

85 Charlotte Street
Ballymoncy,
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BT53 6AZ
Tel. 012656-62235.
18th. October 1999.

Dear *Mamma*

The enclosed statements/letters/articles were prepared on behalf of the New Ireland Group for publication during this week. However it was learnt that Mr. Gerry Adams, leader of Sinn Fein, was preparing a seminal statement in an endeavour to show understanding of Unionist anxieties and to reduce the tension inherent in the present stalemate situation. This statement has now been made and was recorded in full in Irish daily newspapers on October 18th.

As we had no wish to jeopardise the positive effect of any such statement it was decided not to pursue the issue of publication of our material but instead to circulate members of the New Ireland Group and others who might be interested especially people who may be inclined to take issue with us. We will also be circulating to selected opinion makers. We invite response.

Pressure Group:

While there is no doubt that elected politicians show courage in speaking out in our divided society, we believe that there is also a place for groups such as ours to stimulate debate and open up areas of social and political space so that the debate may broaden out.

With limited resources the New Ireland Group has been pursuing its objectives for 18 years. Although membership is small (in the order of 70-100) a number of people who have subsequently gone on to take up prominent positions in political parties have spent time with us.

Open Meetings:

Our next meeting, in the Ulster Peoples' College, 30 Adelaide Park Belfast, will be held at 7.30pm on Wednesday 17th. November, 1999. **The subject: New Politics, New Society? *Is there life for the politics of left and right beyond the politics of Protestant and Catholic?*** The main speakers will be Professor Liam O'Dowd (Sociology, Q.U.B.) and Anne Carr (Local Councillor)

David Irvine of the P.U.P. and Eamonn McCann, journalist and broadcaster will be there to participate in the discussion. The usual format is as follows: Coffee, Introduction, Main Speakers (15-20 minutes each), OPEN discussion, Summary. The meeting stops promptly at 9.30 pm; meetings are usually recorded and subsequently the main points are summarised; the main speakers are shown the summary as part of the final edit before print out and circulation. Contributions made by non-members are not attributable so that they do not have worry in this respect.

Summary of Aims and Role, and Programme of Open Meetings are enclosed.

Yours sincerely,

John
John Robb, Consensor.

respect the main focus has been on the 'commitment' of the Sinn Fein representatives even though one might be bold enough to ask if, out of 108 well paid elected participants, all of the others are fulfilling their obligation in this regard "*to use any influence they may have*", to achieve the decommissioning of all paramilitary arms .

Of more immediate import is the impasse between the Unionist party and Sinn Fein over the issue of 'prior decommissioning', **an issue which was brought into life by the British Prime Minister yet which was not within his gift for the simple reason that it was not included in the Agreement.**

Important though decommissioning is, a question of more concern for many people is whether Northern Ireland will have elected accountable government in place sooner rather than later. As it stands at the moment, Unionists seem adamant that they will not enter into an Executive along with Sinn Fein unless the PIRA lays aside weapons for verification by General de Chastelain or Sinn Fein disowns its associates in the PIRA wing of the Republican Movement.

Knowing that the cease-fires came out of stalemate and aware of the historical legacy in the use of weapons for political purpose in Ireland it is very unlikely that appeals from traditional opponents will ever produce the longed-for result; in any case, to call for the disowning of the PIRA by Sinn Fein is to call for the creation of a state of affairs in which Sinn Fein would no longer be able to use whatever influence it has in accordance with what has been agreed (Decommissioning, page 20, Clause 3). Should the PIRA choose to ignore the May 2000 deadline -which seems highly likely- is Sinn Fein's capacity to influence-whatever it is- no longer to be encouraged?

Confirmation of intent:

It is within General de Chastelain's remit to comment on whether potential participants for an Executive are "continuing to work constructively and in good faith with the Independent Commission and to use any influence which they may have, to achieve the decommissioning of all paramilitary arms within two years following endorsement in referendums North and South of the agreement *and in the context of the implementation of the overall settlement.*" (our italics).

Thus far, from what we can glean from what the General has said, or not said(!), no-one seems to have been singled out for criticism in this regard.

Once the Executive has been set up -and there can be no "overall" settlement without it-, the issue of the deadline, in the context of other deadlines already broken, should not become pretext for the rejection of an agreement which received such overwhelming support from the people, a degree of support which, being consensual, will gradually erode residual paramilitary effectiveness .

We therefore conclude that:

- (i) Even allowing for the best intentions of the Sinn Fein leadership , the PIRA is as unlikely to decommission in the foreseeable future as was the UVF to hand over its weapons when it was requested to do so in order to help the British war effort in 1914!
- (ii) Much as so many people may wish it otherwise, the Agreement in no part affirms that 'prior decommissioning' by paramilitaries is an absolute obligation before democratically elected representatives are allocated seats on the Executive in accordance with the d'Hont formula. Regardless of how persuasive the relevant politicians may be it is those who hold the guns who, in the final analysis, decide what to do with them. But if the public at large give full-blooded support for a Northern Ireland Executive in the

respect the main focus has been on the 'commitment' of the Sinn Fein representatives even though one might be bold enough to ask if, out of 108 well paid elected participants, all of the others are fulfilling their obligation in this regard "*to use any influence they may have*", to achieve the decommissioning of all paramilitary arms .

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Peace Process : Disarming Impasse II.

EDITOR: ARTICLE OR LETTER:

85 Charlotte St.

SECOND OF A SERIES!

Ballymoney

Co. Antrim

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(Dear Sir),

This article is a follow-on from that which was submitted to you yesterday.

Pledges:

In the **Declaration of Support, Clause 4, [page 1] of the Good Friday Agreement** the participants in the multi-party negotiations reaffirmed their "total and absolute commitment to exclusively democratic and peaceful means of resolving differences on political issues" and their "opposition to any use or threat of force by others for any political purpose...."

In the **Pledge of Office, Clause (b), [page 10]** the participants are committed to "non-violence and exclusively democratic means" while **Clause (f)** commits them "to support, and to act in accordance with, all decisions of the Executive Committee and Assembly".

A serious situation would therefore arise if any party in the Executive should refuse to participate in a general condemnation of a paramilitary outrage for this could place it in breach of its obligation under clauses (b) and (f) of the Pledge of Office.

*The Assembly has the power, **Strand I, Clause 25 [page 7] of the G.F.A.** to initiate a process of sanction on any person or group who are in breach of their Pledge of Office.*

Because the G.F.A. received such a huge endorsement and because its supporters want to see the Executive up and running, any persons in such breach would inevitably find themselves losing the public backing on which political parties are ultimately dependent.

¹Seismic Shifts:

At times it seems that unionists do not appreciate the seismic shift which occurred when the G.F.A. was so overwhelmingly ratified by the people of Ireland as a whole; the mandate of the Irish people as far as republicanism is concerned had shifted profoundly from that which had previously prevailed as a result of the outcome of the 1918 general election, the last time that the people of Ireland had voted together on a common issue.

The unionist people are unlikely to get any other deal which could command the support that is now available to them "in the context of the overall settlement". The pendulum of history is not swinging in their direction yet there is much going for them in the setting up of an Executive. As a majority, the "unionist family" would not only have significant influence but would also be in a position to observe and take action concerning the bonafides of the other members.

Republicans too have much to gain from a working executive in which they can clearly demonstrate that their war with the unionist minority in Ireland is over for good. **Even though 'prior decommissioning' is not part of the GFA, the reality is that the British Prime-Minister led many unionists to conclude that it was and unionists along with the rest of us are impaled on this hook. In our view, as we observe the pendulum of history, the Republican Movement should now announce to the world that the war is indeed over** * . With the release of tension which this could bring to the Protestant unionist community together with the daily increase in commerce between the two parts of Ireland, Gerry Adams might well find the accomodation which he seeks for the determination of a New all-Ireland in ten rather than the fifteen years which he has predicted. And how much better its foundations would be if the threatened Irish minority began to feel challenged and excited by the prospect rather than menaced by it.

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* Note Gerry Adams' statement printed in full, Irish Times, Oct. 18th. P. 6

How then may we overcome the present decommissioning impasse with its potential for disaster? At the expense of some repetition of previous statements on the subject, the following very brief synopsis is submitted for further consideration.

Decommissioning, disarming, de-militarisation:

General de Chastelain and his International Commission might be invited to validate the storing, audit and on-going monitoring of all weapons so that there would be no loss of face or implicit 'surrender' which could be the case if a selective process was used.

Thus we should encourage all arms holders to submit their arms for inspection.

British Army:

The obvious reduction in the presence of soldiers on the streets is welcome to those of us who look forward to a return to normality. The disappearance of soldiers from the streets would provide paramilitaries with visible evidence that de-militarisation is being taken seriously by the powers that be. The objective should be to leave only a minimal detachment of soldiers here solely for maintenance duties on property owned by the War Office. All superfluous weaponry to go to Britain and that remaining to be under the observation of General de Chastelain.

Police:

Provided paramilitarism is clearly seen to be on the wane, a scaling down of police weaponry is the reasonable expectation of civic society. Weapons would, of necessity, be retained for self-protection in dealing with sophisticated criminals. It is twenty seven years since a chairman of the police federation stated distinctly that the police should not have to act like or be perceived as "a frontier defending paramilitary force" that it should provide a service rather than being perceived as a force.

Paramilitaries:

In a context shorn of overtones of humiliation or 'surrender', we would hope that Loyalist and Republican paramilitaries would play their role in the disarming process by inviting General de Chastelain to inspect their weapons after they have been placed in armouries to be guarded by their owners before being sealed there with the General as witness. The General, along with aides of unimpeachable integrity,

General de Chastelain to inspect their weapons after they have been placed in armouries to be guarded by their owners before being sealed there with the General as witness. The General, along with aides of unimpeachable integrity, should be the sole custodian of information concerning the inventory and on-going monitoring of all weapons which come under his scrutiny.

If and when the weapons are finally *set aside*, their owners should be offered generous compensation by the state thus confirming that they were not 'surrendered'.

Civilian weapons :

Consideration should be given to the offer of an amnesty with compensation to the owner of any unlicensed 'civilian' weapon handed over voluntarily to the authorities by a given date.

All licensed weapons should be called in by the General for inspection, re-registration and then, using very strict criteria, considered for possible re-licensing for very specific purpose. Subject to right of appeal through the courts, all weapons not licensed for use within a period of five years to be destroyed and their owners compensated appropriately.

Understanding:

An understanding of the effect of the age-old Anglo-Irish and Irish sectarian conflict on both Republican and Loyalist consciousness is essential if lethal weapons are to be processed out of our political experience. An understanding too of how the cease-fires of 1994 came about is also vital -the role of the prisoners, the acknowledgement of stalemate, the non-existence of 'victory' or 'defeat' in the 'war' between the British Army and the PIRA and the role of the increasingly active Loyalist paramilitaries at that time. In particular, it is vital that we hold on tenaciously to the ground which was captured by the Agreement "overall" and by the overwhelming support which was demonstrated for it. On behalf of the New Ireland Group, John Robb and Jack McDowell.

CONCLUDING POINTS

Hard line republicans might consider if it is not to their advantage to initiate a magnanimous statement ** to the effect that the war is indeed over, the start of a process that could lead ultimately to the overall de-militarisation of our heavily armed society. Would such not be likely to expedite the day when, by referendum (Annex A, Schedule, 1, page 3 of the Agreement), a significant majority of voters in Northern Ireland would decide to vote for an all- Ireland accommodation?

Mandates:

Over the years the Republican Movement derived a mandate for action from the 1918 General Election when only four counties poled a unionist majority. That mandate was altered in a fundamental manner by the outcome of the referenda on the G.F.A. when 80% of the voting people of Ireland indicated that they were prepared to accept consensual devolved administration in Northern Ireland. This flew in the face of traditional republican attitudes regarding the partition of Ireland. In doing so those who voted for the Agreement went even further by demonstrating that they were, within the context of the *overall* Agreement, to amend a 'constitutional imperative', the irredentism implicit in Articles 2 & 3 of the 1937 Irish constitution.

Symbols of anxiety:

The symbols of former British domination in Ireland are still there for all to see not least in those parts which are festooned with Union Jacks but to-day the significance of those symbols in social and political terms has diminished dramatically and significantly. In times past, many of the Unionist people who held little or no real power were nevertheless able to derive much reassurance by identifying with the symbols of power as expressed through the culture of empire. Such is no longer the case; the same people now experience a very real sense of anxiety and insecurity with regard to their future. To use a cliché, the unionist/loyalist people of Northern Ireland need 'confidence building measures' and the greatest of these will come when the Republican Movement as a whole -all of it- realises that it has a significant role to play in this respect -when it decides to initiate the laying aside of weaponry.

** Note Gerry Adams' statement printed in full, Irish Times, Oct. 18th. Page 6

Orange and Green:

The day may therefore be at hand when all true republicans will consider once again the most enduring implication of the Tricolour. Brought from Paris by Thomas Meagher in 1835 it was brought as a symbol of hope; of hope that one day the two main historic traditions in Ireland might live together in peace. As symbol of the noble sentiment of the founders of republicanism (1790s), that Catholic Protestant and Dissenter might live together in harmony, the flag is sullied if and when it is used as symbol of any desire for role reversal rather than as hope for liberation of us all. There is danger that implicit in some at least of the Tricolour flying in the Northern 6 counties is statement of separation from fellow Irish neighbours rather than expression of hope for the harmonising of difference in order to go forward into the future together.

In a situation which has changed around so much it is perhaps timely to ask if the Orange tradition as represented in the Tricolour has not at least some cause to wonder how it is going to fare in the New Ireland of to-morrow.? In other words, can the Orange tradition, however quaint it may seem as we enter the third millennium, look forward to citizenship of a nation which does truly "treat all its children equally"

We have come a long way; we have still a long way to go. The war is over; it's time to go forward in peace. Were the military wing of the Republican Movement to initiate a major gesture on the weapons front or even an historic statement** of understanding of the radical change which has come about in the respective positions of the two main historic traditions on this island it could well have an unlocking effect on goodwill presently suppressed by uncertainty, mistrust and much anxiety. Were the rest of us prepared and ready to respond generously then the road ahead to the building of a truly New and democratic Ireland accountable to the people of Ireland might at last have a chance of opening up to us all.

On behalf of the New Ireland Group, John Robb, Consensor.

CONCLUDING POINTS II

In these comments we are acknowledging the point at which we have arrived in our long history of Hope and Disappointment and we urge everyone to take risks for Hope. Even though both have still some way to go, the Republican Movement and Unionist people have moved far further than either would have countenanced not so long ago.

Republicans had to change their constitution in order to allow for other changes that flew in the face of genuine fears and resentments of many traditionalists. Agreement was sought and found to enable acceptance of the proposed amendment to Articles 2 & 3 of the Irish Constitution albeit in the context of the working of the *overall* agreement. This could not be undertaken lightly for the '37 Constitution related pretty directly to resentment felt following the outcome of the 1918 general election when only 4 counties in Ireland had unionist majorities and Sinn Fein had topped the poll in both seats won and votes cast. In spite of that, the Westminster administration refused to acknowledge the mandate for Irish independence.

In the majoritarian interpretation of democracy of that time, not only was Ireland denied its independence but the U.K. held onto 6 counties even though two of them, Tyrone and Fermanagh had not had voting majorities in favour of the Union. Resentment spilled over first into the Anglo-Irish war of 1919-21 and then into the Irish civil war so that Ireland became both re-drawn and quartered, civil war in the 'Free State and Sectarian war in the North.

With such a legacy of bitterness it is little wonder that the 1937 constitution had irredentist clauses included in it. Likewise it is little wonder that for traditional members of the Republican Movement the amendment of these articles was and still is fraught with difficulty.

But that was not all! The Republican Movement had to be persuaded by its leadership that the time had come to deal with other matters also deemed to be immutable, namely the ending of abstentionism in the North of Ireland as well as in the South, indicating willingness to enter into a Northern Administration with unionists, acceptance of the Northern six counties as part of the United Kingdom for as long as a majority here so wish it to be albeit within the context of the overall agreement. The Agreement which they endorsed and for which they received support is as far as the rank and file would let them go and, as such, it is the guarantee that they have against being pushed beyond the barely tolerable limit.

Unionists too have had to make seismic shifts in relation to previous long-standing certainties and assurances: on the job front as the new equality culture began to bite: on the symbolic front as the significance of historic symbolism was undermined in a changing world: on the skills front as the relevance of traditional skills has changed: on the control front as once secure locally controlled industry and commerce has moved away from them: on the cultural front as they have witnessed by comparison with the fall of empire

culture the rising self-confidence and self-belief of people in the cultural explosion which has come over Ireland in recent times. And all this at a time when by contrast a painful reassessment is taking place in the archipelago as a whole of what it means in to-days world to be British.

While nationalists have suffered the grief of bereavement from the action in their own country of what is perceived as external sources of power, unionists have suffered the grief of bereavement involved in defending against relentless attack on what they held as dear to them. One of the great contemporary differences between the two main traditions is that nationalists know in their heart that the momentum of history is moving in the general direction in which they want to go while so many unionists feel in theirs that movement out of the union and into a United Ireland is all but inevitable and many face the future in confusion and anxiety for they cannot conceive of how, as a people, they will cope with yet another seismic shift in their traditional position. Little wonder they feel demoralised and defensive. Little wonder they feel that "they have no more to give." That is why 'New Ireland' as distinct from 'United Ireland' must not ever become mere semantic distinction; United Ireland has implied, in the mind of those most opposed to the ending of partition, the absorption of the 6 northern counties by the 26 southern ones and as everyone used to know 6 into 26 will not go!! New Ireland, on the other hand, invites the free and equal participation of all its citizens in its creation. In other words it should strive to challenge all and threaten none.

Perhaps we didn't previously realise just how wide is the hidden gulf between the two main traditions. In spite of moving as far as they have towards each other there is still some way to go in the search for accommodation in trust, equality, friendship and sharing.

In striving for fair play for all, those who were once in control are bound to feel in the search for equality a loss of power while, on the other hand, those who have been gaining power in the search for equality are bound to remain suspicious of those who not so long ago exercised it over them. It is therefore beholden on those of us who want to help move the present process forward to acknowledge how far others have had to move and to respond in the hope that we may contemplate a more settled time for the generations to come.

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Tel. 012656-62235.
13th. October 1999.

Editor

MO MOWLAM

Dear Sir,

As a person of courage and great warmth Mo Mowlam put a novel stamp on Northern Ireland. Her direct approach to people in local communities and on the street endeared her to those of us who have felt in the past that we were being talked down to or talked at. Of necessity she seems to have rattled cages with her direct and intuitive style. Being so human and so direct it would have been surprising if her decisions hadn't upset someone. As the Peace Process faltered she must have suffered enormous disappointment. Who else, from outside of Ireland, would have given so much energy and commitment to it?

Northern Ireland was once a class ridden society. We have come some way in breaking down social barriers; there is still a long way to go. Classless in her approach, Mo Mowlam recognised people, not backgrounds and seemed, thankfully, uncomfortable with pomp in office. Through her manner of communication she demonstrated that it is the uniqueness of each person which matters, that we all have right to a dignity of our own. Her style will be etched vividly on the memory of friend and foe alike. There was no veneer. We got what we saw and we got it without the frills. Furthermore she helped to pave a way to the future for us all. In wishing her well we wish her good luck as well.

On behalf of the New Ireland Group

250 words

John Robb, CONSENSOR.

ANOTHER SECRETARY OF STATE!!

It is would be odd for the New Ireland Group to welcome yet another Secretary of State to Northern Ireland. By now we should have been exercising autonomy in our affairs. Nevertheless, we wish Mr. Mandelson well in his communications with "the people of Northern Ireland" and, in doing so, would emphasise that 'Northern Ireland' is in the North of Ireland and that what happens in one part of the island will for ever impact on what is happening in the other. We trust that he will hold the wider Irish perspective in order that we may continue to grow closer together, albeit from different perspectives yet all part of one Ireland.

Statement on behalf of the New Ireland Group

sent by, John Robb Consensor Ballymoney

85 Charlotte Street
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Tel. 012656-62235.
16th. October 1999.

Editor,

Dear Sir,

As the crisis of possible failure of Senator Mitchell's review looms ever closer, we make this urgent and desperate plea to the Ulster \Unionist Party and to Sinn Fein.

U.U.P. please acknowledge that Sinn Fein are right and in good faith when they claim that decommissioning is not a precondition to setting up the Executive and proceeding to implement the Agreement.

Sinn Fein please acknowledge that the U.U.P. are right and in good faith when they claim that they genuinely want to establish the Executive and implement the Agreement.

U.U.P. have taken risks in their commitment to the Agreement. Witness the bitter opposition to David Trimble within the Unionist family, including members of his own party.

Sinn Fein have taken risks. Witness the breakaway groups in the Republican family and the accusations of betrayal directed at Gerry Adams.

The U.U.P. will not survive to implement the Agreement unless there is a verifiable and credible act of decommissioning by the Provisional I.R.A.

Sinn Fein will survive if such an act of decommissioning takes place.

We appeal to the courage of the Sinn Fein leadership and their commitment to ultimate total demilitarization to persuade the Provisional I.R.A. to make this vital opening and unlocking gesture.**

On behalf of the New Ireland Group,

John Robb and Jack McDowell

****Note Gerry Adams' statement printed in full, Irish Times (page 6) and Irish News, Oct. 18th. Note also Billy Hutchinson's appeal & David Irvine's Irvine's hope for the Agreement. The New Ireland Group is pleased to support the positive movement which is indicated by these encouraging statements and trusts that it will be built upon.**