



Ár dtag

Bhur dtag

Dáta March 1988.

"TOWARDS A STRATEGY FOR PEACE"

Date: 14/3/88.

## TOWARDS A STRATEGY FOR PEACE.

### INTRODUCTION:

For as long as Britain remains in Ireland its presence distorts the political landscape. British interference has been, and continues to be malign, because its presence has been, and continues to be based on its own self interests.

Through partition, Westminster set the political complexion of both states; the North, based on sectarian criteria, actually dictating the geographical size of the fledgling Free State. Although it has developed into a social democracy, the twenty-six counties remains deeply conservative in social terms because it cannot escape the consequences of partition. These are reflected in intolerant social values (which would be diluted in a 32 county, pluralist Ireland); in economic terms (where the border disharmonises trade, commerce, agriculture, etc); in a political culture which increasingly embraces a revisionist attitude to history and Irish nationalism (which justifies and perpetuates partition but which saps national morale and pride); and in repressive laws, used against republicans and which ultimately help maintain British rule and partition.

1

The sectarian history of the six county state from 1921 until Stormont was prorogued in 1972 and direct rule instituted, is well known and does not need reiteration.

In the past 16 years the actions of the British government in Ireland (especially the extent to which she has gone to maintain political control: -the scandals of torture, shoot to kill, the Birmingham Six case etc.) are overwhelmingly convincing arguments for the case that Britain intends to stay here in support of the Union.

Furthermore, the Hillsborough Accord will remain in effect for as long as it suits British needs and strategy, which we will elaborate upon later.

There has in recent years been an emphasis on loyalist sensibilities to an extent which tends to actually understate all that nationalists have suffered and continue to suffer. We agree that unionist people need assured that in a re-unified Ireland their interests would not suffer. But what has been conceded to their sensibilities has been the continuing power to veto Irish unity and upon that veto rests the pretext for British rule in Ireland.

So, given the lengths to which Britain goes to remain here and indeed, to consolidate its position, one can only conclude that it believes it is in its interests to maintain the Union, to finance the Union, to let its soldiers die for the Union, to be internationally scandalised - at times - for the Union.

Britains actions totally contradict SDLP claims that Britain somehow is now neutral since the signing of the Treaty.

Sinn Fein, however, believes that the solution should rest on the basics of the situation and the first principle is that a foreign power, the British Government, has no right to be physically interfering in Irish affairs or ruling any section of the Irish people. Only the domiciled people of Ireland, those who live in this island can decide the future of Ireland and the Government of the island.

Given all that the nationalist people of the North are going through and what they have suffered, given the practices of unionism, given the historical wrongs which the nation of Ireland has suffered at the hands of the British, it is totally unreasonable to disingenuously argue that the right of the people of Ireland to national self-determination should be subject to unionist self-determination which is, in effect, the power of the veto once again.

SINN FEIN'S VIEW:

The only solution to the present political conflict in Ireland is the ending of partition, a British disengagement from Ireland and the restoration to the Irish people of their right to sovereignty, independence and national self-determination.

Sinn Fein's view is that the British Government needs to be met with a firm, united and unambiguous demand from all Irish nationalist parties for an end to the unionist veto and for a declaration of a date for withdrawal

Within the new situation created by these measures, it is then a matter of business - like negotiations between representatives of all the Irish parties, and this includes those who represent today's loyalist voters, to set the constitutional, economic, social and political arrangements for a new Irish state.

We assert that the loyalist people must be given, in common with all other Irish citizens, firm guarantees of their religious and civil liberties, and we believe that, faced with a British withdrawal and the removal of partition, a considerable body of loyalist opinion would accept the wisdom of negotiating for the type of society which would reflect their needs as well as the needs of all the other people in Ireland.

The establishment of a society free from British interference, with the Union at an end, will see sectarianism shrivel and with the emergence of class politics a re-alignment of political forces along left and right lines. The Irish democracy thus created will usher in the conditions for a permanent peace, a demilitarisation of the situation, and the creation of a just society.

Within that general strategy position the aim of our political struggle in the Six Counties is to popularise opposition to British rule and to extend that opposition into some form of broad anti-imperialist campaign. Our main political task is to turn political opposition to British rule in Ireland into a political demand for national self-determination. That demand will be eventually realised when the will of the British government to remain in Ireland will be eroded.

3

The intended political effects of our political strategy is to bring the British government to the point where they want to leave by (a)frustrating British efforts to physically control the Six Counties;(b)Keep highlighting the coercive and colonial nature of Six County state;(c)creating a broad based anti-imperialist movement;(d)developing the process of winning the confidence of the Unionist population;(e)winning widespread public opinion around to the correctness of this analysis.

Sinn Fein seeks to create conditions which will lead to a permanent cessation of hostilities,an end to the long war and the development of a peaceful, united, independent and democratic Irish society. Such objectives will only be achieved when a British government adopts a strategy for decolonisation.

It must begin by repealing the 'Government of Ireland Act' and publicly declaring that the 'Northern Ireland' statlet is no longer a part of the United Kingdom.

Furthermore, it must declare that its military forces and its system of political administration will remain only for as long at it takes to arrange their permanent withdrawal.

6

This would need to be accomplished within the shortest practical period. A definite date within the lifetime of a British government would need to be set for the completion of this withdrawal.

Such an irreversible declaration of intent would minimise any loyalist backlash and would go a long way towards bringing around to reality most loyalists and their representatives genuinely interested in peace and negotiation. It would be the business of such negotiations to set the constitutional, economic, social and political arrangements for a new Irish state through a Constitutional Conference.

#### ARMED STRUGGLE

Like other forms of struggle in Ireland the armed struggle is about achieving the political demands for national self-determination, an end to partition and the creation of a 32 County Irish Republic. Armed struggle is seen as a political option. Its use is considered in terms of achieving national political aims and the efficacy of other forms of struggle.



The basis for the use of armed struggle arises from the view, that other forms of struggle on their own cannot bring about the political changes which would lead to a British disengagement and an end to the political nightmare that Northern Nationalists have had to endure for over 60 years.

This need to wage an armed struggle arises from within the political experience of the northern nationalist community. This experience has clearly taught them that the inherent undemocratic nature of the Union is maintained through the superior use of force by the British state; that the British state still acts against the democratic wish of the majority of the Irish people by its commitment to maintain the Union; and that Britain has no intention of withdrawing its political, military and economic interests from the Six-Counties. Add to this sixty years of ineffectual leadership by constitutional nationalist politicians whose unwillingness to confront the British helped lock the northern Catholic population into a state of second class citizenship.

The IRA it should be noted, has consistently pointed out that its actions are aimed at the six-county state and not at the twenty-six counties:

"All IRA activities are geared towards the successful completion of the struggle for the independence which was thwarted by Britain foisting partition on the Irish people and setting up a sectarian state in the six-counties...

All IRA volunteers are under strict instructions, under General Army Order No.8, not to come into conflict with the armed forces of the twenty-six counties. They are not the enemy...

There is no campaign or armed conspiracy against the institutions of the twenty-six county state nor will there be."

An Phoblacht/Republican News, December 10th 1987.

It should also be noted that armed struggle is forced upon the IRA. Neither the IRA or Sinn Fein want this war but the ineffectualness of all other forms of struggle, the conditions of repression that we have experienced, and British attitudes have made armed struggle inevitable. the deaths and injuries caused by the war are all tragedies which have been forced upon the people by the British presence.

Your parties bargaining leverage plus the continuous need for Britain to apply time and energy through the mechanism of its various political initiatives are proof enough that the armed struggle has been beneficial to the political aspirations of the nationalist community.

SDLP and Hillsborough.

The nationalist community in the six counties has an historical view of itself as a persecuted section of the Irish people. This view has always been reflected in its political demands. At the very core of these lies the demand for national unity. Other political demands which concern the need for better education and housing, equal voting rights, the ending of unemployment and job discrimination, and cultural rights have run in tandem with this core political demand.

The degree of political, civil and economic rights afforded to nationalists within the six county state depended on the degree to which loyalists would tolerate the erosion of their position of privilege. Even optimum Loyalist tolerance will not permit equality. Equality is synonymous with national rights. Partition is in direct contradiction to that.

Because of its acceptance of the Hillsborough Treaty, your party is presently the lynch-pin of a British Government strategy which seeks to resolve the contradiction of the northern state. Present British Government strategy is aimed at stabilising the six counties in its own interests by introducing limited or symbolic reforms which attempts to make the northern state more tolerable to a section of the nationalist community and to international opinion.

The advantage of the Treaty from the British Governments point of view is that on the one hand Treaty supporters claim it to be part of the process of resolution when in fact the (quid pro quo) cross border security cooperation from Dublin actually ensures that there is no resolution of the national question.

Since Sunningdale in 1973 the British have repeatedly attempted to establish an internal governmental arrangement involving unionists and nationalists. Our struggle and strategy has been to close down each option open to the British until they have no other option but to withdraw. The SDLP - with the conditions of power-sharing and a variable 'Irish dimension' - have continually given the British succour and allowed them to believe that an internal arrangement may be possible, a belief that would be reinforced by any SDLP involvement in a devolved assembly.

11

Sinn Fein is totally opposed to a power-sharing Stormont assembly and states that there cannot be a partitionist solution. Stormont is not a stepping stone to Irish unity. We believe that the S.D.L.P.s gradualist theory is therefore invalid and seriously flawed.

The claim that Britain is neutral ignores their role as a powerbroker and guarantor of Unionist hegemony. It ignores the basic political fact of life that Unionist hegemony was created by the British, to maintain direct British control over a part of Ireland and a major influence over the rest of it. Britains continuing involvement in Ireland is based on strategic, economic and political interests.

Strategic interests are now the most important consideration in Britains interference in Ireland. Quite apart from the very real, if somewhat exaggerated fear among the British establishment that an Ireland freed from British influence could become a European 'Cuba', even the prospect of a neutral Ireland is regarded as a serious threat to British - and NATO's - strategic interests: "NATO too is thinking in terms of a conflict that would require ships, supplies and convoys across the Atlantic. Few would reach Europe unless Ireland in whole or part was committed to the struggle" -Sir Patrick Macrory,'Britains Undefended Frontier'.

Although the annual British subvention to the North is £1.6 billion-plus it would be wrong to conclude that this level of spending negates any British economic interest in Ireland. With the development of multi-national capitalism the economies of both partitioned states have become largely dependent on non-native investment. While Britain remains the single largest source of foreign investment, British involvement in Ireland serves a wider role in securing the interests of Britains multi-national capitalist allies from the potential or perceived threat posed by an independent Irish state.

Though less important than strategic or economic considerations there remains a significant historical and political commitment on the part of the British establishment to the Union. This stems from Britains historical role as an imperial power and an inherent reluctance to see either its territories or its influence diminished. There is also - particularly within the Conservative Party - a political loyalty to the Union if not to the unionist themselves.

It is dishonest, therefore, to argue that Britains role in Ireland is that of a neutral peacekeeper. Britains massive military and financial commitment is in fact a reflection of her continuing strategic, economic and political interests in Ireland.

Both Sinn Fein and your party would agree that the six county state was founded on inequality, and many nationalists, including your own supporters would argue that the history of the last twenty years has shown it to be irreformable:

(i) Stormont's response to Civil Rights demands

(ii) Loyalist response to power-sharing Executive in 1974 and loyalist attitudes to date.

(iii) Stalker, Birmingham Six, PTA, Thain release, Exclusions etc...

(iv) Refusal of British Government and employers to enforce effective anti-discrimination measures (still 2.5 Catholics unemployed to 1 Protestant) etc... We repeat, nationalists will only be afforded the degree of equality which Loyalists will tolerate. This is even implicit in the British Governments latest contribution to the discrimination debate.

It appears to us that rather than concede the failure of Hillsborough and the irreformability of the six-county state the S.D.L.P. is desperately hanging on to the Treaty. The SDLP statement that "its the only little thing we got in 60 years" ignores the fact that there is an alternative.

One of the effects of your support for 'Hillsborough' is that SDLP policy now contains a publicity thrust which seeks to criminalise the broad republican family. For your party the actions of the Republican Movement are now the core political problem. You now share, in a very public way, with the British government, the common aim of destroying the Republican Movement.

This publicity thrust has accelerated a continuous and ongoing confrontation between our two parties which demoralises the nationalist community.



### THE UNIONISTS

In Ireland, Unionism is the child of imperialism, its very name denotes in a very precise way the political reason for its existence -Union with Britain. Unionism evolved historically from the Plantation when those who would settle in Ireland and create a Loyalist garrison to look after English interests were given power and sectarian privileges. It has been effective in postponing the struggle for national and democratic rights by the use of the political mechanism of religious sectarianism. This mechanism adopted its political form with the formation of the Orange Order and reached its highest form in the creation of the six county state. Partition created a Unionist state for a Unionist people. To maintain its existence the Unionist state has historically been politically rigid in thought and application. Unionism as a reactionary political force has only one aim, the perpetration of itself through the maintenance of British rule in Ireland, primarily through the use of violence. This violence had many forms all of which were used for the total coercion of the nationalist community. Institutionalised state discrimination in job allocation and housing, gerrymandered political boundaries, a heavily armed paramilitary police force with a heavily armed militia, backed up by a wide range of coercive legislation were the tools of state-sponsored violence.

For fifty years the British allowed the Unionists total control of the management of the six counties. The systematic attack on the political, social and economic rights of nationalists was kept within the confines of the Stormont parliament. The British Government facilitated this management via such mechanisms as the Westminster parliamentary convention known as "transferred powers". Throughout this period the British Crown was the guarantor of Unionist hegemony. Unionism was an integral part of Toryism. Partition and British control of the six counties was maintained through an alliance of successive British Governments - Tory or Labour - and Unionism.

Between 1968 and 1972 political events in the six counties led to the break-up of the old established political order. Unionism had fragmented and the old nationalist party had disappeared to be replaced electorally by your party, the SDLP.

In 1972 Britain prorogued the Stormont parliament when it became clear that Unionism could no longer politically manage the six counties. Since then Britain has attempted to stabilise the political situation in the six counties by drawing pragmatic Unionists into an alliance with the Catholic middle class and conceding a Dublin government interest. This new political alliance while dependent on wider political forces, was still based within a gerrymandered political system where Britain could rely on the numerical 'majority' of the Unionists. British military, political and economic interests were to be maintained under new arrangements.

Because of their rigid and reactionary view of politics, most Unionists have been unable to accommodate this change in political alliances. From the 'Northern Ireland Executive' to the Hillsborough Treaty, Unionists sought to destroy any form of political institution that did not reflect their dominance of the six-county political establishment.

However, within all shades of Unionism there are elements who have already come to terms with the fact that the British government's shift in its political alliance's does not represent a change in the basic power structure of the six county state, but now see Hillsborough as a modification of political institutions to accommodate the SDLP'S acceptance of partition and the British state in Ireland.

The public perception, engineered by your party, that Unionist acceptance of the Hillsborough Treaty is the end of Unionist power and the Unionist veto on the Irish people's right to self determination is a dangerous political illusion. Unionist acceptance of the Treaty will not interfere with British control of the six- counties.

The energies of your party have been aimed at internalising the conflict. This implies an acceptance of the legitimacy of the British connection which is to the benefit of the British government. Your party has never challenged the British claim to ownership of the six Irish counties which constitute the their statlet.

### PROPOSALS.

We suggest that both parties could usefully consider the possibility of agreement on the following positions:

1) That Sinn Fein and the SDLP agree with and endorse the internationally established principle of the right of the Irish people to national self-determination.

2) That Sinn Fein and the SDLP agree that Britain has no legitimate right to be in Ireland.

3) That Sinn Fein and the SDLP agree that the IRA is politically motivated in its actions and that IRA volunteers are not criminals.

4) That Sinn Fein and the SDLP agree that the British Government and its forces in Ireland are not in a peacekeeping role.

5) That Sinn Fein and the SDLP would agree that failure to rule out nationalist participation in a devolved or internal six-county arrangement actually encourages the British to pursue such policies and in reality would protract the conflict.

6) That Sinn Fein and the SDLP agree on a common solution to the political situation existing in the six counties.



7) That Sinn Fein and the SDLP join forces to impress on the Dublin Government the need to launch an international and diplomatic offensive to secure national self-determination.

In the interim, between the acceptance of a common strategy and British disengagement, Sinn Fein and the SDLP would agree to a common platform of political activity which would safeguard the interests of the nationalist community. These issues would include action on:

extradition, plastic bullets, strip-searching, RUC brutality, repatriation of prisoners, SOSP's and lifers reviews, the Diplock Courts, the UDR, the PTA, the EPA, the Payment of Debt Act, discrimination in employment and high nationalist unemployment, economic cutbacks in the health service, changes in social security laws, cultural rights, etc..

ENDS.

21  
/