



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Ár dtag
Bhur dtag
Dáta

Sinn Féin

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Tel. 726932

Tom King,  
Stormont Castle,  
Dundonald  
Belfast.

15th November 1988

A Chara,

Sinn Féin, which enjoys a substantial electoral mandate in the six counties, has noted your invitation to the political parties to submit their alternatives to the Hillsborough Treaty, the review of which is presently underway. Because our party is committed to the objective of a *lasting* peace in Ireland, based on a national democracy, and free from coercion by outside forces, we are placing before your government our proposals.

Is sinne,

Tom Hartley, Seosamh Ó Raghallaigh

General Secretaries

Sinn Féin

Dublin.

## Introduction

Sinn Féin does not believe that the Hillsborough Treaty is a genuine attempt to establish peace or democracy in Ireland. Rather it is a means to protect British interests in Ireland by tying the Dublin government closer to British political and military strategy. It was conceived in the wake of Sinn Féin's electoral rise.

In return for Dublin being granted a limited advisory role on six-county matters (and a symbolic presence at Maryfield), and the SDLP being presented as the champions of any subsequent reforms, your government demanded increased cross-border security collaboration, and easier extradition procedures. The Treaty is also a major benefit to your government because it can claim (and has claimed) to foreign critics that its military and political presence in the North is there with the approval of the sovereign power in Dublin.

The Treaty, with its Dublin dimension, did originally present a major challenge to the loyalists, as Britain had anticipated. But out of the confrontation which the loyalists walked themselves into no pragmatic leadership has emerged which appreciates the British strategy of bringing the SDLP into the governance of the six counties in order to thwart the demand for national self-determination.

It is quite clear that the British government's commitment to the Treaty stretches only insofar as it meets the needs of its joint military/political strategy. It is also quite clear that the British government is the pre-eminent power in the Hillsborough arrangement. For example, even by the criteria set by the Dublin government and the SDLP as being the markers by which progress should be judged, your government, Mr King, has continually humiliated them.

They made claims about the UDR being accompanied by the RUC until their eventual disbandment. They claimed that three-judge Diplock courts were to be established and that there were to be improvements in the quality of justice. We were to judge British good intentions by the prosecutions emerging from first the Stalker, then the Stalker/Sampson report - which has since been suppressed. We would see the Birmingham Six and Guildford Four released. There was to be radical reform in fair employment legislation etc. We will not labour the list.

Sinn Féin believes that when the British government says that the Treaty is a bulwark against Irish unity and when it says that Britain is not neutral but is for the Union, contrary to how the SDLP has interpreted Article 1(c) of Treaty, it is speaking the truth. The British government has effectively played with the credibility of Dublin and the SDLP in the full knowledge that because of the political competition between them and Sinn Féin there is little risk of them declaring that they have been cheated on and that our analysis is correct.

While the Dublin government, the SDLP and Sinn Féin disagree on many issues and on the means to achieve certain political goals we do not disagree on the fact that Irish independence is the aspiration of the majority of people in Ireland. It also emerged from our recent dialogue with the SDLP that it supports the demand for national self-determination.

The case we now put before the British government is, therefore, the democratic option to the Hillsborough Treaty and to partition.

## 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.