

Peace in Ireland

Freedom, Justice, Democracy, Equality

**Nature, form and extent of
new arrangements**

A Sinn Féin submission to Strands One and Two
of the peace talks
27 October 1997

New Arrangements

"No negotiated outcome is either pre-determined or excluded in advance or limited by anything other than the need for agreement. Participation in negotiations is without prejudice to any participants commitment to the achievement by exclusively peaceful means of its preferred options." - Rules of Procedure.

Sinn Féin seeks the establishment of a 32 county unitary state. This is also the preferred option of the parties which participated in the New Ireland Forum and is a constitutional imperative upheld in Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution.

The issue of sovereignty lies at the core of this process. That is, the power to enact domestic legislation and make international treaties; the power to influence and effect the everyday lives of the people of this island.

Ultimately the power to decide and give effect to new arrangements and the relationship to other arrangements through the enactment of domestic legislation or international treaty resides with the sovereign authority. The outcome of the negotiation on the issue of sovereignty will, above all else, determine the shape and detail of new arrangements and the relationship to other arrangements.

The preferred options of the participants in relation to the key issues of sovereignty, the issue of partition and the constitutional status of the six-counties will be reflected in their submissions on the agenda items of new arrangements. This is as true of the Sinn Féin submission on these matters as it is of the other participants.

Sinn Féin's submission, therefore, is clearly set in the context of our preferred option on the issues of sovereignty, partition and the constitutional status of the six-counties. That is, in the context of a unitary, politically independent, sovereign all-Ireland state.

- New arrangements should in specific ways serve the broad objectives of removing the causes of conflict, setting aside the failures of the past and reaching agreements which will provide lasting peace and stability for the people of Ireland and normalising the relationships between the peoples of Ireland and Britain..

They should in the best interests of all the people of Ireland, aim to:

- advance a process of national reconciliation
- underpin political democracy
- promote and develop economic democracy
- recognise fully the diversity as well as the unity of the people of Ireland

- reverse not only the effects of partition but also the effects of decades of neglect of the areas of greatest need in urban and rural Ireland
- uphold irrevocable guarantees for the protection of the rights and liberties of every citizen on this island including communal and cultural rights
- involve an integrated approach by all relevant government institutions to produce policies which effectively transcend the divisions of the past.
- Sinn Féin believes that in the context of a unitary state with a central government that new arrangements should, consistent with effectiveness and efficiency, involve the maximum decentralisation of government structures in the interests of maximising local democracy.

Democracy must come from the bottom up. It must empower local communities and have an economic as well as a political basis in order to reverse the decline of areas west of the Bann and west of the Shannon. In this way, the concentration of industry along Ireland's east coast would be balanced throughout the country and development would progress evenly throughout all the regions.

The **National Parliament** must arbitrate between the needs of the nation as a whole and the special interests of the different regions.

New arrangements would, of course, include institutional recognition of the special links that exist between the peoples of Ireland and Britain as part of the totality of relationships, while taking account of newly forged links with the rest of Europe. Such institutions must be democratically accountable and must in their functions be open and transparent.

The decentralisation of governmental structures could involve Community, District and Regional Councils.

Community Councils could create a process where people would have maximum control over their own affairs. This would stimulate democratic participation by making people accountable for their own communities. Maximum involvement of communities with maximum control over their own affairs would ensure a determined and resolute effort to rectify the present social and economic problems which currently beset local communities throughout Ireland.

District Councils could have charge of all public services in the sphere of social welfare, education, housing, planning, agriculture, fishing and small industrial development.

Regional Councils. Districts could be grouped in Regions determined by the size of population and geographical area. An exception should be the Gaeltacht region which should be regarded as a Regional Council area despite its lower population.

Ireland as a single unit could have 15 regional councils. That is, the Gaeltacht region; South Connaught; North Connaught, West Ulster; East Ulster; Belfast; South Ulster; North Leinster; Midlands; Dublin; South Leinster; East Munster; West Munster; Cork; North Munster.

Apart from the special case of the Gaeltacht, regions could be concerned with such public services as hospitals, major roads, telecommunications and third level education.

Regional developments could promote and co-ordinate the economic, social and cultural affairs of the region.

Such regional structures could allow for national co-ordination and supervision of regional plans, public services and allocation of funds, economic planning and development.

Sinn Féin believes that the decentralisation of governmental structures as outlined in the new arrangements above could maximise local democracy, address the special needs, interests and conditions in the different regions and in the interest of all the people of Ireland.

- Democratization in this context would be an ongoing, rather than a static concept. Provision could be made for a regular review of mechanisms to tackle democratic deficits at any level in the exercise of governmental power. This would require a searching reappraisal of the role of QUANGO's with a view to their replacement by fully democratic institutions.