



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Analysis of Provisional IRA/Sinn Fein comment
in the general media (week ending 23 November 1986)
and of recent issues of "An Phoblacht" and "Andersonstown News"

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1. Attitude to the Anglo-Irish Agreement, one year on

The occasion of the first anniversary of the Agreement was used by the SF leadership to launch a number of major attacks on it.

The "Irish News" of 12 November carried a lengthy piece on Gerry Adams' call to John Hume to explain how the Anglo-Irish Agreement had improved the nationalist position. He went on to list in detail the areas where, in his view, nothing had changed, saying that the "illusions of reform were crumbling to reveal a reality which was worse than a nightmare for Northern nationalists". He said that "John Hume's list of 11 advances resulting from the Agreement rang hollow when viewed in the light of the failure of the accord to tackle the issues which created the nationalist nightmare. The Hillsborough Agreement, by accepting the British to claim a legitimacy for their presence, actually perpetrates the divisions, violence and hatred".

An article in the "Irish News" of 15 November reports on Adams' remarks to loyalists that "their continued opposition to the Anglo-Irish Agreement made it more acceptable to a section of the nationalist population of Northern Ireland". He said that despite the anti-Agreement campaign he did not believe that the British Government would "readily scrap it". He believed that the "cause of Irish nationalism had been diverted into a colonial cul-de-sac which serves British interests". He claimed that "what the Agreement was aimed at was a reconstituted Stormont with nationalist involvement". He urged the SDLP to abandon the Agreement. In regard to the Secretariat, he

said that the "siting of the Secretariat at Maryfield was needed by the SDLP to sell the Agreement to sceptical nationalists. This presence and other meaningless symbolism had provoked loyalists and allowed Paisley ...to exploit their siege mentality". He claimed that the anniversary weekend would "herald a recommencement of the loyalist campaign of violence against Catholic families".

In the "Irish News" of 21 November, Martin McGuinness called on the SDLP leadership to state publicly "what exactly they have agreed upon with Britain and what concessions and compromises it had to make as their part of the London-Dublin Agreement". He said that the "SDLP can no longer claim with any credibility that the London-Dublin deal in any way poses a threat to the British presence in Ireland".

The "Sunday News" of 23 November carries a report on an interesting interview in "Hot Press" with a "Provo Chief" who conceded that "should the Anglo-Irish Agreement convince people there will be a change, the IRA would suffer". He warned, however, that the IRA wouldn't go away". He also said the "Provos could not exist without community support".

Danny Morrison claimed in the "Irish News" of 10 November that (referring to a possible loyalist bombing campaign in the South) "Dublin people may now die because of the bungling of FitzGerald who entered this Agreement intent on isolating republicans and expecting the loyalists to grasp his grand plan and concede some crumbs to the SDLP".

Meanwhile, "An Phoblacht" has been continuing its attacks on the Agreement. The editorial of the 13 November edition takes a satirical look at the first year of the Agreement (e.g., "the British are so eager to demonstrate their concern for people's safety and well-being that in parts of South Armagh they have moved out of their fortified

barracks and into draughty outposts on hillside farms. Real 'neighbourly like'). It concludes: "spring, summer and autumn have now passed and we can be equally certain that in winter we will see as many goodies delivered by Hillsborough as we have come to expect. And Santa Claus is coming soon so don't say we didn't tell you". The centre pages of the same edition is also devoted to the Agreement under the banner headline "Hillsborough - the nightmare continues". It is largely along the lines of Gerry Adams' analysis carried in the "Irish News" of 12 November (see *page 1 above, 2nd para.*). Two columns are devoted to quotes on the Agreement over the past 12 months (e.g., Mr. King's "bulwark" remark).

The "Andersonstown News" of 15 November devotes its editorial to the Agreement also. It is strongly negative and (echoing Gerry Adams) begins: "Paradoxical as it may seem to our readers, we suspect that the only thing keeping the Anglo-Irish Agreement alive at the moment is the unionist opposition to it". The paper remains of the view that the Agreement "was a hastily conceived plan to help save the SDLP from the Sinn Fein onslaught at the polls". Referring to "John Hume's list of pluses", it says that he "conveniently forgot about the minuses, not the least of which was the killing of a dozen innocent Catholics and the enforced movement of over 500 nationalists families from their homes. As a newspaper, we believe that this was too high a price to pay to give John Hume's party a helping hand at the polls".

Overall comment: It is clear from the foregoing

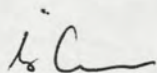
- (a) that the Provisional IRA/Sinn Fein leadership continues to be concerned about the Agreement, are not regarding it lightly (as the "Hot Press" interview confirms) and believes it is here to stay for the foreseeable future;

(b) that they intend to continue the propaganda offensive against it, aggressively and in a high profile way, concentrating ^{inter alia} on the motif "nothing has changed for nationalists and if it has, the change has been for the worse". They will undoubtedly ^{also} continue to seek to keep the pressure on the SDLP, concentrating on the same motif and homing in on specific perceived areas of vulnerability (e.g., highlighting allegations of harassment against the RUC on the basis "that this is the RUC which the SDLP tell us has improved so much since the Agreement" etc.).

2. Other items

- (a) The IRA "armed struggle": Danny Morrison made clear in that "Irish News" article of 10 November quoted above that "the IRA was determined to pursue the armed struggle until the British Government was forced to withdraw".
- (b) "Ulster Resistance": "An Phoblacht" of 13 November devotes its front page story to the formation of "Ulster Resistance", under the banner headline "Be on your guard". It warns people to be vigilant, on the basis that "similar loyalist threats in the past" have meant "sectarian murder attacks on any defenceless Catholics they can find".
- (c) RUC: The Minister's remarks about the RUC on the "Today-Tonight" special on 13 November are referred to by Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness in the "Irish News" of 18 November. Adams calls on the SDLP to clarify its position on the RUC following the Minister's remarks. McGuinness claims that the Minister's comments had shown that he "now accepted Tom King's thesis that the deal perpetuates partition".

- (d) Border arrest: "An Phoblacht" of 20 November leads with the "snatch" of Co. Louth man Frank Murphy by an "RUC/British Army raiding party which crossed the border within yards of a joint Garda/Free State Army patrol", on 18 November. Commenting, Gerry Adams said that "the incident demonstrated that the Hillsborough Agreement had not changed the British attitude of contempt towards the rights of Irish people, even in the 26 Counties".
- (e) Sinn Fein and the Dáil: The editorial of the "Andersonstown News" of 8 November is devoted to the aftermath of the Ard Fheis decision to end abstentionism. While not condemning the move, neither is it particularly enthusiastic e.g., "those who won (the debate) should remember that the ability to take seats in the Dáil (when and if elected) is merely an option, and that the new tactic is not sacrosanct, just as apparently the old one wasn't let Sinn Fein rememberDáil Eireann is as remote from the people who vote to fill it as is Westminster" etc. The editorial calls for, above all else, unity among nationalists - "we need the protection of unity and no splits, however sacred the principles involved".



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