

Sinn Fein submission to Strands 1, 2 and 3

19 January 1998

The very existence of the process of negotiations is an explicit acceptance by all of the participants involved in a good faith engagement of the need to put the failures of the past behind us. There is widespread acceptance that the status quo is not an option. There can be no internal settlement.

The discussions leading up to the Christmas recess were an attempt to incorporate the core concerns of all the participants into an agreed, inclusive and comprehensive agenda of the substantive issues to be resolved. Sinn Féin has stated our willingness to discuss all of these issues.

An essential element of such an approach is to ensure the required parity across and between the three strands of the negotiations.

The "Propositions on Heads of Agreement" tabled by the two governments does not incorporate these essential requirements. This is a mistake. This needs to be rectified.

The perception of many nationalists, for instance, is that an assembly has been imposed as a fait accompli while a serious question mark hangs over all other issues mentioned in the limited scope of the joint-government paper. A particular concern is that this fudge extends even to matters which are in principle non-negotiable; issues of fundamental rights which are not a matter for negotiation.

In summary Sinn Féin believes that the situation can be rectified if realities are accepted and a level playing field in the negotiations is provided.

- The status quo is not an option.
- There can be no internal settlement.

- The balanced agenda of issues to be resolved must be inclusive and comprehensive.
- There must be parity across and between the three strands of the negotiations.

Sinn Féin has received a significant mandate to negotiate. We will fulfil that mandate, whatever the obstacles or hurdles placed in our path. Sinn Féin has outlined the broad issues which we believe need to be addressed if the causes of conflict are to be removed and a lasting peace settlement found. These are;

1) **Demilitarisation.** This can and should be acted on immediately. Real progress is necessary on demilitarisation and justice issues including; the release of those imprisoned as a result of the conflict, the presence of British troops and military installations, policing and Bloody Sunday, collusion and the many other related matters.

2) **An Equality Agenda,** encompassing rights, safeguards and justice issues. In some cases action on these issues may require the urgent implementation of existing British government policy or the fulfilment of manifesto commitments made by it while in opposition. In other cases it will require going far beyond this in terms of policy, legislation and other measures. These are issues of basic human and civil rights. They do not require negotiation. They are non negotiable. These are matters which effect people's daily lives and it is crucial that positive change begins to impinge on their lives now. What is required is the urgent implementation of a program of measures to ensure political, social, cultural and democratic rights.

3) **Sovereignty.** Sovereignty is the power to enact domestic legislation and to make international treaties. The conflict in Ireland is fundamentally linked to the issue of sovereignty, the British government's claim to sovereignty over Ireland and subsequently the 6 north-eastern counties of it, and the right of the Irish people and nation to sovereignty. This issue goes to the heart of the political difficulties we are attempting to resolve.

4) **The Constitutional Status of the 6 counties.** This derives from the failure to resolve the sovereignty issue. Specifically, we need to remove British legislation underpinning the union, i.e. the Act of Union 1800, the Government of Ireland Act 1920 and the Northern Ireland Constitution Act, 1973.

5) **New Arrangements** arising from the resolution of the sovereignty and constitutional issues. In Sinn Féin's view the most efficient and logical model is a unitary state, with a central government and under this the maximum decentralisation of powers to local democratic structures. We have proposed a system of regional councils with further decentralisation below these. It is our firm opinion that a 6 county assembly is neither necessary nor desirable, particularly given the history of unionist abuse of power under the Stormont Parliament, and the contemporary evidence that this abuse would continue, most graphically illustrated in the experience of nationalist councillors in every unionist controlled district council (see, for example, the appended report on the Belfast City Council).

Our particular view of how all these issues should be resolved is contained in the papers we submitted on the various agenda items since September 15 last year.

In these negotiations Sinn Féin will continue to rigorously assert national and democratic positions and objectives. If the two governments seriously believe that their propositions meet the criteria established for the peace process, then they need to show that this is the case.