

• AN AMCHÉACHTA
**THE STARRY
PLOUGH**



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/HER OWN PART
PLAY

PEACE

Justice
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THEME: A JUST PEACE

RULES

1. The editor reserves the right to amend contributions where space dictates and to make comments.
2. Pen names may be used so that material can be considered on its own merits rather than on the reputation of the writer. The writer's name must be supplied.
3. Material can be in Irish or in English.
4. Letters must not be longer than two pages of type.
5. Articles not to be longer than four pages of type.
6. Material must be relevant to the theme of the magazine.

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AN CAMCHÉACHTA THE STARRY PLOUGH

This edition of *The Starry Plough* is exclusively devoted to Sinn Féin's peace strategy and the unprecedented coverage given to it and to the political fall out surrounding the initiatives which Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams has been involved in in recent months. Since 25 September last year when Gerry Adams and John Hume, leader of the SDLP, announced that they had agreed a set of peace proposals for consideration by both the Dublin and London governments, the political life of Ireland, Britain and lately North America, has been dominated by the debate over how to end this conflict.

The breathtaking pace of events and the extensive media coverage of Sinn Féin's views has the capacity to overwhelm the closest observer.

But for republicans and those who genuinely seek peace and justice in Ireland the central question about the Downing Street Declaration is does it represent the prenegotiation stage of the resolution phase of the conflict or is it merely a British put political counteroffensive to the Irish Peace Initiative?

This question cannot be satisfactorily answered through the columns of newspapers nor through the medium of television or radio. The declaration raises but does not answer crucial questions, which lie at the heart of the conflict, hence Sinn Féin's calls for clarification.

Since 15 December when the declaration was unveiled, the British government has engaged in megaphone diplomacy in an attempt to place the blame for the ongoing conflict on republicans.

However, their stance lacks credibility when measured against the background of the previous three years of private exchanges between the British government and Sinn Féin. These exchanges explored the respective positions of Sinn Féin and the British government, and were valuable until the point where the British began to abuse the private line. There were no conditions attached by either side and this is the sensible way to conduct affairs.

The public initiative taken by Gerry Adams and John Hume last September was the catalyst for all that has followed since, including the Downing Street Declaration. These events reflect the central importance of the republican struggle, its strength and durability and the strenuous efforts Sinn Féin has put into developing its peace strategy.

The Irish and British media, print and broadcasting, have been addressing the issues of national importance to the people of both islands. Much debate, verbal and written, has centred on the Irish people's right to national self-determination and how this is to be exercised; the blockage in securing this, namely the British sponsored unionist veto; demilitarising the conflict within a peace process and the mechanisms and processes which will lead us out of conflict into a peaceful future.

The political climate within which the debate is taking place is healthier than it has ever been. After 20 or more years of blanket censorship republicans can now talk directly to the Irish people on Irish television and radio. Those who campaigned to end this ban are to be commended as is the Dublin government and in particular the Minister for Arts and Culture Michael D Higgins.

Praise is also appropriate to President Clinton for lifting the ban on Gerry Adams and allowing him to speak to the powerful Irish-American lobby.

The struggle for Irish freedom is passing through momentous change; there is no going back to the days before 25 September last when the British government was pursuing a bankrupt policy of isolating Sinn Féin and using its legal and illegal forces to contain the republican struggle. We are in a new phase of struggle which has the potential to lead to a new and peaceful Ireland.

It is obvious that the Hume/Adams proposals acted as a catalyst, not only to Irish nationalist opinion North and South, but focussed the two governments on the issue of peace in Ireland, in a manner unparalleled since the mid-80s



the persuaders" and on the Dublin government to persuade the British that partition is a failure, the unionists of the benefits of Irish reunification, and the international community that they should support a real peace process in Ireland.

For Sinn Féin, *Towards a Lasting Peace* marked an intensification of the peace strategy. The document was widely distributed, nationally and internationally. Sinn Féin entered into dialogue with as wide a range of groups and individuals as possible — members of the Protestant churches, the Catholic church, peace and reconciliation groups, community groups and politicians.

HUME/ADAMS

Early in 1993, the contact and dialogue between the British government and Sinn Féin, entered a new and intense phase. Following the collapse for the second time of the Brooke/Mayhew talks, in April 1993 we had the disclosure that Gerry Adams and John Hume was picked up on the dialogue started by the two parties in 1988 and produced a set of proposals.

The Hume/Adams proposals outlined a number of basic principles, a process and a dynamic which both party leaders agreed could create the

conditions for a complete cessation of violence and the establishment of lasting peace in Ireland.

It is obvious that the Hume/Adams proposals acted as a catalyst, not only to Irish nationalist opinion North and South, but focussed the two governments on the issue of peace in Ireland, in a manner unparalleled since the mid-80s. This, coupled with the hype created by both governments, led to heightened expectations.

DOWNING STREET DECLARATION

The Downing Street Declaration, couched in deliberately ambiguous terms, and accompanied by conflicting interpretations given of it by the two governments, is viewed by many nationalists as a disappointment. Nevertheless, Sinn Féin decided to seek clarifications from London and Dublin and take time to evaluate the declaration, along with the governments' statements and comments on that declaration. Among these were the comments of British Prime Minister John Major, who within hours of signing the declaration informed Jim Molyneaux in the British House of Commons that the declaration meant:

- NO — to the value of achieving a united Ireland;
- NO — to a united Ireland;

- NO — to Britain joining the persuaders;
 - NO — to any timetable for a united Ireland;
 - NO — to joint authority;
 - NO — to any change in the unionist veto;
 - NO — to Dublin say in the affairs of the Six Counties.
- These comments caused Jim Molyneaux to remark in a television interview that there was nothing in the declaration which threatened unionists, and little to benefit the nationalists.

INTO 1994

In December, the Sinn Féin Ard Chomhairle set up a commission to oversee the consultation process. Sinn Féin is evaluating the Downing Street Declaration in the context of our peace strategy.

We have never set deadlines. We have never said the building of a peace process will be easy. On the contrary, it will be difficult, dangerous and protracted. But we are confident that if properly managed, a process to bring about a lasting peace can be established. But it will take time, not least because of the British government's present attitude.

Sinn Féin will not be intimidated by any threats from the British government, nor will we be diverted by a 'carrot and stick' approach. The challenge facing us all is to establish the basis for a lasting peace. This, we believe, requires the British government to be prepared to cooperate with the Dublin government to bring about Irish national self-determination, in the shortest possible time, consistent with obtaining maximum consent to the process, and in consultation with all parties.

Sinn Féin has been consistent in the past several years in its pursuit of a real peace process. It is obvious that it is largely due to Sinn Féin's efforts, particularly over the last six years, that the issue of real peace is as high on the political agenda today as it is. Our commitment to the development of a peace process is absolute. This is a year in which we will redouble our effort to advance our peace strategy.

The Irish peace process

BY CLIONDHA NI CHUILIN

TWENTY-TWO years ago, two of the present leadership of Sinn Féin, Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, met with the British government in London to discuss the means to bring the ongoing conflict to a conclusion. William Whitelaw, who headed the British delegation at those negotiations, later read into the House of Commons record the demands of the republican leadership, the first being "a public declaration by the British

government that it is the right of all the people of Ireland acting as a unit to decide the future of Ireland".

Those leaders were neither wooed nor intimidated into settling for anything less. They are no less resolute today. Twenty-two years have passed — over two decades of unsurpassed misery and suffering — yet the primary republican demand remains as clear now as it was then.

Some republicans may be apprehensive that, in their view, insufficient emphasis is being placed on 'Brits Out' as a demand. While such misgivings

The truce of 1975 showed us that in the absence of armed struggle, we had no struggle

are misdirected, they should not go unaddressed. For long enough, the slogan 'Brits Out' was utilised by republicans when we were of the opinion that we, without the help of others, could force the British to disengage from our country. But events have moved on, and republicans, in order not to be overtaken by them, have shifted within the parameters of our general goal without ever having deviated from that goal.

'NARROWNESS' OF THE REPUBLICAN OUTLOOK

This is the more general and loose context in which the Irish Peace Initiative — better known in the media as Hume/Adams — must be located. It pertains almost exclusively to the 'narrowness' of the republican outlook. This was not merely a narrowness restricted to the sphere of organisation whereby republicans shunned the assistance of others unless they would acquiesce to all our views, it was also an intellectual arrogance that refused to entertain alternative views and merely served as a form of self-imposed censorship. It prevented republicans entering into creative dialogue with people, thus depriving ourselves of a valuable font of rich ideas and perspectives. We all convinced each other that we were right and left everyone else unconvinced. Yet we survived, and not simply because we were strong, iron-willed republicans who had history on our side, but because the penny dropped. And if that penny were to become a pound we would have to broaden out a hundredfold — which is what we have been endeavouring to do throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s.

The truce of 1975 showed us that in the absence of armed struggle, we had no struggle. The British had only to close the republican struggle down on one front and the field was theirs. The H-Block and Armagh protests, culminating in the hunger strikes, taught us the necessity of working with others not persuaded by all our arguments. It acted as the catalyst for allowing us access to new points of pressure, not





least electoral advances. The more we broadened, the more we would see areas that remained out of bounds to us, but which had to be taken if we were not to be isolated and weakened. The theoretical ending of abstentionism in 1986 was part of this process. Its practical ending is still as vital to us today as it was then. Our attempts to work within broad fronts, such as the '68 Committees, FADA and the Irish National Congress, have all been further acknowledgments on our part that Sinn Féin for us does not mean 'Ourselves Alone'

This acceptance that others have a part to play has naturally led us to devise means to ensure that they do play the part necessary to achieve national self-determination, and do no renege. In particular, the government of the 26 Counties has at every opportunity

abdicated its responsibility to take effective action to unify the country. The heavy emphasis on peace in republican discourse, the reaching out to the SDLP and the construction of the Irish peace process have forced the question of a permanent solution centre stage in an unprecedented manner. Our task is to ensure that national self-determination is the solution most likely to win the day. Our strategy for pressing this home is to confront our potential allies with ways of moving forward which they, because of their own nationalistic discourse, will find difficult to refuse, and which will mobilise the maximum amount of people behind our goals.

Our analysis of the political stalemate encased around us led us to conclude that we would have to take the initiative in persuading the SDLP and the Dublin government to confront the British state on the

question of its continued involvement in our country and its underwriting of partition. Dublin in particular could do this quite successfully by confronting Britain over the question of sovereignty and by urging international opinion against Britain's continued disruption of Irish national democracy. Given that Cardinal Daly and others of like mind had successfully managed to falsify the republican message and have it misrepresented as 'Brits Out' meaning 'unionists out', republicans felt it politically suicidal to remain a sitting target. We therefore shifted stance, throwing weight behind our long-held demand of national self-determination. This demand is undoubtedly instantly recognised as eminently reasonable in the international arena, and all nations, by virtue of their own existence and recognition in international law, are compelled

This acceptance that others have a part to play has naturally led us to devise means to ensure that they do play the part necessary to achieve national self-determination

to support the concept. This is the more specific and tighter context of the Irish peace process.

IDEA OF PEACE

From May 1987, when we launched our pamphlet *Scenario For Peace*, it has been clear that the way in which republicans have talked about the conflict has been heavily shaped by the idea of peace. Peace has formed the spine of republican discourse. So strong and enduring has our emphasis on peace been, that all but the British and unionists have been compelled to listen.

Armed with the argument for peace, Sinn Féin engaged in critical and constructive dialogue with many individuals

and organisations, political opponents and enemies, with a view to forwarding the case for national democracy. This type of contact was made all the more difficult — but by the same token all the more necessary — by the existence of a strict censorship policy.

In 1990, a prolonged period of contact between Sinn Féin and the British government began. The underlying rationale was to allow republicans to put to the test the commitment of the British government to a genuine peace process.

Without question, the most significant moment of this intensive dialogue process came with the talks between Gerry Adams and John Hume. These talks led to a series of

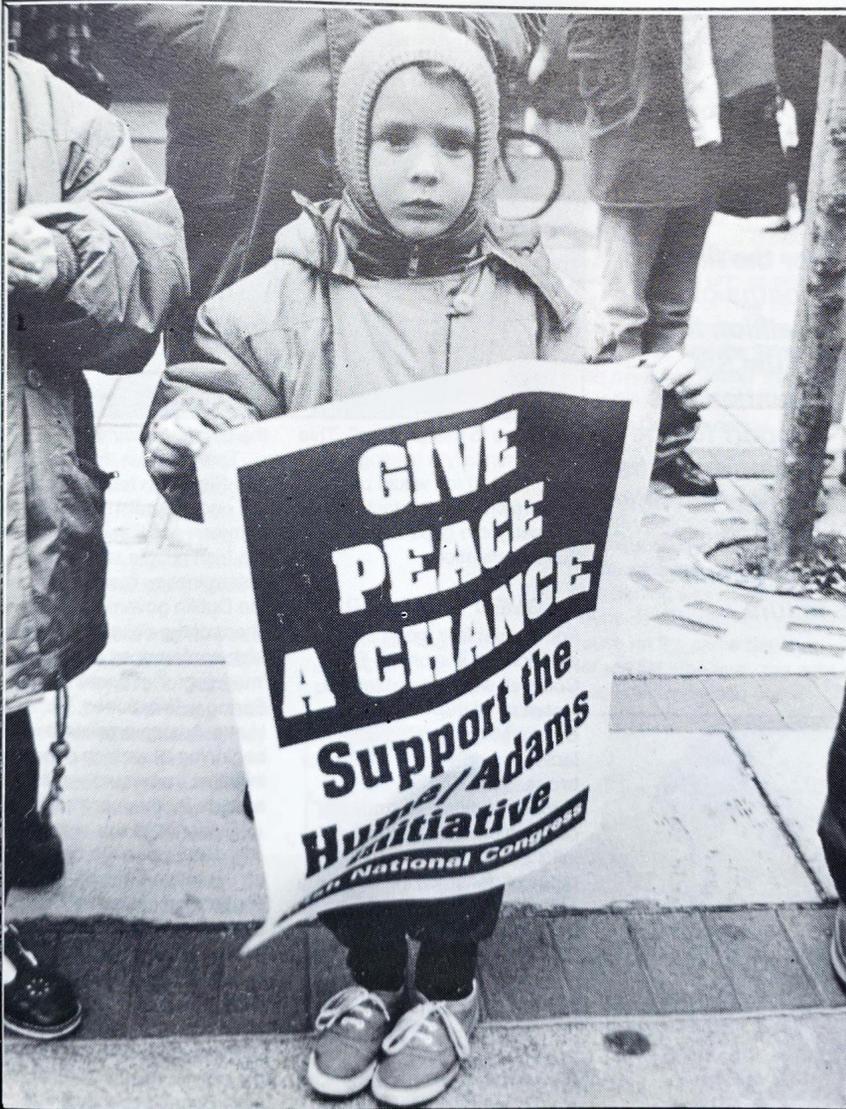
Gerry Adams and John Hume were designed to produce a united nationalist voice against British usurpation of the Irish right to national self-determination

proposals which were in turn put to the London and Dublin governments. The proposals outlined a number of basic principles:

- That the Irish people as a whole have the right to national self-determination;
- That an internal settlement is not a solution;
- That the unionists cannot have a veto over British policy, but that the consent and allegiance of unionists, expressed through an accommodation with the rest of the Irish people, are essential ingredients if a lasting peace is to be established;
- That the British government must join the persuaders;
- That the two governments have the major responsibility to secure political progress.

The series of talks between Gerry Adams and John Hume were designed to produce a united nationalist voice against British usurpation of the Irish right to national self-determination. The measure of their success can be gauged by the extremely heightened level of interest in political developments throughout the island as a whole and the Downing Street Declaration. There is a growing view that the declaration was an attempt by the British, to retake ground lost as a result of the joint proposals put forward by Gerry Adams and John Hume. These proposals placed responsibility for the conflict at the British government's door and highlighted Sinn Féin's commitment to a meaningful peace process. The London and Dublin governments were forced to focus on the issue of peace in Ireland in an unprecedented manner. The Downing Street Declaration was an attempt to throw the onus back onto Sinn Féin. We are determined that it shall not succeed.

The British government, through the person of their prime minister, John Major, holds the key to progress. Peace is knocking on the door. Sinn Féin is pushing to open the door. Will Major unlock it? In any event, we are determined not to be turned away.



Shifting sands

Fianna Fáil, Labour and the Irish peace initiative

BY NEIL FORDE

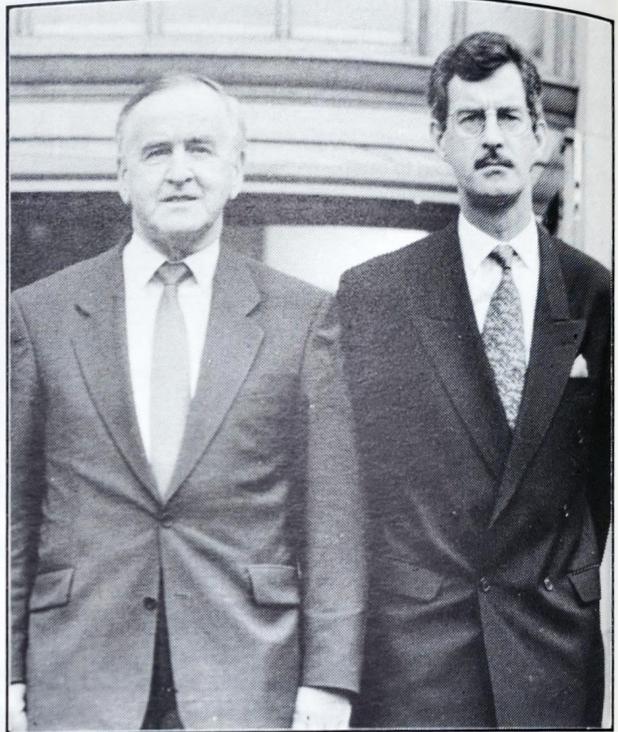
When Fianna Fáil and Labour formed their 'Partnership' coalition in January 1993, republicans wondered how the new Dublin government would develop its policy on the Six Counties and Anglo Irish politics in general.

There seemed to be an obvious conflict. Spring had made his party's participation in government dependent on him being appointed minister for foreign affairs with special responsibility for the Six Counties. His party had campaigned in the 1992 Leinster House elections on a broad economic platform. Their election manifestoes "Justice into Economics" and "Trust into Politics" offered little of any new thought out initiative on the Six Counties.

Spring's own position on the Six Counties seemed in January 1993 to place him and Labour on a par with the Progressive Democrats and Fine Gael in that he seemed to be in favour of amending Articles Two and Three unilaterally. Fianna Fáil were the only Leinster House Party which took a path that did not involve a range of immediate constitutional sops to Paisley and Molyneaux. Reynolds merely maintained that in the context of all inclusive talks everything should be on the table including Articles Two and Three and Section 75 of the Government of Ireland Act.

The coalition Partnership Programme promised that the Dublin government would "search for an end to this conflict" and will "mobilise all the resources... which can

For the first four months of the coalition the line on the Six Counties was support for the restarting of the Brooke/Mayhew talks. This tactic was doomed to failure



contribute to this process". This was essentially a holding statement which would be interpreted after the fact as the cabinet got to grips with the political situation.

DOOMED TO FAILURE

For the first four months of the coalition the line on the Six Counties was support for the restarting of the Brooke/Mayhew talks. This tactic was doomed to failure for two reasons. Firstly both the unionist parties had since the collapse of the last round of talks in 1992 constructed a range of demands including the amending of articles two and three for the initiation of new talks. Secondly the media and political reaction to the beginning of public talks between Gerry Adams and John Hume, leaked by Eamonn McCann to the press, provoked even greater consternation in

the unionist community.

The very fact that the SDLP and Sinn Féin had agreed by the end of April 1993 a common position on the right of the Irish people to self determination meant that for the Dublin government, the sham of the occasional Anglo-Irish conferences and 'meaningful' statements by Spring was exposed. Within the Hume-Adams process lay the beginning of an Irish peace initiative that would set the agenda for the months ahead.

Evidence of this was seen in July 1993 when the day before an intergovernmental conference in London Dick Spring had in a Guardian interview suggested that "There is now a very real chance of a destabilising political vacuum. If it is not possible to restart the talks, then the British and Irish governments must themselves act". Spring's proposal that

Dublin and London should act met with a verbal rebuff from Mayhew and a strained intergovernmental conference. The five hour meeting was allegedly dominated by the Guardian interview.

However Spring's interview showed clearly that the Dublin government was pursuing its own path from London and that there was considerable disagreement between the two governments.

The September 1993 statement from John Hume and Gerry Adams that they had "made considerable progress" and had "agreed to forward a report on the position reached to Dublin" brought into public light a fundamental shift in the Dublin role in the Anglo Irish process. As the weeks passed on from the Hume-Adams proposal it became clear that Reynolds had taken a small but historic step in that for the first time since partition a Dublin government was actually lobbying and pressuring Britain to support the right of the Irish people to self determination.

Dick Spring then offered his six points which was at the time the first substantial public statement by Dublin on the Hume-Adams process. It encapsulated the contradictions in the Dublin government's public position in that it was unclear about the unionist veto and seemed to be a recognition of their right to veto on any peace process which they did not favour. Reynolds has since maintained that there can be no veto.

In the weeks that followed through the Brussels summit and into November, Dublin seemed to be in a process where on a week to week basis they drifted to and from an agreement with the British position. It was obvious that divisions existed between the two governments on how to approach the Irish peace initiative. It was unclear how much pressure if any Dublin was putting on London.

The subsequent disclosure by Patrick Mayhew in the House of Commons that the British government had been since 1990 in negotiations with

Sinn Féin brought new impetus from Dublin. We now know that Spring and Reynolds were outraged that London was hedging so much on a new agreement while unknown to Dublin they had had no prejudice about previous contact with the Republican Movement.

PUBLICLY ANGRY

An intergovernmental conference the same week showed Dublin for the first time publicly angry and combative with London. The conference over ran its scheduled time as the two governments could not initially agree a communique. The net result of this events was the Downing Street Declaration.

Here in the twelve paragraphs was what seemed to be a repositioning of Dublin and London on the same political agenda. Major, Mayhew, Reynolds and Spring stood side by side outside Downing Street and claimed that the declaration had the necessary attributes to create a lasting peace.

The declaration was almost universally and unquestioningly welcomed by both the 26-County and Westminster legislatures, and the British and Irish media. However the days after the declaration showed that the Dublin London alignment was arbitrary and that serious differences remained between the two governments.

John Major's now infamous list of qualifications to the Declaration the very day of the joint signing was at odds with Reynolds assertion in Leinster House on the same day that "for the first time ever, the right to self determination of the

people of Ireland is now acknowledged. Reynolds told us in contradiction to Major's statement that "there is no unionist veto" and that "the road is open on one hand to a united Ireland, if it can be achieved by agreement and consent". Reynolds also asserted that "the nationalist community had suffered neglect and discrimination for 50 years. It is the duty of the Irish government to ensure that it never happens again".

The days after the declaration saw senior British cabinet members including foreign secretary, Douglas Hurd threatening the nationalist community and the Republican Movement with an intensified military offensive if the declaration was not accepted. Reynolds the first weekend after the declaration was agreed seemed to endorse this position. However a new Anglo-Irish rift appeared as Dublin and London squabbled over the issue of an amnesty for republican POWs.

Since then Dublin has taken a range of unilateral decisions while London has pushed a return to the failed talks process. Dublin's final position is unclear. It has since the declaration continually shifted from being at one with London to pushing its own separate agenda temporarily and then shifting back again.

Albert Reynolds has taken a historic step in that he is the first Dublin government Taoiseach to take up a positive position on creating a process which could end the conflict in Ireland. Reynolds has said that he wants to find a formula for a cessation of violence. How they have approached this in the weeks before and after the declaration has seen constant shifts in emphasis. There does seem to be more of a commitment to a peace process from Dublin. They have come further in the last year than the last seventy years gone by.

Reynolds has said that the peace initiative is based on two simple principles "the principle of agreement and the principle of consent". It remains to be seen whether Dublin can both live up to and compel London to accept this political reality.

In the weeks that followed through the Brussels summit and into November, Dublin seemed to be in a process where on a week to week basis they drifted to and from an agreement with the British position

● John Major on a Six-County propaganda visit



Unionist 'Consent' in an agreed Ireland

BY MITCHEL
McLAUGHLIN

DESPITE ALL THE assurances that the unionists have a re-affirmation of their 'statutory' guarantees, a deepening distrust of the long-term intentions of the British government has been developed in the thinking of many in the unionist population. The DUP's Ian Paisley has contributed to that and is cultivating very fertile ground as he builds his Euro Election campaign on these fears.

There are increasing numbers of the unionist community who believe that they cannot rely upon the



● MITCHEL McLAUGHLIN

integrity or commitment of the British government, and indeed haven't republicans been telling them that for years!

The present climate contains a potential for historic political developments. The loyalist death-squads with the covert patronage of British intelligence, aim variously to

act as a barrier to that or to inhibit the potential for progress. An increased tolerance of their activities from within the unionist political leadership and community has undoubtedly been developed. It is, therefore, an irresponsible misrepresentation of a very dangerous and volatile situation to explain away loyalist sectarian violence as simply a response to republican violence. Loyalism has always had its own agenda. That project reflects an often vicious determination to defend the so-called 'Protestant' homeland, ie the British state in the North of Ireland.

From the foundation of the Northern statelet, through vicious social and economic discrimination, anti-Catholic pogroms, random murders of 'Taigs' and by the assassination of political activists, the loyalist murder

The present climate contains a potential for historic political developments. The loyalist death-squads with the covert patronage of British intelligence, aim variously to act as a barrier to that or to inhibit the potential for progress



● Even the staunchest of unionists have developed a deep distrust of the British government

gangs have continuously asserted themselves, often to a backdrop of incitement by 'constitutional' unionist politicians.

Many British government spokespersons and other commentators have attempted to reassure unionists that they have, through the Downing street Declaration, and legislation ranging back to the Government of Ireland Act (1920) been given guarantees that their constitutional position has not been affected. But these comments do not address the full scope of Unionist concerns, which have as much to do with losing dominance and control over the Six-County nationalist community; with the threat to the current political social and economic infrastructure of the Six-County statelet. In summary unionist supremacy. Hence the constant unionist demand for 'guarantees', the blackmail of the 'backlash' and the refusal to engage in democratic discussion with the representatives of the remainder of the Irish people.

CONSENT OR VETO

It has become something of a cliché for those who criticise republicanism to point out that it is totally wrong to attempt to "unite the people of Ireland by force". Republicans have no such objective. The notion is a ludicrous distraction. The unity of the Irish people will be achieved by a process of national reconciliation, not by force. In 25 years of political activism, I have yet to hear any republican make such an assertion. But surely it is now time for those who wish for a lasting peace to acknowledge that the Irish people were divided by force and by a deliberate act of policy by a British government at that!

It is a matter of historical and contemporary fact that peace has been unattainable within the context of partition. The achievement of peace requires that the policies of both governments display an understanding of that. Sinn Féin policy accepts that if we are ever to have real and lasting peace on this island, there must



be a rapprochement with the unionist community in the North. Their agreement is essential to a durable and democratic settlement.

Irish republicanism rightly prides itself on its democratic inclusiveness, linking Protestant, Catholic, and Dissenter. The founders of Irish republicanism espoused the rights and the essential unity of all Irish people free from British domination. Republicanism's very existence, philosophy and universality dates back to the United Irish Movement of the 1790's. But the denial of the right to exercise Self Determination of the retarded political development in Ireland since then, and in unionism (as with the white settlers in South Africa) has created a reactionary mind-set that has rejected all efforts at a democratic accommodation. Unionists are prisoners of a history over which they have very little control. The democratic and inclusive vision of Irish republicanism offers no threat to any political opinion within the context of Irish self-determination.

The republican quarrel is with the British state in Ireland

It is a matter of historical and contemporary fact that peace has been unattainable within the context of partition

and the means by which the British government tries to impose its writ. The British government position has always been "This is the outcome. Now, let's negotiate it!" The republican position has always been the democratic one; it is for the Irish people to explore all democratic possibilities including the political option of a unitary Irish state. Ultimately it is for the Irish people through a process of persuasion and negotiation to freely make their decision on all of this.

Inevitably, in the exercise of self-determination there will be differences of emphasis and preference. But it is clear that if there is an honest desire to examine, without preconceptions, our linked histories and our aspirations then agreed political structures in Ireland are not only possible but inevitable.

Sinn Féin has a policy of dialogue with all those who share the objective of achieving an end to conflict and injustice in Ireland on the basis of universally accepted democratic principles. We are only too willing to engage in discussion, public or private,

The 'healing process' described by John Hume and the 'Process of National Reconciliation' described by Sinn Féin are similar concepts. Peace and Reconciliation are vitally important objectives which transcend many of the differences in Irish society today

with any and all shades of political opinions in Ireland to achieve that objective through securing agreement on national political structures.

BRITISH POLICY IN IRELAND

In the pre and post Downing Street Declaration period commentators have proffered various contradictory interpretations of British government policy in Ireland. This, of course, brings its own influence to bear on conflicting public perceptions of the meaning of the Downing Street Declaration itself. Hence the importance of clarifications. The central question to be answered is, of course, does it represent the prenegotiations stage of the resolution phase of the conflict or is it merely a British government political counteroffensive to the Irish Peace Initiative?

Sinn Féin's Peace Commission is currently involved in a process of public consultation on those very issues and will come to

conclusions in due course.

Notwithstanding his reiterated belief that the British are now neutral in Ireland, John Hume has in recent months, put on record his view that as a consequence of British policy in Ireland, "there still remains a bitter legacy, which is that we are a deeply divided people". This view would be shared by Sinn Féin. The SDLP leader has offered two other conclusions, the first of which Sinn Féin would completely endorse, "that division cannot be healed by force".

John Hume's other conclusion, proffered during a speech delivered in August 1992, is also worthy of careful study. He argued that "Britain should develop the implications of Peter Brooke's speech (of no selfish strategic or economic interest) by making it clear that not only would she like to see the divisions among the people of Ireland healed by agreement but she would commit her resources to creating the

atmosphere that would bring such a healing process about." He ended that particular passage by calling on Britain to join the ranks of the persuaders and it is important that John Hume should be encouraged to pursue that opinion.

The 'healing process' described by John Hume and the 'Process of National Reconciliation' described by Sinn Féin are similar concepts. Peace and Reconciliation are vitally important objectives which transcend many of the differences in Irish society today.

There are, however, deep and genuine difficulties in ending a conflict whose roots in Ireland are to be found in a history of colonial conquest long before any of us were born. Who of all the forces who are active in Ireland in this, the last decade of the 20th Century, has the most influence over the greatest number of people to effect the necessary political changes. Clearly that lies with the



London and Dublin governments and especially the British government which has the power and responsibility to progress the situation.

Surely the logic of inclusive dialogue currently being pursued in the Middle East and in South Africa with the enthusiastic support of the London and the Dublin governments should now be deployed in the North to break the cycle of violence, repression and resistance that made a victim of everyone who lives there.

The twin objectives of peace and reconciliation in Ireland will challenge us all, but opportunities to begin the process are being ignored by both governments. The failure of more than twenty years of 'pacification' or 'counter-insurgency' programmes was underlined by the ambiguity and 'fudge' of the Downing Street Declaration.

Peace, stability, justice and reconciliation in Ireland can only be achieved through agreement between an overwhelming majority of the people on this island. That agreement must be based on political maturity, mutual respect, and a willingness to create new structures acceptable to all.

Despite all the rhetoric about 'consent', the unionist veto belongs, in reality, to the British government.

British government policy has inhibited and removed any incentive for unionists to engage in dialogue. The veto has promoted intransigence, inflexibility, and an absolute unwillingness to consider any proposal for political progress that rejected Britain's involvement in Ireland.

But clearly partition has failed, and all informed opinion implicitly accepts that fact. Unionists are a substantial minority on the island of Ireland. It should never be disputed that unionist agreement is not only desirable but vital if we are to have lasting peace and stability in Ireland. The unionist community must be encouraged to recognise that their future lies within a newly negotiated Ireland, in which their power and influence will

have a legitimate determining effect. Such a national agreement is unattainable within the context of partition which denies the Irish people their right to national self-determination. The continued pretext for partition — the wishes of a national minority to maintain British rule holds no validity against the express wishes of the vast majority of the Irish people.

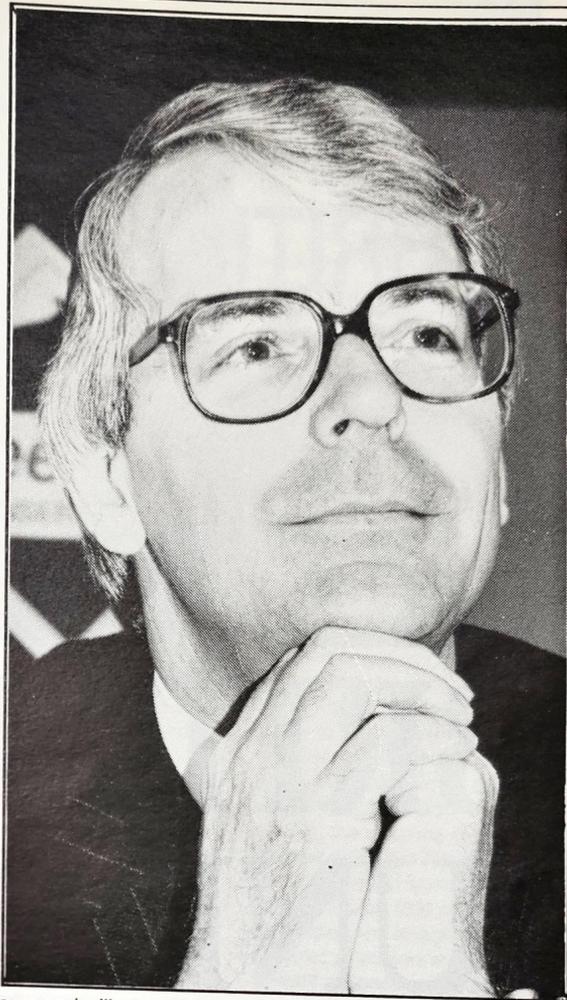
Britain created the unionist veto and Britain created the "consent" misnomer. Because Britain has the power to remove the veto, it holds the key to the solution of this problem. Britain has the responsibility to change this contrived and historically divisive policy. Sinn Féin believes that by ending the constitutional guarantee and the "veto", Britain can at long last break the political log-jam in Ireland by instituting a new realism and determination to enter into inclusive dialogue.

The deliberate denial of Irish self-determination is responsible for the repression, injustice, discrimination, conflict and tragedy in our country. Partition maintains distrust, division and political violence. It ensures unionist intransigence, and, coupled with politically engineered ignorance in Britain and systematic censorship on both islands, will guarantee further decades of the cycle of repression and resistance.

A NEW BEGINNING

Genuine peace in Ireland depends upon recognition by the British government of the failure of partition. Given such an initiative it would be the duty of republicans to engage openly, generously, and imaginatively, in the process of building trust, within mutually agreed time-frames, between all the different political traditions on the island.

Irish self-determination poses no threat to unionists. We, as republicans, know that the acceptance of this principle will lead us into a period of difficulty and shifting allegiances. We will all have moved into a post-partition mode of exploration, where the traditional republican vocabulary of struggle and freedom will no longer be solely



● JOHN MAJOR

ours and will require constant clarification and examination.

Sinn Féin is not afraid of such developments. The republican position is a matter of record. We understand only too well that the granting of the Irish people's right to self-determination will not solve overnight a history of conflict. We will undoubtedly be in a period of great flux and change, but so too will the unionists, and all the other shades of opinion on this island. We will all be together in that initial confusion. That must pose a difficult, yet surmountable, challenge to us all. In the new Ireland we can be part of a new beginning, cherishing our histories, yet resolved to bury, in the making of our new country, our divided and violent pasts. Irish self-determination, for all the Irish people, can, and will, accommodate all our aspirations and this historic opportunity.

Genuine peace in Ireland depends upon recognition by the British government of the failure of partition



BRITAIN'S 'UNIONIST VETO'

BY
HILDA
Mac THOMAS

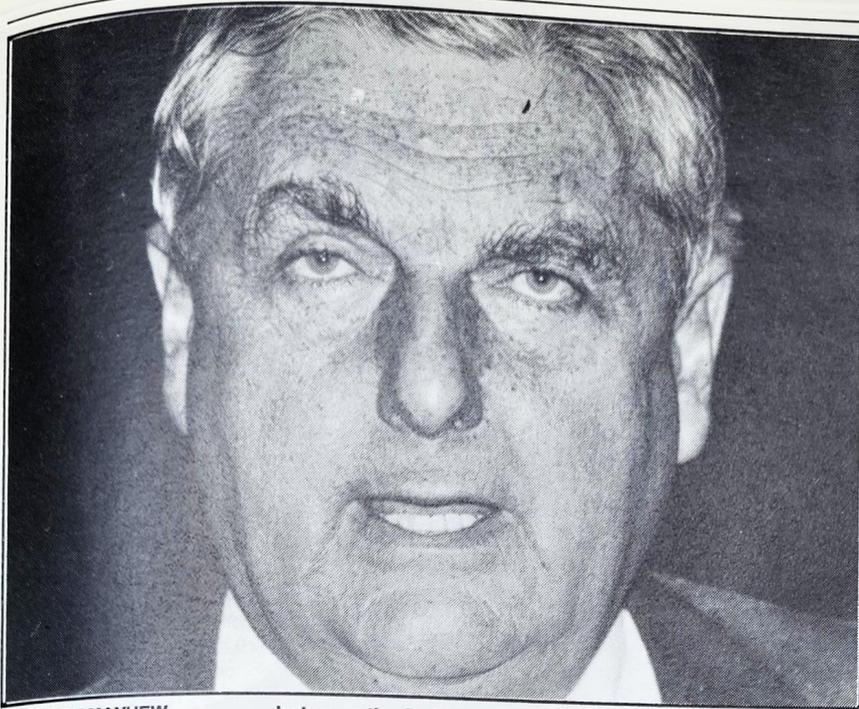
ONE OF the main questions Irish nationalists ask themselves as they assess the Downing Street Declaration and the chances of it assisting in a meaningful peace process, is what the British government intend to do concretely to bring about 'peace'. Analysing British strategy at this time can be a hazardous business. What is the strategy of a government which on the one hand affirms that it has

"no selfish strategic or economic interest" in Ireland, that it wants to assist the people of Ireland in seeking agreement among themselves, and which engages in private talks with Sinn Féin over a period of several months to explore the possibilities of lasting settlement, and on the other hand, continues to censor, repress and attack those in the Six Counties who disagree with Britain's continued interference in Irish affairs.

*Analysing
British strategy
at this time can
be a hazardous
business*

One of the sharpest contributions to that analysis in the mainstream press appeared last November in the Dublin newspaper, the *Sunday Business Post*, where a 'special correspondent' outlined what s/he saw as the current British policy aims. They deserve quoting:

- "1. To portray John Major and Patrick Mayhew as reasonable and flexible men, acting as honest brokers in the attempt to find peace — for the British it is imperative that this impression is driven home in North America and mainland Europe. It hardly matters at all what Irish people — Protestant or Catholic, nationalist or unionist — think of these people.
2. To maintain the support of James Molyneaux and the Official Unionists, by offering them practical concessions at Westminster and within Northern Ireland, while refusing absolutely to make any fundamental concessions on issues of importance to Dublin, to Hume or Sinn Féin.
3. To drive a wedge, if possible, between Hume and Adams.
4. Falling this, to drive a wedge, if necessary,



● PATRICK MAYHEW

One of the ironies of the last two months is that the British government, having produced this declaration with the Dublin government, which aims, they say, to lead the way to peace, now refuses to clarify the points of this declaration

- between the Dublin government and Hume.
5. To place the blame for a continuation of the violence on what they call the "leadership of the Provisional movement".
 6. To employ the extraordinary degree of influence which the British can exert on the UFF, UVF and Ulster Resistance and the knowledge they possess of the operations of those organisations, to best advantage."

The writer adds another aim, which is to use agents and paid informers to destabilise and ultimately "liquidate all republican organisations."

There is very little in the history of the last few months which would disprove this analysis. It may well make depressing reading, but since last September, the British government's whole thrust has been directed at resisting the mounting pressure to embark on a real peace process.

The Downing Street Declaration is, as the British government would have the public in Britain, Ireland and internationally think, the last word of London and Dublin as to how a peace process can be set in train. But does it really do that? It certainly furthers the first objective above. But no

actual peace process can be guessed from the document.

"A masterpiece of ambiguity" is how a commentator described the Downing Street Declaration within hours of its release. The declaration made a number of very general points and a few very broad statements of intent. But all those who have read it carefully, and there are many, particularly among northern nationalists, have come up with more questions than answers.

One of the ironies of the last two months is that the British government, having produced this declaration with the Dublin government, which aims, they say, to lead the way to peace, now refuses to clarify the points of this declaration — at least they refuse to clarify it for the benefit of the very people which they were trying to persuade of their intent, namely, republicans. "It needs no clarifications and will get none," in the words of Secretary of State Patrick Mayhew.

British Prime Minister John Major added another warning to Sinn Féin that they would "find themselves increasingly isolated" if they did not jump and accept the Joint Declaration quickly. This was against a backdrop of confusion created by the discrepancies between the

comments of the British and Irish prime ministers after the signing of the declaration, and the contrast between the language of 'peace' used in the declaration and the aggressive tone of British ministers in subsequent statements.

The ink was hardly dry on the bottom of the Joint Declaration when the British Prime Minister John Major had felt it necessary to reassure unionists as to what the declaration was not about. In the British House of Commons he informed Jim Molyneux that the declaration meant:

NO — to the value of achieving a united Ireland.

NO — to a united Ireland.

NO — to any timetable for a united Ireland.

NO — to Britain joining the persuaders.

NO — to any change in the unionist veto.

NO — to joint authority.

NO — to Dublin say in the affairs of the North.

On 4 January, in an address to "the people of Ulster", through the columns of the unionist daily, the *Newsletter*, Major reiterated some of those 'Nos', showing little of the innovation and imagination required of someone describing himself as leading a "peace process". He described Sinn Féin's request for clarifications as "an increasingly desperate attempt to avoid facing up to the clear choice that confronts them."

Even more 'confrontational' language had come from Douglas Hurd, the British foreign secretary, who on 27 December threatened republicans that unless they "stopped prevaricating" they could expect "no quarter". Hurd explained that the Joint Declaration signified that the two governments had now updated their positions, and that republicans should realise that they could "no longer exploit divisions between the British and Irish governments, or stir up trouble in the United States, as they have done in the past." Using a tone reminiscent of Lloyd George's threat of "all-out-war" in 1921 if republicans did not sign the treaty, Hurd added that the



"ring" around republicans had become more solid, and that republican rejection of the declaration would cause an intensification of "security measures" against them.

Hurd's statement came in the wake of other comments by British ministers that there would be no amnesty for political prisoners, and that the IRA's handing up of all arms and explosives would figure high on the agenda of the "exploratory talks" promised by the British government after a three-month cessation by the IRA.

Admittedly, these two issues had been raised, not by the British government, but by journalists. But the fact that the British chose to respond in this way indicates, to say the least, that they are more intent on war than peace. The question of an amnesty for prisoners has always been a very emotive one. As for the prospect of the IRA handing up its weapons, it caused great concern throughout the northern nationalist community,

particularly given the current campaign by loyalist death squads. Nationalists have always looked on the IRA as a deterrent against loyalist attacks, and in some cases, as their last line of defence.

The case for giving Sinn Féin the clarifications that it requires is a very strong one. Over the last two months it has received support from the British Labour Party, John Hume, Cardinal Cahal Daly, and several Dublin politicians. The Dublin government has felt compelled to address some of the issues in the declaration through speeches and statements. But London remains intransigent.

The Official Unionists meanwhile, flushed with the power granted them by nine Westminster MPs, whose support a weak John Major badly needs, have assessed the declaration as "posing no threat to the union", and have been pushing ahead with their own political demands. The setting up of a Select Committee in Westminster is in

progress, and OUP leader James Molyneux has briefed local unionist associations about the prospect of a local assembly by the end of this year.

The mounting evidence of the British government's unionist agenda at work is beginning to cause concern among nationalists, whose hopes prior to the Downing Street Declaration have gradually been chipped away by all these utterances. It is this growing concern which provoked recent requests for clarifications. Even Eddie McGrady, the most 'unionist' of SDLP MPs, who has always pushed for an internal settlement with unionists, came out in January with a most unequivocal attack on the Downing Street Declaration. He called it a "unionist document" and criticised its over-emphasis on reassuring unionists: "The declaration specifically refers to the unionists in no less than seven places, each reassuring the unionists of

● Dick Spring, Douglas Hurd, Mairé Geoghegan Quinn and Patrick Mahyew at an intergovernmental conference some weeks before the signing of the Downing Street Declaration

The mounting evidence of the British government's unionist agenda at work is beginning to cause concern among nationalists

their position, each giving an enhancement to the unionist veto.

"Democratic nationalists of the North," he added, "do not even merit a mention, except possibly the platitude of being 'equally' valued. No question of a right of veto to the nationalist community. No question of repeated reassurances of our position." He further pointed to the evidence of the British government delivering on their deal with the OUP.

"Is this what the unionist veto really means", he concluded, "the sellout of the northern nationalists? Clarifications are certainly the order of the day — and not just of the Downing Street Declaration."

In a recent interview with the *Scotsman*, the OUP leader James Molyneaux claims that last Autumn, thanks to his 'understanding' with the British Prime Minister John Major, he obtained from him the removal of crucial proposals from what was to become the Joint Declaration. These proposals outlined the setting up of a British-Irish convention, which would have been sitting in

parallel with a devolved Six-County assembly, and would have held some power over it.

This "neutralised" the declaration, the OUP leader claims, and made it into a "muddled, tortuous document" which "didn't pose any threat to the union". Molyneaux claims that under his influence, the Dublin government's original proposals — which surfaced in a leak to the *Irish Press* last November — were slashed from a 30-paragraph to a 12-paragraph document. This, he trusted, made the resulting declaration unacceptable to the IRA. "The IRA would have been a bit more sympathetic if the British government had agreed to the 30 paragraphs... Once it was denuded of the mechanisms, it was no good for them."

One of the Dublin proposals Molyneaux alleges he let go through, is that of Reynolds' 'Forum for Peace and Reconciliation'. Reynolds "can have a talking shop if he wants to," the unionist leader contemptuously remarked. "We are not involved. The British government is not involved. They can do what they like. It is

their own sovereign territory."

As the *Scotsman* editorial commented, Molyneaux's words begged the question of whether the British government or the unionists were in charge of Britain's Irish policy. "The Joint Declaration's survival chances have clearly diminished if the Prime Minister is beholden to the Ulster Unionists, to the extent that Mr Molyneaux indicates," the *Scottish newspaper* concluded.

Dublin replied that Mr Molyneaux was confusing two documents, and that the lengthy document he alleged he had "neutralised" was not Dublin's contribution to the Joint Declaration. But there are signs that the British move to restart talks between the northern parties — without Sinn Féin — is worrying Dublin.

British minister Michael Ancram has already met delegations of the OUP, the Alliance party, and the SDLP. Ancram said his government hoped these talks would achieve "an acceptable settlement which will lead to lasting peace in Northern Ireland." The OUP has expressed the hope that the British would revive a local assembly before the end of this year. The DUP is refusing to take part in the process, because of current developments which it interprets as a British sellout of the union. Sinn Féin is excluded from talks because of the British precondition of an IRA cease-fire. As for the DUP, it is proceeding with local meetings around the Six Counties for its 'Save Ulster Campaign'. It has vowed not to get involved in any inter-party talks while the Joint Declaration is up and running. The inter-party talks have, therefore, even fewer chances of success than they had in 1991 and 1992, when they collapsed amidst recriminations, unionist blackmail and the British refusal to take risks and depart from a partitionist framework.

But this matters apparently little to British Secretary of State Patrick Mayhew. He is now prepared to "give focus and direction" — the words he used last October — to the

Molyneaux claims that under his influence, the Dublin government's original proposals — which surfaced in a leak to the Irish Press last November — were slashed from a 30-paragraph to a 12-paragraph document



talks, by proposing the setting up of an assembly which would share power with him over the administration of the Six Counties.

Another story which surfaced recently was the alleged role of MI5 in the seizure last November in Teeside of the Polish arms shipment destined to loyalists. According to a Dublin newspaper, a Polish official claimed that the arms shipment was part of a bogus operation carried out by the British for political reasons, namely to put pressure on the Dublin government to accept the terms of the Joint Declaration. Loyalist death squads have recently let it be known that other shipments reached their destination.

Collusion between the British military machine and the loyalists has been well documented. The leaking of RUC files to the UDA and UVF continues to this day — this week for example people living in the Twinbrook and Poleglass areas of West Belfast were informed their files had gone missing and were in the hands of loyalists. And in the same

way that individual cases of repression, once they become known, bring fear to the whole community in which these individuals live — a human rights activist once called it the "penumbra of repression" — attacks by loyalist murder squads with the backup of the British state terrorises the whole nationalist community. But the collusion extends beyond the operational level to the political.

Terrorising the nationalist community, the British government hopes, might force them to put pressure on the IRA to retaliate, thus deflecting it from its main objective if it does, or exposing it to criticism from its support base if it doesn't. But it might also force them to lower their political demands and settle for much less than national self-determination. It assists the British in portraying the conflict as a sectarian war. It gives military clout to the 'unionist veto' by hinting that, should the British grant nationalist demands, there would be a "loyalist backlash", possibly far worse than the current one.

It would not be the first time

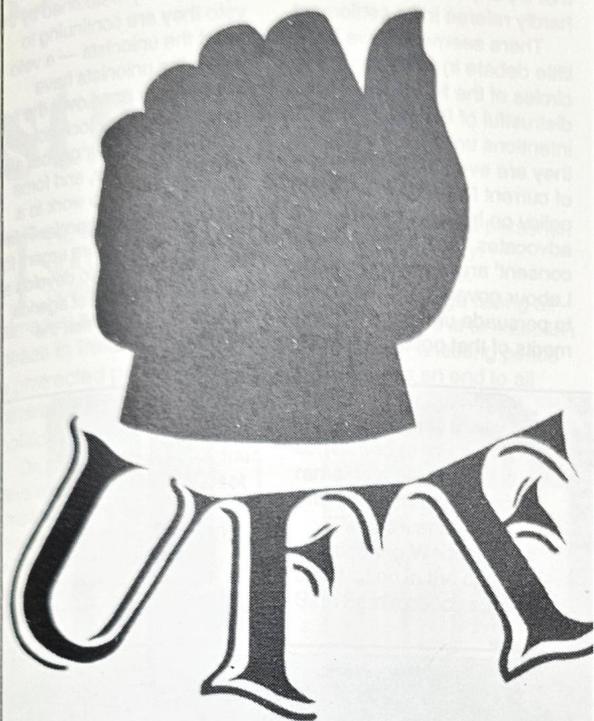
that the threat, inherent in the upsurge of loyalist attacks, has been unashamedly used by the British government, particularly by the RUC, to put pressure on Dublin. Throughout last year, a number of RUC briefings to the media hinted at possible loyalist bombings in the South. This was mentioned in the RUC annual report for 1992, published in the summer of 1993. Last summer, Chief Constable Hugh Annesley made a public declaration on the subject. It provoked an angry reaction from Dublin Foreign Affairs Minister Dick Spring, who complained that such information, if true, should not have been communicated to the Dublin government via the media. This was a clear example of the British government using loyalist violence for political ends.

In the warped political setup of the Six Counties, unionists are constantly fearful that they will be abandoned by Britain. They react at the slightest sign that Britain might be speaking with nationalists or planning some reforms. This in turn creates the illusion for nationalists that change is on

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the way, but that it is thwarted by unionist opposition. Meanwhile, the British government will be making noises about the need to keep unionists 'on board', the need for unionist consent. The fact is, that unionism has acted as a means to lower nationalist expectations of what political change is achievable.

Loyalist death squads have served the British political agenda in much the same way. Whenever nationalists are perceived to be making some headway — the abolition of Stormont in 1971, IRA talks with the British government in 1975 and also in the 1992-93 talks, the Hillsborough Treaty, the Hume/Adams talks — out come the loyalist dogs of war. Unionist politicians meanwhile

act as unofficial PR for the death squads. For example, throughout last year they launched frequent verbal attacks on the alleged 'pan-nationalist front' while the UDA was murdering nationalists. And while loyalists have their own political agenda, they have also been used by the British to further their own, and been facilitated with arms and intelligence for that purpose.

The DUP and the UDA have bared their teeth, and sent a clear message to Irish nationalists and to the Dublin government — stop messing with our little state, or you will have to contend with our guns. The OUP, while welcoming the declaration, have also been applying pressure. They have asked for a deadline to be put

on Sinn Féin's response to the declaration. They have supported the British government's ridiculous refusal to clarify the ambiguous terms of the declaration and of ensuing statements. They have been clamouring for a resumption of the inter-party talks which the British were preparing to relaunch before the Downing Street Declaration. The OUP is confidently predicting that the British will be setting up a Six-County assembly before the end of the year.

The British political agenda seems clearly focused on maintaining the status quo, and producing yet another cobbled-up internal arrangement, where local politicians will be kept amused for another while. The tone of British declarations and statements is, 'take it or leave it'. With the support of the OUP, and with the DUP and the UDA growling in the background, the unionist alliance is shaping up.

Recent events, particularly developments over the past year, point to some serious contradictions and u-turns in British policy regarding Ireland. In April 1993 in particular, the British government was considering holding a delegate conference with Sinn Féin as a first step towards a peace process. By June, they had dropped the whole idea. In October, they rejected the Hume/Adams proposals. And now they are running with the Downing Street Declaration — an ambiguous text which subsequent comments from London have failed to clarify — and restarting a failed political initiative. The need to be seen to be doing something while offering nothing new, and to portray republicans as the unreasonable stumbling block, seems to be driving the British government once again.

Irish nationalists may well conclude that British Prime Minister John Major — an "emotional unionist" as a colleague described him — lacks the strength to break out from this mindset, the courage to take political risks and the vision to set up a genuine peace process. Having cobbled up an alliance with the nine

Whenever nationalists are perceived to be making some headway — the abolition of Stormont in 1971, IRA talks with the British government in 1975 and also in the 1992-93 talks, the Hillsborough Treaty, the Hume/Adams talks — out come the loyalist dogs of war

Official Unionist MPs at Westminster to guard himself against desertion by some of his own backbenchers in tight votes, Major is now running with the OUP's agenda.

And so back to the British policy objectives quoted earlier. There is, as we said, very little in recent history to disprove that these are the current British intentions. The implication for nationalists of these objectives, and of recent political developments, is clear. First of all, they highlight that nationalists must not confine their reflection and analysis to the Joint Declaration but to the context in which it was made. And this context involves not only the comments made by London and Dublin prior, and after the signing of the Downing Street document. It also involved looking at the current balance of power in

The British government's room to manoeuvre has been considerably weakened by the veto they are continuing to grant the unionists

Westminster and the implication of the 'understanding' reached by Major and the OUP last June. In the Downing Street Declaration, as they have said many times before and since, the British have tried to portray themselves as 'facilitators', that is, neutral referees. Molyneaux's recent utterances further dent such an assertion, already weakened by the fact that a party to a conflict can hardly referee in its settlement.

There seems to have been little debate in British political circles of the fact that, however distrustful of British government intentions unionists may be, they are even more distrustful of current British Labour Party policy on Ireland, which advocates 'Irish unity by consent' and suggests that a Labour government would work to persuade unionists of the merits of that policy. The fact

that, should Major take the necessary risks and move towards a final and just settlement in Ireland, it could reasonably expect some support from its Labour opposition, which would probably not want to be excluded from such a historic move.

The British government's room to manoeuvre has been considerably weakened by the veto they are continuing to grant the unionists — a veto which the unionists have consistently used over the past two decades to block not only constitutional change, but also political progress, and force political parties to work to a British-unionist agenda. This makes it even more urgent for Irish nationalists to develop and pursue a nationalist agenda which will help break the deadlock.



The evolution of Sinn Féin's peace strategy

BY
CHRISIE
McAULEY

THE DEVELOPMENT of a comprehensive political strategy aimed at securing a lasting peace in Ireland has, over a protracted period, been central to Sinn Féin's political programme.

On 19 December 1993, four days after the Downing Street Declaration, the Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams, writing in *The Sunday Tribune*, reiterated that the establishment of a real peace

process was both a personal and political priority.

Mr Adams said:

"The challenge facing all political leaders is to establish the basis for a lasting peace which brings an end to all conflict in our country.

"Sinn Féin is totally committed to this and it remains a personal and political priority for me.

"Republicans will be considering Wednesday's declaration in the context of Sinn Féin's peace strategy. We

will approach it positively and seek to move the peace strategy forward."

- Sinn Féin is committed to the establishment of a durable peace with justice in Ireland.

- It considers this its highest political priority.

- Over a protracted period Sinn Féin has concentrated its political effort in pushing ahead, publicly and privately, domestically and internationally, in debate and dialogue around the issue of establishing peace.

- There are no instant solutions. The building of a sustainable peace process is by its nature fraught with difficulties and confusion. Above all it will be protracted.

Mr Adams said:
"The challenge facing all political leaders is to establish the basis for a lasting peace which brings an end to all conflict in our country."





● Grandiose gestures which ignore the core issues can only but delay the development of a real peace process.

PEACE STRATEGY EVOLVES

How did Sinn Féin's peace strategy evolve and how, despite all the odds, has the party managed to make considerable political headway in pushing ahead with its peace agenda to the extent where the British and Irish governments were forced, at least publicly, to appear to be addressing the issue of peace?

FROM REACTIVE TO PROACTIVE

The Armagh and H-Block prison hunger strikes of 1980/81 led to significant developments within Sinn Féin. The political experience gained through the hunger strike period, coupled with additional personnel, completely transformed what had formerly been a loosely organised reactive protest organisation

into a proactive, politically focussed party.

Effectively, the hunger-strike period acted as a catalyst in the rapid political evolution of republican politics. Internal debate in Sinn Féin, coupled with its active participation in councils, in the community and in campaign work, produced a breed of experienced activists. They had a sharper political focus on events and an ability to articulate the causes of conflict and the means required to make conflict redundant.

Despite many formidable obstacles placed in its way by the Irish and British establishments, proof of the validity of Sinn Féin's political position lies in the relevancy of its policies in relation to current Irish politics.

Censorship in both parts of Ireland and in Britain has placed a considerable obstacle in the way of Sinn Féin's ability to project to the general public its political analysis of how to achieve lasting peace.

However, Sinn Féin, through various publicity mechanisms

— keynote speeches, press conferences, book launches, speaking tours abroad, exclusive interviews and Ard Fheis presidential addresses — has fairly successfully managed these publicity opportunities to promote its peace agenda.

Over the years, Sinn Féin has made strenuous efforts to engage in dialogue with those politically opposed to its position. Dialogue is viewed by Sinn Féin as an absolute necessity in conflict resolution. To this end it has attempted to break down the misconceptions created by Britain's attempt to isolate the party and censor its opinion.

THE POLITICS OF IRISH FREEDOM

It is interesting to note that in 1986, six years before the publication of Sinn Féin's current policy position on the peace process contained in *Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland*, Gerry Adams, writing in his book *The Politics of Irish Freedom* synthesised in just

Effectively, the hunger-strike period acted as a catalyst in the rapid political evolution of republican politics



three pages the political pathway to peace which would later be outlined — albeit in more detail — in *Towards a Lasting Peace*. (See pages 165-167 which identify the cause of conflict as the British presence, that the building of peace lies in the removal of this barrier, that maximum public pressure in Britain, Ireland and internationally is needed to achieve this)

SCENARIO FOR PEACE

On Friday 1 May, 1987, Sinn Féin produced *Scenario for Peace* which spelt out a certain formula on how to demilitarise the conflict via a British withdrawal.

The document, as a first public statement of Sinn Féin's peace strategy, defined 'national self-determination' for Ireland in the context of international law; it addressed the issue of loyalists and their place in an Irish democracy and placed the onus firmly on the British government as the root cause of the conflict. It endorsed the principle that it was a matter for the Irish people "as a whole" to "determine the future status of Ireland".

The final section of the document proposes a way in which the British government could withdraw and transfer

power to an all-Ireland constitutional convention and national government.

The document did not represent the definitive republican position, nor was it exclusive of other proposals dealing with alternative scenarios for a British withdrawal from Ireland.

Whatever its shortfalls, *Scenario for Peace* was an important first step in Sinn Féin's teasing out of the elements required to end conflict. It was also a useful mechanism to invite dialogue and discussion among its critics.

A PATHWAY TO PEACE

Nineteen eighty-eight saw the publication of *A Pathway to Peace* by Gerry Adams which elaborated fuller on the twin issues of conflict and peace. Again, there are many elements in *A Pathway to Peace* which would later be contained in the February 1992 publication of *Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland*.

Chapter two in *A Pathway to Peace*, headed Peace with Justice? reads:

"Peace is not simply the absence of war or conflict. It is the existence of conditions of justice and equality which eradicate the causes of war or conflict. It is the existence of

conditions in which the absence of war or conflict is self-sustaining.

"The Irish people have never known peace. Despite protracted periods of an absence of war the conditions fostered and imposed on us have ensured perennial conflict. The Irish people have a right to peace. They have a right to political structures which are capable of sustaining peace — of making peace permanent. They have a right to decide for themselves what those structures would be. They have an obligation to ensure that the ethos and practice of those structures guarantee equality for all Irish people and serve the best interests of all the Irish people."

A Pathway to Peace represented yet another step forward for republicans in terms of articulating the republican position and in promoting the peace debate.

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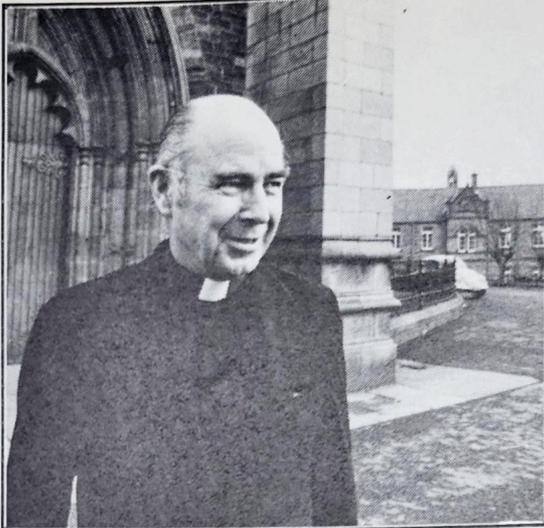
SINN FÉIN/SDLP TALKS

Between January-September 1988 senior Sinn Féin and SDLP members held a series of discussions aimed at investigating the possibility of developing an overall political strategy to establish justice and peace in Ireland.

A number of discussion documents were exchanged. However, the meetings concluded with both parties being unable to agree at that time on an overall strategy.

Sinn Féin's closing statement in this exchange shows the extent to which its current peace strategy was already in an advanced stage. It said:

"Our discussions with the SDLP elicited the shared political view that the Irish people as a whole have the right to national self-determination and that the Irish people should be defined as those people domiciled on the island of Ireland (and its off-shore islands). In that context it was accepted that an internal Six-County settlement is no solution." (Compare this with the position outlined by Gerry Adams and John Hume in their first joint statement in April 1993 which reaches the same conclusion).



● Bishop Edward Daly

Sinn Féin long ago left behind the politics of 'Brits Out' and has evolved into a relevant political party with a clearly defined strategy that has the potential of moving the situation away from conflict and towards a durable peace in Ireland

Sinn Féin intensified internal debate and external dialogue. Throughout the Brooke talks process, public statements from Sinn Féin spokespersons repeatedly pointed out the flaws in the British approach which continued to ignore partition as the biggest stumbling block to peace.

TOWARDS A LASTING PEACE IN IRELAND

During discussion of the political report to the 1991 Ard Fheis it was announced that an Ard Chomhairle sub-committee was to be given the task of reviewing the *Scenario for Peace* document and would report within 12 months.

The sub-committee began its assessment in February 1991 and some months later presented the Ard Chomhairle with the first draft of *Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland*. This was reviewed, ratified and released to the Sinn Féin membership for discussion. The document was endorsed at the February 1992 Ard Fheis (annual conference).

The publication of *Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland* represented a cornerstone in the development of Sinn Féin's peace strategy. Its publicity promotion resulted in an intense programme for work for Sinn Féin both domestically and internationally. Despite limited resources, it was presented to the London and Dublin governments and widely distributed to all shades of

political, religious and community opinion makers in Ireland, Britain and abroad. It was officially launched by Sinn Féin representatives at press conferences in the USA, in Ireland, Britain, Europe and Australia.

The substance of the peace document contained in the section 'Conditions for Democracy and Peace' (section 6) is obviously the main thrust of the document and represents a new approach to the peace debate by Sinn Féin. The four key requirements for creating the conditions for peace and democracy in Ireland are identified:

1. **A British government which makes the ending of partition its policy objective.**
2. **A Dublin government which has the same policy objective.**
3. **Cooperation between the two governments over a period of time to bring about this joint objective in the shortest possible time consistent with obtaining the maximum consent to the process and minimising costs of every kind.**
4. **Democracy and practicality demands that this be done in consultation and cooperation with the representatives of the Irish minority, the northern unionists, as well as the representatives of the northern nationalists. In effect, a process of national reconciliation.**

EXPANDING DISCUSSION

In line with its objective of promoting discussion around its peace strategy contained in *Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland*, senior members of Sinn Féin have been engaged in both private and public meetings and discussions with individuals and groupings spanning the so-called political 'divide' and among a broad representation of the Irish establishment.

These have included dialogue in 1992 with the

former Bishop of Derry Dr Edward Daly and former Presbyterian Moderators Jack Weir and Godfrey Brown; with representatives of the business community (nationalist and unionist); with wide ranging representatives of the community; and with politicians acting in both a personal and official capacity.

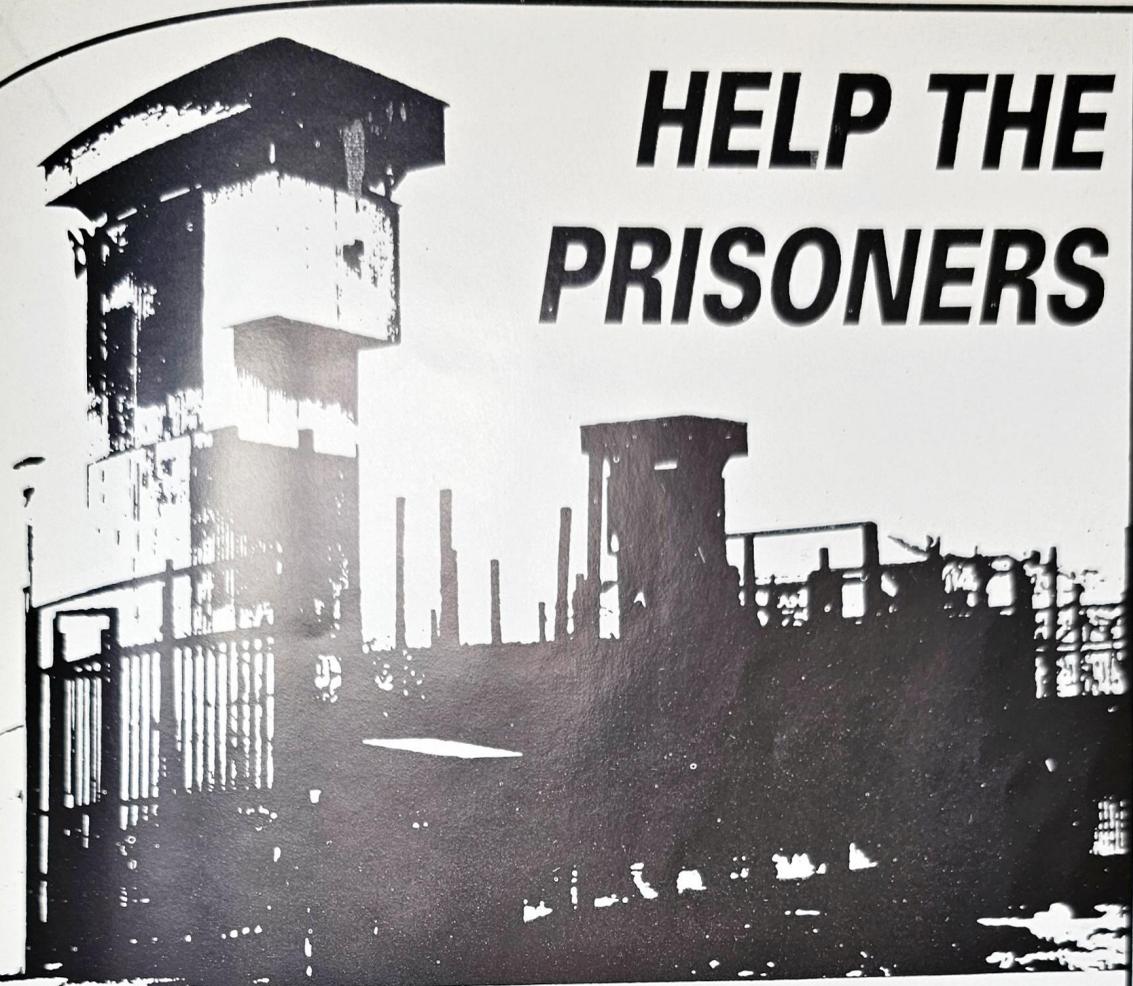
The most important of these discussions were with the SDLP leader Mr John Hume and Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams last year, acting in their respective roles as leaders of the nationalist community. These discussions led to the release in April and September of joint statements which set in motion a process which has forced the London and Dublin governments into frenzied activity in order to be seen to be prioritising peace in Ireland. Sinn Féin is currently undergoing an intensive consultation period with as wide a body of opinion as possible and is seeking clarification from both governments on several ambiguities and seeming contradictions contained in the Downing Street Declaration.

CONCLUSION

As documented above, Sinn Féin long ago left behind the politics of 'Brits Out' and has evolved into a relevant political party with a clearly defined strategy that has the potential of moving the situation away from conflict and towards a durable peace in Ireland.

Our peace strategy is our highest political priority and has been for many years. This project and the continuing evolution of party policy and its public promotion has been and remains a major undertaking, accomplished and conducted in most difficult conditions, unreported by most sections of the media and mis-represented by others and by our opponents.

Sinn Féin is, and will remain, totally committed to this strategy and remains ready to continue to debate the issues with any party to the conflict, believing that inclusive dialogue is necessary in the protracted nature of conflict resolution.



HELP THE PRISONERS

SUPPORT An Cumann Cabhrach & Green Cross

An Cumann Cabhrach and Green Cross are two organisations, staffed by voluntary unpaid workers, which exist to alleviate some of the suffering of republican prisoners and their families. Dependent solely on public subscriptions and collections, these bodies provide weekly grants to dependants of over 700 republican prisoners in jails in Ireland, Britain, Europe and the US, pay expenses and arrange accommodation for relatives visiting POWs and provide finance to purchase clothing and other necessities for these prisoners.

All donations, enquiries and offers of help should be addressed to:
An Cumann Cabhrach,
44 Parnell Square,
Dublin 1.
or
Green Cross
51/55 Falls Road,
Belfast 12.

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