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SDLF - Sinn Fein 13 June 1988

1. Comments on Sinn Fein Document, 2 May 1988, Pages 8 and 9

Introduction

From our discussions it has emerged that while we are both agreed that the Irish people have the right to self-determination, there is a major difference between us on how necessary it is to obtain the agreement of Unionists if there is to be unity in Ireland.

that right is to be secured.

On the second matter it appears to us that in keeping with many people Sinn Fein confuses two vetoes exercised by Unionists..

The Unionists have a natural veto since they live on this island and since their agreement is essential if unity is to be achieved.

The Unionists have also, historically, had a veto on British policy towards Ireland, a veto to which they had no right whatsoever. That veto was exercised in that British policy denied Irish unity. Up until now successive British governments have been pro-union. Now, however, they are neutral in that they are saying, without taking a position themselves, that Irish unity is a matter for those who want it persuading those who do not.

other than their ^{studies} fear of possible consequences.

There is, therefore, nothing to stop British governments becoming pro-Irish unity in their policies. Our task is to persuade them to go in that direction and to use all their considerable influence and resources to persuade the Unionist people that their best interests are served by a new Ireland; a new Ireland in which Unionist interests are accommodated to their own satisfaction and in which there is a new relationship with Britain.

These are the goals of SDLP policy. They are goals which we believe can only be achieved by political means and which have to be achieved by political means if the outcome is to be a stable and peaceful Ireland. It goes without saying that if a new Ireland is to be built politically, it should be as painless as possible for the people who have suffered so much. It must also involve the progressive breaking down of all barriers which have grown up between people in post-partition Ireland.

SDLP Proposals

To the ends outlined above we would make the following proposals to any party interested in achieving these same ends:

1. Concerted political action, nationally and internationally, to persuade the British government to adopt, as a matter of policy, a commitment to and action towards progressively breaking down the barriers between both parts of Ireland that have developed since partition and to using all its influence and resources to persuade the Unionist people that their best interest lies in a new Ireland which

accommodates their interests to their satisfaction and which has a new relationship with Britain.

2. Concerted action to persuade the Unionist people to join together with us in building a new Ireland.

3. In the interim concerted political effort, nationally and internationally, to alleviate the social and economic problems which affect all our people.

Conclusion

We wish to reiterate the very strong view that is central to all our discussions with you, that the right to self-determination and the exercise of self-determination depend on reaching agreement between the people of this island as to how self-determination is to be achieved.

It must be clear that such agreement cannot be achieved by force. In stating that we are simply restating what was said by Tone, two centuries ago, when he was quite explicit in stating that the way to achieve the right to self-determination of the Irish people was to unite Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter. The same sentiments were repeated a century later in Belfast by Parnell when he said that "Ireland can never be united and can never have its freedom until the prejudices of the Protestant people are conciliated".

Are we at last ready to take up the challenge thrown down by both men
and which have never really been taken up by the leadership of
nationalist-republican Ireland ?