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Ár dtag
Bhur dtag
Dáta

Sinn Fein
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Tel. 726932

Charles Haughey,
Government Buildings,
Dublin.

15th November 1988

A Chara,

Sinn Fein represents 11.4 percent of the electorate in the British occupied six counties. As such we speak for a significant section of people there who were never consulted about the Hillsborough Treaty, signed three years ago by your predecessor.

In public statements at that time you shared our major reservations about this arrangement. Now that the Hillsborough process is being reviewed your government has the opportunity and the duty to rectify the situation.

Because Sinn Fein is committed to the objective of a lasting peace, based on a national democracy and free from coercion by outside forces we are placing before your government our proposals. We enclose also for your attention similar proposals which we have sent to the British government.

Is sinne,

Tom Hartley S Ó Raghallaigh

Tom Hartley, Seosamh Ó Raghallaigh

General Secretaries

Sinn Fein

Dublin

Three years have passed since the heads of government in Britain and the 26 counties, Margaret Thatcher and Garret Fitzgerald, signed the Hillsborough Treaty. From the beginning Sinn Fein recognised the Treaty for what it was - an arrangement to stabilise the British presence in the six counties by tying the government of the 26 counties closer to British political and military strategy. The quid pro quo for this heightened co-operation was supposed to be a greater say for the Dublin government in the administration of the six counties, and in particular in its relation to the nationalist population.

On a wider field the Treaty was trumpeted around the world as providing a panacea for the ills of Ireland and as the greatest political initiative since 1920. Three years later would even its staunchest advocates make such public claims for the document signed at Hillsborough Castle in November 1985 and for all that has flowed from it?

In return for the presence of a secretariat in Maryfield which has absolutely no legal, administrative or effective political power, the government of Garret Fitzgerald conceded in an international treaty the usurpation of the six counties by Britain and, through the national minority of unionists, to exercise a veto over the self-determination of the Irish people.

That this was the case was confirmed just a couple of weeks after the signing when Tom King declared that "there would never be a united Ireland" and that the Treaty provided a "bulwark against a united Ireland". At that time you, Mr Haughey, strongly criticised the signing of the Treaty as a setback for nationalism and a recognition for the first time in a London/Dublin treaty of the 'legitimacy' of the unionist position. The clear contradiction between the Treaty and the 1937 Constitution's Articles One, Two and Three was also highlighted by you and members of your front bench.

Three years later the British government finds in Dublin a government no less enthusiastic in its implementation of the Treaty than that which signed it. In fact, the level of co-operation between the army and the gardai on this side of the border and the British army and RUC in the six counties is significantly greater than in 1985 and indeed it is publicly acknowledged that the Department of Foreign Affairs has granted British aircraft permission to fly deep into the territory of the 26 counties and that British patrols are allowed to cross the border with virtual impunity.

Then, in 1987, came the implementation of an Extradition Act between this state and Britain which, in the words of the present Minister for Social Welfare, Michael Woods, opposing it in Leinster House in 1986, make Irish citizens, "the most easily extradited in Europe". The implementation of such an Act, giving as it does the stamp of legitimacy and, more importantly, a vote of political confidence in the British judicial system in the six counties, represents one of the major practical benefits to the British government of the Treaty. The wider political implications of all these practical measures are even greater.

But what of the quid pro quo? What of the practical benefits and improvements for nationalists in the North which were to flow from the Treaty? Speaking at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, on April 22nd this year, you spelt out what is presumably still the government's position on the Treaty. After explaining that in 1985 Fianna Fail had "reservations because of its constitutional implications" you said:

"On coming into office my Government accepted it as an internationally binding agreement signed between two sovereign Governments and we set about using to the full the mechanisms of the agreement, particularly the Intergovernmental Conference and the Secretariat, to bring about any improvement that was possible in the situation of the people of Northern Ireland and in particular the nationalist people.

"The Intergovernmental Conference offers scope to confront a long agenda of issues; issues that are both difficult and divisive. But let me isolate those issues which I believe have a particular resonance here in the United States, because of American experience and sensitivities. These are: the administration of justice, the upholding of the rule of law, and fair employment".

These three named areas are also the ones which have been mentioned most as coming up on the agenda of the Intergovernmental Conference.

Speaking on the same day to a Friends of Fianna Fail dinner in Boston you stated that "public confidence in the rule of law and the administration of justice is vital if the tensions that lead to violence are to be reduced". You listed a succession of recent incidents which you said "seriously undermined confidence in the administration of security policy". These included the suppression of the Stalker/Sampson Report, the dismissal of the appeal of the Birmingham Six, the shooting of Aidan McAnespie and the Gibraltar killings.

Since that statement was made the British soldier who killed Aidan McAnespie has walked free from court, the jury in Gibraltar has ruled that the SAS killings were lawful, the Wiltshire Three were sentenced to 25 years each and in the middle of their trial Tom King announced that his government was abolishing the right to silence in the six counties.

Nationalist confidence in the administration of justice in the six counties, if there was ever such a thing, is infinitely lower than it was in 1985. Harassment of nationalist communities by the British forces has risen markedly. Discrimination against Catholics in employment remains as ingrained as ever in the fabric of the state with the British government setting its face against the MacBride Principles of Fair Employment for which you have expressed your support.

What all this points to, twenty years after the Civil Rights Movement took to the streets, is that the six-county state is as irreformable as ever. Improvement for nationalists within the sectarian structure of a state which has proved itself a "failed political entity" is an illusion. Ironically, the historic British creation of unionist sectarianism has, by the depth of its opposition to a Treaty designed to maintain its veto, displayed the blatant bigoted nature of loyalism.

The question, therefore, is not what benefits have been gained by the Irish people from Hillsborough but what price has been paid.

One of the immediate effects of the Treaty for Northern nationalists was an increased toll of attacks on them from loyalists. Sectarian killings of Catholics was stepped up, in particular in North Belfast.

From the point of view of the 26 counties the increase in already massive expenditure on patrolling the border is a national scandal, particularly in the context of widespread expenditure cutbacks in essential public services.

The implementation of the new Extradition Act was a major political concession to Britain and a major diminution of the rights of Irish citizens. It belies any claim that the government of the 26 counties now makes of its concern for the fair administration of the judicial system in the six counties.

The greater and longer term cost of Hillsborough has been to prolong the conflict in the six counties and to cost lives. It is Britain's declared policy to contain the situation and, as it hoped through Hillsborough, to tie the Dublin government and the SDLP closer to its strategy. Central to that strategy is the propagation of the lie that Britain is neutral in the conflict and that the problem is one of relations between the Irish in the six counties. Only by maintaining this pretence can Britain, with the help of the government in the 26 counties, sustain its immoral, unjust, illegal and repressive presence in our country.

By playing its part in the Hillsborough strategy your government and its predecessor have put back the day of peace and justice. You have abandoned the nationalist position and, without a mandate from any section of the Irish electorate North or South, conceded to the British a veto over Irish self-determination. In return nationalists in the six counties (for whom on its part the Dublin government allegedly entered the process) received nothing. They feel as abandoned and betrayed by your government as ever they did in the past.

Sinn Fein proposes that the period set aside for reviewing the Hillsborough Treaty be used by the Dublin government to assert the Irish nation's right to self-determination. We offer the following proposals as the basis for such a re-negotiation.

THE LOYALISTS

The ending of partition, a British disengagement from Ireland and the restoration to the Irish people of the right to exercise sovereignty, independence and national self-determination remain the only solution to the British colonial conflict in Ireland.

The major stumbling block to independence is British colonial interference. The creation of the six-county state around an artificial majority, the loyalists, was meant to give a veneer of democracy to the foothold which Britain maintains in Ireland. The loyalist demand for the continuation of the union not only provides Britain with its pretext for remaining in the North, but allows Britain to falsely claim that it is not the obstacle to Irish independence, and allows Westminster off the hook, projecting itself as the 'honest broker'.

While we in no way wish to ignore the economic challenge which re-unification presents, or minimise the extent of the problem, or the great trauma that will be experienced by the unionist population, we believe that loyalism derives an artificial psychological strength from the British presence, from the Union. Indeed, the relationship between unionist intransigence and past unconditional British support is recognised (though unacknowledged) by Mrs Thatcher's government, part of whose present strategy, via the Hillsborough Treaty, is to rock the morale of loyalists, split the unionists and force the emergence of a pragmatic leadership which will do an internal deal with the SDLP.

The loyalists are a national minority in Ireland. According to most opinion polls the majority of people in Britain want to disengage from Ireland. Increasingly, loyalists are finding themselves in an untenable position. Their protest campaign against the Hillsborough Treaty has cost them dearly in PR terms and to the British public it has only emphasised the differences between the six counties and Britain.

The Hillsborough Treaty and the processes it involves seek merely to camouflage the fact that the six-county state is a failed entity, socially, economically and politically.

The Treaty does not challenge the constitutional status of the Union but actually reinforces it.

Sinn Féin seeks a new constitution for Ireland which would include written guarantees for those presently constituted as 'loyalists'. This would recognise present-day social reality and would include, for example, the provisions for family planning and the right to civil divorce.

The resolution of the conflict would free unionists from their historic laager mentality and would grant them real security instead of tenure based on repression and triumphalism. We do not intend to turn back the pages of history, or to dispossess the loyalists and foolishly attempt to reverse the Plantation. We propose a settlement based on their throwing in their lot with the rest of the Irish people and ending sectarianism. We propose peace and equality.

Sinn Féin seeks to create conditions which will lead to a permanent cessation of hostilities, an end to our long war and the development of a peaceful, united and independent Irish society. Such objectives will only be achieved when a British government adopts a strategy for decolonisation.

It must begin by repealing the 'Government of Ireland Act' and publicly declaring that the 'Northern Ireland' statelet is no longer part of the United Kingdom.

Furthermore, it must declare that its military forces and its system of political administration will remain only for as long as it takes to arrange their permanent withdrawal.

This would need to be accomplished within the shortest practical period. A definite date within the life-time of a British government would need to be set for the completion of this withdrawal.

Such an irreversible declaration of intent would minimise any loyalist backlash and would go a long way towards bringing around to reality most loyalists and those of their representatives genuinely interested in peace and negotiation. It would be the business of such negotiations to set the constitutional, economic, social and political arrangements for a new Irish state through a Constitutional Conference.

CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCE

Free elections to an all-Ireland Constitutional Conference would be arranged. The conference would consist of the elected representatives of the Irish people and would be open to submissions from all significant organisations in Ireland (e.g. the Trade Union Movement, the Women's Movement, the Churches) and would draw up a new constitution and organise a national system of government.

While this conference could have no influence on the decision by Britain to withdraw, it would play an important role in organising the transition to a new governmental system. Should it fail to find agreement on a new Constitution, or on any other matter, a British withdrawal would proceed anyway within the fixed time period.

Republicans have consistently asserted that the loyalist people in common with all other citizens, must be given firm guarantees of their religious and civil liberties and we repeat our belief that, faced with a British withdrawal and the removal of partition, a considerable body of loyalist opinion would accept the wisdom of negotiating for the type of society which would reflect their needs and interests. The irreversible nature of a British withdrawal strategy would be a major influence in convincing loyalists that we were entering into a new situation which could not be changed by the traditional methods of loyalist intransigence.

BRITISH WITHDRAWAL

As part of the military withdrawal, the RUC and UDR would be disarmed and disbanded.

The introduction of United Nations forces or European forces to supervise a British withdrawal or fill any alleged vacuum would only frustrate a settlement and must be avoided. Experience in other conflicts has shown that such a 'temporary' presence would become 'permanent' and the deployment would have a political bias. Their subsequent withdrawal would become a point of contention and there would be a re-run of the bloodbath-threat scenario. Similarly, there should be a real effort to avoid the introduction of forces from the Twenty-Six Counties. A total demilitarisation should be the objective.

The Constitutional Conference would be responsible for determining the nature and composition of an emergent national police service and judiciary. There is absolutely no doubt in our minds that, if Britain were to be sincere about disengaging and was committed to an orderly transference of power, this could be achieved with a minimum of disorder.

All political prisoners would be unconditionally released.

A cessation of all offensive military actions by all organisations would create the climate necessary for a peaceful transition to a negotiated settlement.

As part of the settlement, the British government must accept the responsibility for providing financial support by agreeing by Treaty with the national government to provide economic subvention for an agreed period. Given the disastrous involvement of British rule in Ireland, reparations for an agreed period are the least contribution Britain could make to ensure an ordered transition to a national democracy and the harmonisation of the economies, North and South.

The onus is on the British government to ensure a peaceful transition to a united and independent Ireland. The shape of that society is a matter for the Irish people. Only when Britain recognises that right and initiates a strategy of decolonisation along these lines will peace and reconciliation between Irish people and between Britain and Ireland be established.

We repeat, it is only through the process of decolonisation and dialogue that a peaceful, stable Ireland will emerge. Only when independence is restored can Ireland hope to prosper and take her place among the nations of the world. Britain must take the initiative and declare its intention to withdraw. This is the first step on the road to peace. Republicans will respond quickly and positively.

The above contain the Sinn Féin proposals for not just an alternative to the Hillsborough Treaty but proposals for long-term peace and justice, harmony between our two islands and an end to conflict.

Surely it is in the interests of all concerned that this democratic option be examined.