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Reference Code:	2016/22/2071
Creation Dates:	3 September 1986
Extent and medium:	8 pages
Creator(s):	Department of Foreign Affairs
Accession Conditions:	Open
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Sinn Féin / ~~IRA/IRA~~

SECRET

Provisional IRA/Sinn Féin attitudes to the
Anglo-Irish Agreement

General

An analysis of statements made by Provisional IRA or Provisional Sinn Féin spokesmen in the period since the Agreement was signed shows that the Republican movement has been badly shaken by the Agreement. Provisional propagandists have found it necessary to drop any pretence of indifference to it and to engage instead in regular and vociferous condemnation of the Agreement. They have been forced very much onto the defensive and something of their frustration and, indeed, desperation as a result of it has emerged in the ever wider range of arguments which they have sought to deploy against it.

A number of broad themes may be identified in the various statements made since the Agreement:

- The purpose of the Agreement is to defeat the IRA and to counter the electoral threat posed by Sinn Féin.
- It seeks to do so by a mixture of appeasement and repression. The former is achieved by a number of reforms of purely cosmetic value and by a powerless consultative role for the Irish Government. The latter is achieved by heightened security cooperation between the two Governments.
- The Agreement copper-fastens partition and reinforces the 'British presence in Ireland'. It is a ploy on the part of the British Government to consolidate its control over Northern Ireland and at the same time to improve its image abroad.

- Any improvements for nationalists which the Agreement may succeed in introducing have to be traced back to the efforts of Provisional Sinn Féin.
- The IRA's paramilitary campaign is unrelated to the Agreement.

Most Provisional IRA/Sinn Féin comments on the Agreement have been characterised by a combination of bluster and defensiveness. Furthermore, there is clearly a very real fear that the Agreement will produce significant concessions to nationalists and a corresponding desire to contain the damage which this may do to Sinn Féin by claiming credit in advance for any concessions which emerge.

In the course of the ten months since Hillsborough, Provisional propagandists have experimented with a succession of different approaches. From generalised rejection of it in the initial stages, they moved on to attack specific aspects of the Agreement on which they considered the two Governments to be vulnerable. A later approach was to focus on matters such as the Stalker affair or Loyalist paramilitary violence and to claim that the Agreement had been powerless in preventing negative developments of this kind.

Month-by-month

The following is a month-by-month account of the main themes sounded in Provisional IRA/Sinn Féin comments on the Agreement. (For the most part these were published in "An Phoblacht" or the "Andersonstown News").

November 1985 (immediate aftermath of Hillsborough)

The Provisional IRA and Sinn Féin were obviously taken aback by the successful conclusion of the Agreement. Their state of confusion may be deduced from the first major comment which appeared - an editorial in "An Phoblacht" of 21 November. The

Agreement was seen as an attempt to stabilise the North and thus to "secure British control in Ireland". The British Government could no longer rely on the Unionists in this connection so they bought Dublin's assistance with the promise of "cosmetic reform and a powerless consultative role". They hoped in the process to restore their tarnished image abroad. The editorial warned that "Republicans must counter the propaganda of the Dublin Government and the general media" as failure to do so would allow the Irish Government and its "British allies" to "isolate us".

December 1985

In a major interview in "An Phoblacht" (12 December), Gerry Adams held that

- the Agreement institutionalises the British presence in Ireland and pledges Dublin's formal recognition of "the six-county state, partition, the Loyalist veto and the British connection";
- the Irish Government's main reason for entering into the Agreement was to protect constitutional nationalism, North and South, from the electoral threat posed by Sinn Féin. "Dublin fears the political thrust of Sinn Féin because Sinn Féin exposes the shallowness of Dublin's nationalist credentials";
- the Agreement involves a mixture of concessions and repression. "Concessions are needed in order to neutralise the nationalists. Repression is needed in order to appease Unionists and to defeat the IRA. Which comes first, the carrot or the stick? Each applied in equal measure will satisfy no-one";
- any improvements in the "quality of life" for Northern nationalists would be due to the "steadfastness of a section of the nationalist people, allied to their support for Sinn Féin". The credit goes to "the

resistance struggle and its supporters, not to the SDLP or its allies in Dublin".

In the same issue of "An Phoblacht", a Provisional IRA statement denied that the Provo campaign then in progress against RUC stations/checkpoints had anything to do with the Agreement.

January 1986

During the by-election campaign, Gerry Adams and other PSF speakers attacked the Agreement as a 'carrot-and-stick' strategem designed to defeat the IRA, to undermine Sinn Féin's political base and to copper-fasten partition. The election outcome clearly upset Sinn Féin. An editorial in "An Phoblacht" (30 January) admitted gloomily that "last week's by-election results were not good for Sinn Féin.....evidence that the post-Hillsborough packaging of the SDLP backed by limitless financial resources and media backing worked on this occasion".

February 1986

In the aftermath of the election defeat, morale was low during February. There were nervous references in comments in "An Phoblacht" and the "Anderstown News" to the Agreement's "spurious credibility" and to fears that the ferocity of Loyalist reactions might lead nationalists to believe that "there might be something to it after all".

March 1986

During March, however, spirits seemed to lift somewhat as the Provisional propagandists exploited issues on which they judged the two Governments to be vulnerable. These included the Glenholmes affair and the Secretary of State's description of the Agreement as a "bulwark against a united Ireland".

In a statement on 21 March, Gerry Adams challenged the Minister for Foreign Affairs and John Hume to say what progress the Agreement had made regarding disbandment of the UDR, changes in the RUC and strip-searching. "The best the supporters of the Agreement can manage", he said, is "to warn nationalists not to expect too much, while attempting to appease Unionists".

April 1986

This trend continued during April when Provisional commentators sought to exploit to their advantage (a) the widespread rumours that the Agreement might be temporarily suspended or 'frozen'; and (b) the Loyalist violence against Catholics.

In a statement on 24 April, Danny Morrison claimed that the Agreement "is coming down like a lead balloon. The SDLP for several months have papered over its cracks by pointing to the Loyalist response as some sort of indication that they wouldn't be behaving like that unless there were major gains for nationalists in the offing. The SDLP have failed to understand that, when Loyalists say 'not an inch' and 'no surrender', they mean exactly that". Morrison contended that Loyalist violence was inevitable whether the 'provocation' came from the SDLP or from the IRA. (This argument, of course, did not sit easily with Sinn Féin's frequent contention that only fear of Sinn Féin as a political force caused the British Government to conclude the Agreement). Morrison claimed that Catholics were being burned out of their homes in exchange for an Agreement which enshrined the Loyalist veto and did not produce the reforms which had been promised.

May 1986

During May Provisional propagandists continued to play the 'Orange card'. Exploiting nationalist fears of Loyalist violence, an editorial in "An Phoblacht" (8 May) commented that "these Loyalists belong to the same tradition and identity that Garret FitzGerald, Peter Barry and John Hume are so anxious to accommodate". A consistent theme was that nationalists were

now under acute threat from Loyalist sectarian killers, that the Agreement would not help them and that only the Provos could offer the protection they needed.

Another alarmist ploy was to suggest that, as part of the Agreement, internment was about to be re-introduced North and South of the border. This has been a regular theme of Provisional IRA/SF pronouncements since May.

June 1986

The angle seized on during June was that of reported dissatisfaction on the part of the Irish Government with the rate of implementation of the Agreement. After the meeting of the Conference on 17 June, for example, "An Phoblacht" wrote that

"Once again the Conference had met and produced nothing which would improve the life of Northern nationalists".

Criticism of the SDLP continued, with Gerry Adams calling on the party to indicate, inter alia, where it stood on the issue of internment. Danny Morrison claimed that the SDLP was being "sucked in deeper" by the Agreement and "the slippery slope will take them onto the Police Authority and then into Stormont".

The Stalker affair was also availed of in an attempt to discredit the Agreement. "An Phoblacht" (26 June) suggested that

"Dublin's main fear is that this latest scandal will further hinder the efforts of the two Governments to present the RUC as becoming more acceptable to Catholics".

In the same addition, a Sinn Féin Councillor observed that

"Nothing has changed.....so much for the much-vaunted London/Dublin deal which was going to allow nationalists to hold their heads up".

July 1986

Feeding on the anxieties aroused by the marching season, Provisional IRA/Sinn Féin comment in July continued to emphasize the Loyalist threat. In an article in "An Phoblacht" (17 July), Danny Morrison claimed that Catholics who were told that as a result of the Agreement they could hold their heads high were "now going through a nightmare because of it". The Twelfth march along Garvaghy Road was "all the more humiliating and offensive" to nationalists because it occurred against a background of "exaggerated claims from the Dublin Government and the SDLP that the Hillsborough Agreement was improving nationalist lives". Attacking Sir Jack Hermon and Tom King (the former in relation to Stalker and other matters and the latter for his Brussels remarks and "Belfast Telegraph" interview), Morrison noted that both were "central to the implementation of this Agreement" and that the Irish Government and the SDLP "are depending on them and on their so-called moral and political integrity". He dismissed the possibility of reform in relation to the UDR and the courts and, while conceding that "minor reforms of a symbolic nature" on flags and emblems and the Irish language could be introduced this autumn to "inject credibility into the SDLP", felt that "such tinkering with an unjust system is not worth the Loyalist backlash it has provided". As for the Loyalist paramilitaries, he concluded, "under the Agreement they got marching through Garvaghy Road, in a united Ireland they'll not".

August 1986

The beginning of August saw the announcement of the Provos' threat against people working for, or supplying to, the security forces. The accompanying denials that this had anything to do with the Agreement have been greeted with scepticism on both sides of the community. While Gerry Adams has sought publicly to limit the threat to the ^{so-called} "fat cats", Morrison has been less defensive, claiming that the threat is consistent with IRA tactics during the War of Independence.

In other comments during August, Provisional IRA/Sinn Féin spokesmen have been dismissive of the reforms which are being mooted for this autumn. An editorial in the "Andersonstown News" (9 August) described the Agreement as a "fiasco" and concluded: "For once we have to agree with the Unionist population (even if it is for a different reason) and state that the Anglo-Irish Agreement will have to be abandoned before any progress can be made in putting an end to our nightmare".

Finally, a front-page article in last week's issue of "An Phoblacht" (28 August) described the Loyalist sectarian murders this year as "the cost of Hillsborough". An editorial in the same issue challenged John Hume to say whether, in the light of his view that Irish unity is not worth the spilling of a single drop of blood, the Agreement has been worth it.

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Anglo-Irish Division,

3 September, 1986.

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