

SINN FEIN/SDLP

Persuading the British

a joint call

SF/SDLP/3/JUNE88.

Sinn Fein would like to explore the SDLP assertion that "Britain is now saying that she has no interest of her own in being here and that her only interest is to see agreement among the people who share the island of Ireland."

If this is the case (and Sinn Fein remain unconvinced that it is so) then it would appear that there is currently an opportunity and an urgent need to test the SDLP assertion by attempting to persuade the British government that the best way to "see agreement among the people who share the island of Ireland " is for Britain to adopt a policy of ending the union in the context of a United Ireland and should then actively seek agreement among the people who share the island of Ireland on how this can be accomplished.

Once this is the British objective the strategy (or strategies) for achieving it should be a matter of formal agreement between the representatives of the Irish people and the British government. The search for such agreement must of course involve northern Protestants and every effort must be made to get their agreement and involvement in the constitutional, financial and political arrangements needed to replace partition. Furthermore, regardless of their attitude to such arrangements, their rights must be guaranteed in whatever arrangements emerge from such deliberations.

In other words once the above objective becomes British policy and while the democratic policy contained in it is continued throughout its implementation, there must be due provision for the rights of northern Protestants and every

effort made to win their consent. By adopting such a policy the British would be joining the persuaders.

While such a scenario may appear improbable at present, surely if Britain now has no self interest in being in Ireland it must have an open mind on the future of Ireland and be open to such a proposition. In this proposition we are re-stating the nationalist and democratic position that the unionists have no right to maintain partition and the union in opposition to a national majority. We would also assert that the consent of northern Protestants, like any other interest group, is desirable on the constitutional, financial and political arrangements needed to end partition. It is a responsibility of all Irish democrats to guarantee that all Irish people are treated equally.

Sinn Fein has long accepted that northern Protestants have fears about their civil and religious liberties. We have consistently insisted that their liberties must be guaranteed and protected.

The fundamental republican and nationalist position has always been to get Britain to abandon its partitionist policy and adopt instead a policy of withdrawing from Ireland and handing over sovereignty to an all-Ireland government whose selection would be a democratic matter for the Irish people. This position is based on the principle of national self-determination and on the democratic position that Britain has no legitimate right to be in Ireland.

Maximum political unity in Ireland based on these principles and geared towards persuading the British government to adopt a policy of disengagement in the context of Irish reunification seems to us to be a fundamental part of a nationalist strategy towards justice and peace.

As a step towards such a strategy -which is the stated aim of our discussions.- and as an exploration of the SDLP's assertion regarding the current British position, we propose that Sinn Fein and the SDLP jointly issue a call to the Dublin and London governments for them to consult together to seek agreement on the policy objective of Irish reunification. Having agreed this both Governments would issue a public statement outlining the steps they intend taking to bring about a peaceful and orderly British political and military withdrawal from Ireland within a specified period.

The adoption of such a position by Sinn Fein, the SDLP and Dublin government would advance the situation, concentrate everyone's mind, not least the unionists, and put the responsibility where it belongs - with the British government.

ENDS.