no way be regarded as analogous to condoning or supporting the beliefs and actions of the organisations and/or its members, but rather as a crucial first step in countering the threat. It is proposed that it is by first understanding the individuals involved, and their decision making processes, that one can take the initial steps to successfully countering the threat posed by violent dissident Republicanism, or any other violent organisation for that matter.

While the title of this chapter may allude to a straightforward one dimensional question in truth to answer the question as to why a person may become a dissident Irish Republican one must first of all consider a series of questions, rather than just one which stands alone. In reality it is initially required to assess why the individual chooses the path of

² See Rapoport, D. C. (2000). Series Editor’s Preface. In Bowyer Bell (2000). *The IRA 1968-2000: Analysis of a Secret Army*. London: Frank Cass Publishers. P.viii

³ These are the 1969/70 split between Provisionals and Officials, 1974 between Officials and INLA/IRSP, 1986 between Provisionals and CIRA/Republican Sinn Fein and 1997 Provisionals and RIRA/32 County Sovereignty Committee (now Movement)

organised Irish Republicanism, whether this be violent or non-violent. This assessment will give the researcher a greater understanding as to the initial motivations of the individual and what they wish to achieve from their organisational membership. While it may be assumed that these motivations will largely be in line with the group's objectives it will become clear throughout the chapter that personal reasoning can often times be significantly detached from the purposive goals of the organisation. With the very nature of dissidence one of the fundamental elements of the question is that of why a person chooses to leave the parent organisation. It is this exiting behaviour, and the rationale behind it, which is the initial differentiating element between dissident and 'mainstream' Republican activity and by analysing this the researcher can begin to establish their understanding of why an individual may choose the dissident route. Following this is the analysis of why a specific group is selected for affiliation as opposed to other alternatives, be they Republican or otherwise. The alternatives available are not only alternative organisational membership but also complete organisational disengagement, with no further affiliation with any Republican organisation, and at times a distancing of affiliation with any political organisation be they Republican or otherwise. However even this analysis does not cover all forms of dissident Republicanism.

In order to gain as close to a comprehensive understanding as possible one must also consider those who join the dissident group as their first form of organisational affiliation, and therefore the question of why they exited the parent organisation is entirely irrelevant and obsolete. In place of this the assessment must move from why they became involved in organised Republicanism to an evaluation of their choice of organisational affiliation. Similarly there must be a separate appreciation of non-voluntary exit and dissidence. There are occasions in all forms of human organisations where individual members, and groups of members, have to depart the organisational structures against their own will. This is often times due to their expulsion by the existing leadership. Therefore if and when they form a dissident organisation it must be appreciated that the naissance of their organisational dissidence can have significantly different origins from those of what may be regarded by many as similar groupings. In recent times the presence and rise of 'freelance' dissident Republicans have been

observed across dissident groupings.⁴ This predominantly refers to those former IRA members who offer their services for specific actions taken by individual dissident groups. While they are not officially associated with any particular group their actions can still pose a very serious threat. Due to the freelance nature of their dissident activity the analysis of involvement must be assessed slightly differently. Why have did these Republicans exit mainstream organised Republicanism and continue their involvement as freelancers as opposed to the dissident alternatives? Where possible the question must also be asked as to why these individuals choose to assist dissident groups on specific actions as opposed to others. Finally if one is to fully appreciate the significance of the actions, choices and reasoning of dissidents one must place similar emphasis on the actions, choices and reasoning of those who remain with the parent organisation at a time of split or otherwise. It is only by assessing these choices at variance with each other can one fully appreciate why an individual would become a dissident Republican. As will be seen there are often times similar factors at play with regards to the decisions made by both groups.

Heterogeneity

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of terrorist actors and their actions there must first of all be a clear respect for the heterogeneity of individuals who engage in terrorism⁵ across groups, and even within individual movements and organisations.⁶ This heterogeneity may be analysed and assessed in a variety of ways. However for the purpose of analysing why individuals become dissident Republicans it is posited that two of the most informative heterogeneities to be aware of and appreciate are those of timing of dissident affiliation and prior Republican experience. An understanding of these as well as other factors will contribute to enhancing our understanding of what contributes

⁴ See Independent Monitoring Commission 22, paragraph 2.7

⁵ For the purpose of this chapter any use of the word 'terrorism' refers to the employment of violence or the threat of repeated violence by an individual or group intent on bringing about a social or political effect. The aim of this action is to bring about a state of fear in a wider audience than the direct physical victims of the initial act or threat of violence. A terrorist incident should be defined by the use of violence or the threat of violence to bring about social or political change, not by the specific motive of the perpetrators. Therefore terrorism is a tactic which can be employed by any individual or group, whether they be state or non-state actors.

⁶ Horgan, J. (2005). *The Psychology of Terrorism*. London: Routledge. Pp.30-32 and 74-75.

to these critical choices made by individual actors. With respect to the timing of dissident affiliation choice one must consider whether or not an individual chooses their affiliation at the time of or alternatively a significant time after the relevant organisational split, namely did the individual become a dissident at the time of the group's inception or during a period of time afterwards. It is to be expected that the reasoning for dissident affiliation at the time of a split will be more likely to be intrinsically linked to the cause of the intra-organisational conflict and split than for those who join the dissident organisation during a period significantly detached from the separation of groups. This appreciation for timing however must only be considered as the foundation level to a multi-faceted understanding of dissident affiliation. While considering the timing of initial engagement with the dissident organisation the analysis must similarly assess the level of experience, and organisational rank, of the dissident prior to their decision to dissent. The analysis must distinguish between those who with an extended history of experience and those newly affiliated with organised Republicanism.⁷ Within these considerations one must be aware of the role, if any, played by the actor within the local and/or national leadership and therefore the influence they may have had in, and the knowledge they may have had of, the decision making processes. Parallel to this there must be an appreciation that at times in historically enduring movements, such as the Irish Republican Movement, that there are those outside of the leadership who hold a significant influence in the movement and over members and leadership alike. This influence may at times come from the historical significance of their previous actions or a previously held leadership position. Therefore with the assessment of the level of influence of individual members it is insufficient to merely divide the membership into the categories of 'leadership' and 'rank and file members.' These categories must be further scrutinised so as to acknowledge the different levels of experience and influence which may exist among the two categories. The heterogeneity does not, and the analysis must not, stop with timing, experience and rank. There must be a similar appreciation of the roles which age, regionalism and other factors can play in the decision making process. Within the following pages there will be a careful assessment of the roles which

⁷ Within this assessment it must be acknowledged that the length of time one has been a member is not always analogous to level of experience. This must include an assessment of the level of commitment and activity during the period of membership.

these factors can and have played, while still acknowledging that the factors assessed are far from an exhaustive list of influential variables.

Why do People Become Irish Dissident Republicans?

The modern day focus may be on those members of groups such as the Continuity and Real IRA but in our analysis of dissident Republicanism we must not overlook the fact that the original Republican dissidents of the Troubles are those who shifted their allegiance away from the Goulding leadership of the old IRA, a move which saw the birth of the dissident grouping of the Provisional IRA in 1969. With this extended history of organisational dissidence and split, not just in the same conflict but within the same movement, the opportunity is there to analyse in a more valid and reliable manner the relevant issues and themes which arise in an individual's decision to dissent and switch allegiance from 'mainstream' Irish Republicanism. This opportunity is reflected throughout the present chapter as there is continuous reference not just to the rationale of the post 1986 dissidents, but also to many of those original dissenters from the late 1960s and early 1970s. The process that is modern day Irish Republican activism has seen that group have its label gradually re-defined to that of 'mainstream' Republicans. It has been observed throughout the interview process that the themes involved in the development of the dissension of the original 'Provos', while not identical, displays the same underlying factors as those of the modern day dissidents.

Throughout this piece there is continuous reference to individual reasoning for organisational exit which precedes joining or establishing an alternative Republican group, and resultantly becoming a dissident Republican. The form of exit outlined throughout does not constitute an overall disagreement with the organisational aims but suggests a disparity with a specific attribute, or attributes, of the parent organisation, whether this be a strategy, tactic, personality, goal or structure. Reflecting on the issues which can drive individuals and groups to organisational exit and the development of or enrolment in alternative groups not all individuals who have the same disagreements will react in the same manner. In order to take the significant action of leaving to develop a new autonomous group the individuals must view the conflict at the centre of their exit as

significantly threatening to what they believe to be the organisational identity.⁸ This is supported by Francie Mackey a leading member of the 32 County Sovereignty Movement (32CSM), the group widely believed to be the political wing of the Real IRA. In 1986 when Republican Sinn Fein and the Continuity IRA split away from the Provisional Republican Movement over the issue of elected representatives taking their seats in Dail Eireann Mackey disagreed with this decision, however he did not regard it as an issue which warranted the formation of an independent group or his or other's exit from the organisation.

“At a personal level I disagreed with going into Leinster House, but it wasn't a significant enough issue to create a major split in the Republican Movement.”⁹

Converse to this are the views and actions of Ruairi O'Bradaigh, Daithi O'Conail and others who left the Provisionals to develop the new¹⁰ political an armed groups of Republican Sinn Fein and the Continuity IRA.¹¹ They regarded the dropping of this section of the abstentionist policy, coupled with the removal of Eire Nua¹² a few years previously, as a denouncement of what it was to be regarded as 'true' Irish Republicans.

⁸ Sani and Reicher (1999), Identity, Argument and Schism: Two Longitudinal Studies of the Split in the Split in the Church of England over the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood. *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations*, 2(3), pp.279-300. (p.296); See also Sani, F. and Reicher, S. (1998). When Consensus Fails: An Analysis of the Schism Within the Italian Communist Party (1991). *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 28, pp.623-645.

⁹ Interview with Francie Mackey, June 25th, 2008.

¹⁰ The membership of Republican Sinn Fein and the Continuity IRA did not consider these as new groupings but as an unbroken continuation of the Irish Republican Movement which can trace their position and policies historically. They believed, and still espouse the position, that the Provisionals are the ones who had changed and therefore had moved away from what it is to be true Irish Republicans.

¹¹ Republican Sinn Fein have never acknowledged, and at times deny, the official link between their group and the Continuity IRA however this linkage is widely confirmed, with the support of extensive evidence, by academics, policy makers and the security forces.

¹² With the formal structuring of the Provisionals in the early 1970s there had been the development of a social and economic programme for the movement, *Eire Nua* (New Ireland). This was approved as Sinn Fein and IRA policy in 1971. The central tenet of this programme had been the federalisation of a united Ireland, divided into four federations, one for each province. In the 1980s the Adams leadership believed this to be, and sold it as, a 'sop' to the loyalists and unionists as they would more than likely have command of the Ulster federation and it was voted out of the constitution of the movement. See Feeney, B. (2002). *Sinn Fein A Hundred Turbulent Years*. Dublin: O'Brien Press. pp. 320-321.

“...our attitude was that the people who did that [accept that elected Sinn Fein members could take their seats in the Dail] had broken the constitution.”¹³

This is supportive of the belief of Sani and Reicher that organisational exit is preceded by a change or action perceived to be threatening to what the dissidents regard to be their organisational identity.¹⁴ It is similarly supported by the organisational theory posited by Hirschman who states that quality conscious members will exit when they believe there to be a significant drop in the quality of the ‘product’ produced or espoused by a group.¹⁵ The exiting members of Republican Sinn Fein and the Continuity IRA can be regarded as defining their membership very much on what they believed to be the core values of Irish Republicanism, and central to this was the rejection of what they believed to be partitionist parliaments, Dail Eireann, Stormont and Westminster. In the language of Hirschman their continued membership was defined by an adherence to the ‘quality of the product’ produced by Sinn Fein and the IRA. Central to this adherence was an unremitting rejection of the three parliaments while continuing the armed struggle to achieve a united Ireland. However when there was a significant drop in the quality of this policy, namely an electoral acceptance of Dail Eireann, they could no longer recognise themselves as ‘true Republicans’ if they continued with the Provisionals, and therefore left to form their own group. Countering this it can be proposed that those who remained with the Provisional Movement did not deem this to be a significant drop in the quality of the product or policies being adhered to and promoted by the Movement, on the contrary many believed this to be an improvement in quality and a change necessary to bring about the group’s purposive goals.

While what has been detailed above can be regarded as an accurate reflection of what happened in 1986 it should not be regarded as painting the full picture of why people left the Provisionals, it only briefly details the ultimate rationale of the splitting of the group. This does not always equate to every individual’s motivation for their own personal

¹³ Interview with Ruairi O’Bradaigh, February 20th 2008.

¹⁴ Sani and Reicher (1998); Sani and Reicher (1999).

¹⁵ Hirschman, A.O. (1970). *Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organisations and States*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. (p.47)

dissent, even if they do leave to join this dissenting organisation. Too often the focus can be on the reasoning of the leadership and those others intrinsically tied to and aware of the divisive issue. But not every member is aware of the full context of the disagreement, and can only come to their decision in light of the information which they have at hand at any one time. Therefore in order to gain a fair and accurate reflection of the overall spectrum of membership dissent the reasoning of all levels of the rank and file membership is just as, if not more, important to understand. Many of these members may not be fully aware of the rationale for the organisational schism and therefore their own individual factors may be regarded as independent from the origins of the dissident group. As with initial engagement into a terrorist group a person's exit or dissidence can be regarded as the culmination of a gradual process. This can be true at both leadership and rank and file level. It can be argued that in order to fully understand the origins of Republican Sinn Fein and the Continuity IRA one must start by analysing the aftermath of the 1969/70 split, and the origins of the Real IRA have to be traced back to the aftermath of 1986. Similarly in order to understand an individual's defection often times one must understand the process leading up to this dissent in the years previous. This was reflected in an interview with a leading 32CSM member, who was once imprisoned for her role in a Provisional IRA attack. While she did not leave the Provisional Movement until 1998 her discontent can be traced to the early 1990s.

“My real concern with the Provisional Movement started to come about in the [early] 1990s when I began to feel that the people at the top were more concerned with furthering their own agenda than they were with following the Republican agenda and that began to cause me problems...”¹⁶

This supports the claim that a clear understanding is not achieved by focusing purely on the action of dissent or exit, but by first assessing the origins and process of this dissent. The process of exit and dissidence can be influenced by numerous factors, with some more pertinent than for others. These factors need not always be related to the stated factors of organizational split, or even any ideological, strategic or tactical differences

¹⁶ Interview with 'Una' May 14th 2008.

with the parent organization. The diversity of factors is reflected in the subsequent sections where there are a number of issues focused upon.

Timing

As has been stated here already the reasons behind individuals joining or developing dissident organisations should not be regarded as being uniform in nature. Some of the key factors at play in this deficiency of uniformity is that of context and timing. The individual reasoning for dissidence can vary from time to time and across contexts. One of the most obvious issues of timing is that of whether the dissidence takes place at a time of dissident organisation inception, i.e. does it occur at the time of the split? If it does take place at this time it can be assumed that the rationale for the dissidence of leadership members at least is likely to be intrinsically tied to the reasoning for organisational split. However it must similarly be assumed for those rank and file members, who are not fully aware of the reasoning for the split,¹⁷ that their reasoning will not be as intrinsically tied to the rationale of schism. The assumption that dissidence at a leadership level is intrinsically tied to the reasoning for the split does not stipulate that this reasoning is tied to the *official* reason for the divide. In an interview with a leading member from the Provisional IRA Executive¹⁸ and Engineering Department of the mid to late 1990s, a man who was a founding leadership member of the Real IRA, the reasoning behind the 1997 split is detailed.

“The Army split on practical issues...prior to the split certain weapons were not being used, not allowed to be used. If weapons were there prior to the split, why couldn't we use them? We had new weapons coming from Libya that were never used, or even announced.”¹⁹

¹⁷ At times of split there are rank and file members who are fully aware of the relevant issues, but this does not constitute all members.

¹⁸ For a detailed account of the organisational structures of the IRA see Horgan, J. and Taylor, M. (1997). *The Provisional Irish Republican Army: Command and Functional Structure. Terrorism and Political Violence*, 2(1), pp.1-32.

¹⁹ Interview with 'Conor', January 12th 2009

This quote not only reveals some of the issues at the heart of the organisational split, but also the individual's own personal reasoning behind his own dissidence. Within his role on the IRA Executive and within the Engineering Department, and through strong links with the Quartermaster General of the time, he would have been very well informed of the issues at the core of the intra-organisational conflict as well as the operational capabilities of the IRA at this stage. This reasoning similarly displays a discrepancy between his cited 'practical issues' for the split and the official cited reasoning of acceptance of the Mitchell Principles.²⁰ While the two issues are not completely unrelated the dissident leadership were aware that in order to secure as much support as possible they would have to frame the origins of the new group in a more acceptable manner. With national and international support for the peace process, and a growing appreciation of the value of political solutions among a large slice of the Republican Movement, if they had simply announced that they were splitting on the issue of use of new arms it would have proved near impossible to gain any level of credibility or support. This is a view which was appreciated by the dissident leadership at the time.

*"Representatives from the Army who wanted to split met with the political people (32County Sovereignty Committee²¹) to decide how best to frame the split. We had to be seen to be splitting on an issue."*²²

Following this while the reasoning for exit and dissidence at a leadership level may have originated to a large extent over the issue of use of arms those less informed rank and file members who chose their affiliation on what they believed were the issues of split were not doing so on an entirely informed basis but with the information which had been issued to them by the leadership, be it their national or local leadership. Therefore the reasoning for organisational affiliation, be it dissident or mainstream, is disparate due to levels of information available to the relevant actor. In some instances at times of split

²⁰ A set of principles put forward by Senator George Mitchell in addition to his report on decommissioning which essentially required any paramilitary groups entering in to talks to commit to the use of exclusively peaceful means in the pursuit of their political objectives. Guelke, A. (1999). Political Violence and Paramilitaries. In Mitchell, P. and Wilford, R. (Eds.) (1999). *Politics in Northern Ireland*. Oxford: Westview Press. Pp.29-53. (pp.44-45)

²¹ This was the original name for what is now known as the 32 County Sovereignty Movement.

²² Interview with 'Conor'

potential members, especially those with no previous Republican affiliation, may have little or no idea in any regard for the rationale of schism or the differentiation between the groups. This was quite common in the late 1960s early 1970s when there was a large number of new recruits wishing to join the IRA. These potential recruits at times were not aware of the differences between the Officials and Provisionals, and in some instances in the immediate aftermath of split were not aware of the existence of any division at all. In such circumstances decisions are often times not made on the basis of differing organisational strategies, tactics or goals but often times due to other issues less tied to the ethos and strategies of the group but more to do with the individual's opportunities for membership and the influence of the individuals around them and the regions in which they lived.

“At that particular time the Official IRA was at war as well with the British, so I mean they would be operating at one end of the street shooting machine guns at the army, and the Provisionals would be at the other end. I didn't really know, I was just too young....I didn't really understand it [the difference between the Officials and Provisionals] until I went into prison.”²³

This description by Joe Doherty of his early days as a young Provisional IRA member in West Belfast is similar to the experience of many other young recruits at the time. Their affiliation was not decided by their views on abstentionism, the National Liberation Front or Socialism. The extended beliefs and ideology of the individual groups did not matter to them. At that time they wanted to join the IRA, in their eyes, to protect their communities in the short run. For a number of new recruits at that time their initial involvement with the IRA was not even strongly linked to the aspiration for a united Ireland. The relevance of the timing of their mobilisation and choice of group was not linked to the inner workings and debates within the Irish Republican Movement, it was influenced by what they saw on the Falls Rd., the Short Strand and in the Bogside. They were influenced by their peers and the influential individuals local to them. This is a description which is as true today across both Northern Ireland and the Republic of

²³ Interview with Joe Doherty, February 1st, 2008

Ireland as it was in 1970. What follows now is a description of some of these factors beyond the internal debates and ideologies which play a significant role in an individual's movement into dissident Republicanism.

Influential Individuals

Throughout organisational involvement in the Republican Movement, and within other political and terrorist groups, decisions made by members are often times significantly influenced by the stance or viewpoint of another individual. This individual may be a peer, comrade, leadership member or relative.²⁴ These influential individuals can have either a negative or a positive influence on an individual's actions. They need not even be members of the Republican Movement for their actions and viewpoints to play a role in the decision making process. Throughout the research process every interviewee, without fail, detailed the significant role played by at least one influential individual in their decision making processes, nowhere was this more relevant than at the time of choice of group affiliation. It was found that the beliefs and actions of influential individuals can at times have more of an influence than policy or strategy.

As was detailed in the previous section at the end of 1969 and throughout 1970 there were numerous new Republican recruits assessing whether to join the Officials or the Provisionals. To many of these the intricate ideological and strategic issues involved at the heart of what was first an intra-organisational dispute but was now an *inter-*organisational dispute held little or no significance. However one of the factors which time and again proved vital in their decision making process was that of the position and views of influential individuals. The group they eventually joined was often times the one containing members they could most relate to on a personal level, or held the most respect for. For some the influential individual was a national or local leadership figure; however the choice of others were similarly influenced by the rank and file members of each group. The period of time in the aftermath of the 1969/70 split was on occasion confusing for potential new recruits to the Republican Movement they had to decide between membership of the Officials or Provisionals. This competition between groups,

²⁴ This is not an exhaustive list

and confusion for young recruits, saw a number of young members switch allegiance after their initial recruitment. Often times this was heavily influenced by their negative opinions of the individuals they encountered in their first group, or the positive influence of the members of the group they went on to ultimately join, and at times there was a combination of both.²⁵ One individual who switched initial allegiance was Martin McGuinness who in late 1970 joined the Official IRA initially unaware of the difference between the two groups, or even the existence of two separate IRAs.

“Both of us [McGuinness and a friend] decided that we would join what we believed to be the IRA at the time. Now at that time the IRA was going through its own turbulence in terms of the split and so forth. At that stage my knowledge of who was the IRA would have been like everyone else’s, you would have thought there was only one IRA and this whole turbulence occurred because of different approaches and different ideas and suggestions about how things should go forward. For us we joined what we believed to be the IRA in Derry.”²⁶

However after a period of initial engagement McGuinness realised that the group he had joined was not what he thought he had initially signed up for. His disillusionment stemmed from what he perceived to be the group’s inaction and his dissatisfaction with the local membership he had encountered. However coupled with this push factor of his negative opinion of the Official IRA membership was the pull factor of his respect for and friendship and familiarity with a number of prominent local Provisional IRA members.

“Well I suppose it was mostly being unimpressed by the people that we met [in the Official IRA] after we effectively joined [which pushed us away]. ...In terms of then joining the Provisional IRA, I was familiar with some of the people who were associated with the Provisional IRA. In fact I realised that I was probably more

²⁵ This observation is in line with the description of ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors outlined by John Horgan in detailing disengagement from terrorism. See Horgan, J. (2006). Disengaging from Terrorism. *Jane’s Intelligence Review*. (pp.34-37). P.35

²⁶ Interview with Martin McGuinness, June 23rd 2008.

familiar with some of the people who were in the Provisional IRA than I was with some of the characters I met in the Official Republican Movement. The Keenan family were a leading family in Derry city at the time and I had been a long time friend of Sean Keenan Junior, who is now sadly deceased, and also familiar with his father, and his father's role in the Citizen's Defence Group in Derry, and I was also familiar with the fact that he had spent a very long period in prison as a result of internment, in total from maybe fourteen to sixteen years. .”²⁷

This example of McGuinness, a former leading member of the Provisional IRA and now Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland, displays both the negative and positive influences that certain individuals can have on affiliation choice. While this illustrates the persuasive powers of influential individuals on young less informed new recruits their impact continues right up to experienced and leadership levels. In each of the four major splits from 1969 to 1997 one of the most effective strategies employed to attract support and membership at the time of intra-organisational conflict and split was the use of well respected influential individuals to legitimise the position taken by a specific group or sub-group. These influential voices were used in the preparation for the split, at a personal level as well as at significant membership meetings, General Army Conventions and Ard Fheiseanna. The success of such a strategy is acknowledged by all sides as numerous members, fully aware of the dispute at the heart of the schism, were influenced by the position taken up by respected figures within the movement, people who they trusted. The effectiveness of these influential individuals is clearly illustrated by Mick Ryan, a former leading member of the IRA in the lead up to the 1969/70 split and a leading member of the Official IRA in the aftermath of the split, in the decision making process of a number of Republican members in the aftermath of the split between the Officials and the Provisionals.

“Many people made up their mind on the basis of who was on particular sides, people they trusted and liked more...It was not clear cut hard political people deciding. It was human factors that were deciding why some people went with one

²⁷ *Ibid*

side over another, and this is not in hindsight. The political orientation would have counted but to what degree with certain individuals is unclear."²⁸

The employment of these influential voices was effectively utilised by the Provisionals at both a military and political level of involvement in the lead up to and in the process of the 1986 split. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the 1986 Ard Fheis where Sinn Fein delegates voted on whether or not to drop the abstentionist policy to the Dail. The Adams leadership, who were proposing this change in electoral policy, were able to call upon the support of a variety of influential individuals from both the old and new guard at political and military levels. Similarly the O'Bradaigh and O'Conail faction, who would later go on to form Republican Sinn Fein and the Continuity IRA, sought to legitimise their stance by gaining the support of the well respected Republican leader General Commandant Tom Maguire. However with respect to the use of influential individuals it is clear that the Adams leadership had the upper hand, and this legitimising support from such a respected group of influential individuals proved vital in their maintenance of large levels of support. The chairman of this 1986 Ard Fheis Sean McManus held an ideal position to view the effect which these individuals had.

*"To have people of the calibre of John Joe McGirl get up, other people like Fergie Albert McGovern who would have been from Cavan would have been significant as well. People like Joe Cahill obviously as well, older republicans who had been through the mill, who had seen stuff and I'm sure there were hundreds if not thousands who had seen them as an inspiration, certainly hundreds of delegates who would have seen them as inspirational figures and they would have been to some degree swayed."*²⁹

The role played by influential individuals while significant at the time of split maintains importance throughout all stages of involvement. These influential individuals are needed to retain support and membership, especially in the smaller dissident groups.

²⁸ Interview with Mick Ryan, February 16th 2009

²⁹ Interview with Sean McManus, May 29th 2008.

They not only invoke their own positive influence on members and supporters, but at times the negative influence which the leadership of Sinn Fein and ‘mainstream’ Republicans can have on their membership. The negative impression of the current Sinn Fein leadership among certain individuals, groups and regions is manipulated so as to strengthen and gain membership and support. This is especially prevalent with reference to Sinn Fein’s opinion of dissident Republicans. This is at times manipulated or exaggerated by dissidents in order to promote opposition to the mainstream Republicans among their members, supporters and potential recruits.

“They always have to find a term. I don’t know what anyone else thinks but if he [Gerry Adams] calls me a dissident to me it’s a badge of honour.”³⁰

The above quote is taken from an individual who in his own right could be classed as an influential individual in Republican West Belfast. He was prominent in the development of the Provisional IRA in the area in 1969 however in the aftermath of the 1986 split he exited the Provisionals to support the Continuity IRA and Republican Sinn Fein. This quote is relevant to this section for two main reasons. The most obvious is his utilisation of the critical opinion of Gerry Adams within certain populations to revise the negative connotations normally associated with a label such as ‘dissident’ and transfer a more positive ‘badge of honour’ label onto the term. However it is the legitimacy which he himself, as an influential individual, gives to positioning oneself with the dissidents that is most interesting. It is assumed here that he utilises a similar sentiment when speaking to both potential and existing supporters and members of the dissident community. Without such legitimisation provided by influential individuals it proves more challenging for individuals to associate themselves with the smaller dissident Republican groups.

Regionalism

The geographical location in which a person resides can have a significant impact on them joining a specific group. The influence of this regionalism can derive from the

³⁰ Interview with ‘Roy’, January 23rd 2009

influential individuals living in the area, as well as the historical and modern day circumstances relating to the locale. These geographical areas may be as small as an apartment block or housing estate, or as large as a country or even continent, and therefore with respect to geographical influence on Irish Republicanism one must look beyond whether a person is situated north or south of the border. Terrorist organisations can invariably find it easier to recruit in specific areas as opposed to others.³¹ Within certain areas the organisation's ideals are often times entwined with local aspirations.³² These ideals can be in reference to the purposive goals of a movement or a more specific goal with respect to the local area. A terrorist organisation may have a specific role to play in a geographical region which supersedes the purposive goal of the organisation in the eyes of local members. Such a role may be in regional defence or local policing. If the organisation is providing a specific public good for the local area and its residents this may persuade individuals not just to support the actions of the organisations but they may also be encouraged to join. At a time of split regionalism proves one of the most dominant rationales in choice of whether to remain a member of the parent organisation or join the newly established dissident group. This can be especially true for the ordinary rank and file members whose membership is not as closely tied to ideological and purposive elements. Members often times tie their membership to that of local influential individuals. These may be family members, friends or the local leadership. If a member who they trust and look up to is adamant on joining the dissidents or alternatively staying with the parent organisation this may have a significant influence on the choice made. Tied to this if the vast majority of the membership within a designated geographical area are members of one specific organisation then the cost of membership of their rivals rises dramatically. The most unmistakable example of the influence of regionalism is illustrated in West Belfast where there have been clear divisions with respect to regional affiliations in the process of and aftermath of the Republican splits. In the aftermath of the 1969/70 split the majority of the Falls Rd would have been Provisional dominated areas while areas very close such as Divis St and Leeson St would have been under the control of the Official IRA, with a significant proportion of the residents there siding with

³¹ Oots, K.L. (1986). *A Political Organisational Approach to Transnational Terrorism*. Westport, Connecticut: Green Wood Press. p.54

³² Bowyer Bell, J. (1998). *The Dynamics of Armed Struggle*. London: Frank Cass. p.250

those groups. This has earlier been illustrated by the Joe Doherty quote where he detailed how

“...they [the Official IRA] would be operating at one end of the street shooting machine guns at the army, and the Provisionals would be at the other end.”³³

With the split in the Official IRA in 1974, resulting in the formation of the INLA, regionalism further came into play.

“Even at the time of the split in 74/75 all of the Divis Flats unit and 99% of na Fianna [the youth wing of the Irish Republican Movement] all went to join the INLA and it was the opposite in Leeson Street, 98/99% percent stayed and only one or two left.”³⁴

This dramatic division does not reflect a division of political views or beliefs. This reflects the power of regionalism and the influential individuals within these specific areas. Leeson St and the Divis St Flats are in particularly close proximity to each other, yet the division at this time of schism displays the power and influence of the allegiances of the local leadership and other influential individuals in the area. As is displayed in the example of na Fianna this influential can be particularly visible among young recruits, a finding which is detailed in more detail in a later section.

As with the previously detailed factors the theme of regionalism is just as dominant today as it was in the 1970s. There are specific regions across the island of Ireland where certain groups, be they dissident or ‘mainstream’ Republicans are dominant. One can look to areas such as the city of Limerick as a stronghold for the Continuity IRA. To borrow a previously utilised phrase this is often worn as a ‘badge of honour.’ The local leadership of the area will not only take pride in the strength of their recruits on the

³³ Interview with Joe Doherty

³⁴ Interview with ‘Denis’, February 29th, 2008.

ground in the area, but also those from the area imprisoned for their role in dissident group activities.

“What we say is this there is youth in our organisation in Limerick. Limerick is very strong, Limerick is one of the strongest parts of Republican Sinn Fein in the south, even if you go to any part of the country. They are capable of doing anything...A lot of them would be political, most of them would be political. But within our youth are armed units, among the Continuity. Even now we had one of our members arrested lately, he is in Portlaoise [prison]. We had a lot of people in Portlaoise from Limerick. Going back years and years no matter what movement there was always a very militant element in it.”³⁵

This statement from a Republican Sinn Fein and Continuity IRA activist not only takes pride in the regional involvement in dissident Republican activity, both militant and political, but also in those prisoners from the area in jail in Portlaoise. The power of regionalism is similarly seen across the island of Ireland. Other small clusters and pockets of areas similarly show the dominance of specific Republican groups in a region. The combination of regionalism and influential individuals often times overpowers any political or ideological differentiation. It is by first grasping and understanding these keys features in dissident group selection and engagement that one will recognize the dominant features at play when assessing why people become dissident Irish Republicans.

Age

Throughout this chapter there has been continued reference to the recruitment and affiliations of young Republicans. The importance of focusing on young recruits, especially young males, is supported by the findings of the most recent Independent Monitoring Commission (IMC) reports. In reference to dissident Republican groups its states that:

³⁵ Interview with ‘Frank’, March 11th 2009

“The majority of recruits are inexperienced young males”³⁶

This has been the result of a deliberate targeting of young males on behalf of the various dissident groups in operation. One needs only look to the Republican Sinn Fein press conference in the aftermath of the Continuity IRA murder of PSNI officer Stephen Carroll in March of 2009. This press conference showed the young RSF press officer Richard Walsh positioned beside three young males from the Craigavon area outlining how he believed they had been unfairly treated by the PSNI. This can be seen as a deliberate attempt by the group to appeal in particular to young males, as that dissident group and their militant wing the Continuity IRA would be perceived among some people as being overly populated by old guard traditionalist Republicans, a reputation in need of alteration in order to maintain the survival and existence of the groups.

These young recruits would have no clear memory of the Troubles, and in some cases would not even have been born. Therefore the dissident leadership have the opportunity to glorify active involvement in militant Republicanism. Their positioning of influence within specific areas, as has been detailed above, provides them with the ability to influence, shape and form the beliefs of this youthful population, in some instances with no relevant alternative narrative clearly available to the young recruits and potential recruits. Active membership in a militant group can appeal to a young male’s sense of adventure and rebellion, in combination with a number of other factors some of which have been detailed above. This sense of adventure is not reliant on an in-depth knowledge of the defining ideological issues relevant to a specific group, but on the framing of what active involvement will entail, the status among the peer group available with engagement and a simplified justification based on the aspirations for a united Ireland.³⁷ This is once again resonant of the situation which was in place, particularly across Northern Ireland, during the early 1970s.

³⁶ Independent Monitoring Commission Report 22, paragraph 2.7.

³⁷ Crenshaw, M. (1987). *Theories of Terrorism: Instrumental and Organisational Approaches*. In Rapoport, D.C. (Ed.) (2001). *Inside Terrorist Organisations*. (pp.13-31). London: Frank Cass p.19; Crenshaw, M. (1985). An Organisational Approach to the Analysis of Political Terrorism. *Orbis*, pp.465-489. (pp.473-478); Horgan (2006), p.34; Horgan, J. (2009). *Walking Away From Terrorism: Accounts of Disengagement From Radical and Extremist Movements*. London: Routledge. p.143; White, R.W. and Fraser, M.R.

“At that stage there was three of us from the bottom of the Falls Road, Divis St area and this guy approached us and asked if we wished to join the Republican Movement. Dream come true. ‘Certainly, yes, incognito, cloak and dagger, a chance to do something.’ In yourself you were a big lad, you were sworn in it was ‘Sssh don’t say this, don’t say that.’”³⁸

The above quote displays how easy it can be to appeal to a young male, in this case a thirteen year old boy, to join a violent Republican grouping. It was the status and adventure of membership and involvement which appealed to the young boys, rather than any particular desire to achieve the national or even local goals of the movement. While this case is an example of young male recruitment in 1970 this is undeniably relevant today. The findings of the IMC report are backed up by a statement which has already been referred to earlier in the chapter in relation to the Continuity IRA.

“What we say is this there is youth in our organisation in Limerick. Limerick is very strong.”³⁹

Taking all of this into consideration a strong ideology or purposive goals will not be sufficient to attract a significant number of new young recruits to any organisation. The leadership must therefore be able to put in place sufficient personal and social incentives to attract and retain recruits, and these at times may be supported by material incentives. If an organisation is unable to retain and attract recruits the group itself will decline and cease to operate.⁴⁰ Some members may even join an organisation without even being fully aware of the purposive goals of the group, these are often times later learned

(2000). Personal and Collective Identities and Long Term Social Movement Activism: Republican Sinn Fein. In Stryker, S., Owens, T.J., and White, R.W. (Eds) (2000). *Self Identity and Social Movements*. (pp.324-346). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. p.325; Irvin, C.L. (1999). *Militant Nationalism: Between Movement and Party in Ireland in the Basque Country*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. p.34

³⁸ Interview with ‘Denis’

³⁹ Interview with ‘Frank’

⁴⁰ Oots, K.L. (1989). Organisational Perspectives on the Formation and Disintegration of Terrorist Groups. *Terrorism*, 12, pp.139-152. (pp. 143-144)

through active involvement with the organisation. Without the continued recruitment of these young members these dissident organisations will not last for any significant amount of time.

Change of Organisation

Traditionally when looking at dissidents one would focus on those who move from one group to another in the aftermath of a split between the two organisations. With respect to dissident Republicans such splits have seen the former members of the Provisionals joining or setting up the Continuity and Real IRA, and former Official IRA activists developing and joining the INLA. This concentration can develop to assess similar movements away from the parent organisations at a time other than the split. However this transfer of groups need not always be from the parent organisation to their own dissident groupings. There are cases within the Irish Republican context where individuals, or groups of individuals, have moved from one dissident organisation to another. One such example is that of a large portion of the INLA and IRSP membership of Limerick and Clare moving over to the Continuity IRA and Republican Sinn Fein in 1998. If one is assessing these groups on purely ideological and political grounds this movement, and especially the acceptance of these new members into CIRA and RSF, would seem to be counterintuitive to what would be expected. The leadership of the CIRA and especially RSF go to great lengths to frame themselves as the only 'true' Republican Movement, and dismiss and disparage the actions and beliefs of all others who had taken a different course at any time during the history of the Irish Republican Movement. They are publicly wary of those who have historically taken an 'extreme socialist' political standpoint or criticised and disposed of the abstentionist policy which they see as the cornerstone of Irish Republicanism. This standpoint would suggest an inherent distrust of all members past and present of the Irish Republican Socialist Movement or the Official Republican Movement. It was these individuals who they moved away from during the split of 1969/70 when they were then part of the Provisional Movement denouncing the Goulding leadership of the Irish Republican Movement, a split which went on to shape modern day Irish Republicanism. However when the case of the movement of Clare and Limerick INLA and IRSP members is looked at it is clear

that ideological and political beliefs and concerns played little or no part in the choice of organisational affiliation, or acceptance and recruitment into the movement. This departure took place in the aftermath of the 1998 INLA ceasefire, when it became clear to the dismay of these members that their organisation, the INLA, was no longer going to continue with the armed Republican struggle. However they still believed in the viability of an armed struggle in the pursuit of a united Ireland. At this stage they viewed the pursuit of this purposive goal to be more important than any political or ideological standpoint.

“There is an armed struggle and they [RSF and CIRA] hardly have deviated since 1921, they have the same policies, there is a lot to be said for it. The struggle is above everything else, there is nobody bigger than the struggle, not Leinster House Stormont or Westminster or any of those places. The struggle for national reunification of the country, that would be a priority....The Continuity or RSF was the only group I could see holding on to the Irish Republican end of things. The Provos had accepted, had a ceasefire and soon afterwards they decommissioned, we could see all this coming on board. The Provos asked me to join them, but I wasn't going to join the Provos.”⁴¹

The above quote from Patrick Kennelly outlines his, and his former INLA comrades', justification for joining Republican Sinn Fein. For this grouping, a collection of individuals with extensive experience in and knowledge of the armed Republican movement, political and ideological beliefs were surpassed by the continuation of the armed struggle. Therefore a particular political ideology was not as important in this decision as was the continuation of the armed struggle itself. This further supports one of the fundamental proposals of the present chapter that in order understand why a person becomes a dissident Irish Republican, or a specific kind of dissident Republican, that the reasoning is often times independent of the political and ideological stance taken by a particular organisation and is more reliant on a rationale external to these beliefs.

⁴¹ Interview with Patrick Kennelly, March 10th 2009

Freelance Dissidents

While a number of dissidents will choose to change organisational affiliation there are similarly those who have decided to continue their Republican activism in an independent or freelance manner. These individuals will at times offer their 'services' to a variety of armed dissident Republican groups for specific actions. The growing threat of freelance Republicans has been acknowledged as being very serious in nature.

“There are...now indications that former republican terrorists have as individuals provided services in some instances to dissident republican groups, which even if occasional can significantly add to the threat.”⁴²

These individuals are often times recruited for their specific skills for an individual action by the local or national leadership of the dissident group. Similar to the case of those Republicans switching organisational allegiance from the INLA to the CIRA and RSF the continuation of an armed Republican struggle outweighs any individual ideological or political belief structure. The freelance nature of their activism, and their organisationally independent Republican belief structure, leaves them open to assisting a variety of Republican groups in individual campaign or actions.

“I probably agree with most of what they [32CSM] say. I also agree with a lot of what Republican Sinn Fein say. I also agree with quite a lot of what the INLA would say, I would have a lot of common ground with a lot of different groups. But I wouldn't be comfortable lending my total allegiance to one group...If it came to the bit, and it is not going to come to the bit, but if it came to the bit where I was needed to do something and I approved of it, I would certainly do it. But as it stands it is all different little groups and I believe that there is so little separating them all that they are not necessary.”⁴³

⁴² Independent Monitoring Commission Report 22, paragraph 2.7.

⁴³ Interview with Dolours Price, April 21st 2008.

Dolours Price, the former Provisional IRA activist, outlines above the rationale by which she and others justify their organisationally independent Republican activism, and at times their association with the actions of specific dissident groupings. Her justification moves on to the hypothetical situation whereby she is requested to aid one of these groupings. She has outlined what is probably true for a number of independent dissident Republicans, that they would be willing to take part in an action for a number of these groups if it is something which they approved of. Therefore unlike the organisationally tied down Republicans they can in a sense pick and choose the actions they wish to be associated with be they armed or political.

If the dissident Republican threat is to be successfully countered one must not only focus on the dissident groups but also on those freelance dissidents operating independently of organisational ties and leadership orders.

Conclusion

The purpose of the present chapter has been to offer an understanding of the rationale behind an individual's decision to become a dissident Irish Republican. Throughout the chapter the language used and the studies referred to have often times originated in the organisational literature. This approach has enabled the researcher to take a more dispassionate and focused approach to the issue of dissident Republican affiliation. It provides a basis whereby one can move beyond the moral debates of whether these groups and their motivations are 'right or wrong,' and allows one to focus on understanding the basic rationale behind organisational and personal decisions made by members.

While these dissident Republican groupings often times define themselves due to their political and ideological belief system this is not always reflected in the reasoning behind a person's decision to become a dissident or in their choice of dissident affiliation. An analysis of the interview data gathered during the author's doctoral research has pointed to the importance of the factors of *timing*, *influential individuals*, *regionalism* and *age*. While not an exhaustive list by any means if one is to come close to an understanding of

dissident group affiliation and selection the importance of these issues must be acknowledged and appreciated. It is this understanding which must first be in place before any policy is developed to counter the modern day threat posed by these small but dangerous groups. The factor of *regionalism* would suggest that any strategy must not be developed solely at a national level but must also focus on the individual areas, no matter how small, where there is a prevalence of dissident membership and activity. Policy makers and the security services must appreciate the heterogeneity of dissident affiliation and the different rationales and justifications utilised for dissident activity. This regional specific focus must not just concentrate on the dissidents themselves but must also provide a safe environment where alternative peaceful voices can be heard. Often times, in certain areas, this alternative voice will not be respected if and when it comes from governmental politicians or ‘mainstream’ Republicans. Within each region there will be different *influential individuals* and groups who may be listened to and respected by potential members and supporters of, as well as those already affiliated with, the dissident groups. It is vital that the young people in these areas are not blinkered in their beliefs by the glorification of armed struggle, and the fictional adventure provided by armed Republican activism. It is a necessity that they are aware of the significant steps which have been taken through a peaceful political process.

Without these young recruits the dissident groups are not able to survive. Therefore any attempt to counter the modern day violent dissident threat must not only focus on the leadership and influential individuals within these organisations but must similarly attempt to deter the engagement of young males in particular in joining these groups. Arrests and judicial sentences alone will not succeed in doing this. The cornerstone of any initiative to counter the threat posed by the Real IRA, Continuity IRA and Oglai na hEireann must be an understanding of these groups and the motivations of their members and supporters. It must be clear that the threat is not posed by dissident Republicanism, there is nothing wrong with vocalising one’s Republican or Nationalist viewpoints or an opposition to the policies and decisions of the Sinn Fein leadership. The problem is when those dissident Republican views and beliefs are portrayed through violence and

terrorism. Therefore any attempt to counter the threat must not focus on dispelling dissident Republicanism, it must aim to counter *violent* dissident Republicanism.