



# Towards a lasting peace in Ireland

# About this document

*Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland* is presented to the Sinn Féin Ard Fheis by the Ard Chomhairle as a discussion document. Its main purpose at this stage is to inform the debate within the party and the wider public debate about how best to develop a strategy for peace in Ireland. This is in keeping with the 1991 Ard Fheis decision. —?

It aims also to formalise discussion within Sinn Féin on this issue so that at the end of a period of open and democratic debate we can agree upon conclusions and adapt Sinn Féin policy in accordance with these conclusions.

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**Published February 1992**

# Towards a lasting peace in Ireland

## 1. Introduction

The heart-felt aspiration of most people in Ireland is for peace. If this aspiration remains limited to a popular desire it cannot become reality. A genuine peace process needs to recognise that an end to conflict does not, of itself, lead necessarily to a lasting peace. Irish history has taught us that a mere cessation of hostilities leads inevitably to a recurrence of the conflict in the future. A peace process, if it is to be both meaningful and enduring, must address the root causes of the conflict. For our part we believe that a genuine and sustainable peace process must be set in the context of democracy and self-determination. A true peace process needs to focus on these dimensions. The proposals which follow represent a responsible and realistic contribution to the debate on peace in Ireland which we believe is long overdue. We offer this document as a contribution to that debate.

## 2. National democracy and peace

Peace is not simply the absence of war or conflict. It is the existence of conditions of justice, democracy and equality which eradicate the causes of war or conflict. It is the existence of conditions in which the absence of war or conflict is self-sustaining.

The Irish people have long been denied peace. Despite protracted periods of an absence of war in our country the undemocratic conditions fostered and imposed on us have ensured perennial conflict.

The Irish people have a right to peace. They have a right to political structures which are capable of sustaining peace — of making peace permanent. They have a right to decide for themselves what those structures should be. They have an obligation to ensure that the ethos and practice of those structures guarantee equality for all Irish people and serve the best interests of all the Irish people.

Those in Ireland who claim to seek permanent peace, justice, democracy, equality of opportunity and stability cannot deny that the abiding and universally accepted principle of national self-determination, in which is enshrined the principle of democracy, is the surest means through which to further those political and social aims and once having achieved them, of maintaining them.

The refusal to allow the Irish people to exercise their right to self-determination has been and remains British government policy. That policy is the root cause of conflict in Ireland. That policy in conjunction with the measures taken to maintain it are the causes of the ruptures in the relationships between the Irish people themselves and between Ireland and Britain.

Division and coercion have always been and are the basic tenets of that policy. Division obtains not only in the physical division of the country through partition but in the divisions which spawned the Civil War in 1922 and has moulded politics in both parts of our partitioned country ever since. It exists in the divisions between nationalists and unionists which were cultivated by an inequitable system of privilege and sustained by the British government-bestowed 'unionist veto'. And finally but not least it exists in the very real divisions among nationalists themselves.

## NOTES

Self-determination is universally accepted to mean a nation's right to exercise the political freedom to determine its own social, economic and cultural development without external influence and without partial or total disruption of the national unity or territorial integrity. Those criteria are not observed in Ireland. British government involvement in Ireland has been in contravention of the established international norms which create and sustain conditions conducive to the establishment of internal peace, democracy, justice, stability and national freedom and by extension to the development of good relations between Ireland and Britain. The Irish national territory has been physically divided by partition with the British government assuming sovereignty over the Six Counties. The Irish people are divided within the Six Counties and between the Six and 26 Counties. National unity, far from being allowed to develop, has been consciously and deliberately fractured in the interests of the British government. The social, economic and cultural development of Ireland has been variously disrupted, stultified and eroded.

The unionist political veto, grafted by the British government onto its deliberate fracture of Irish national unity, has become the cornerstone of the British government's rationale for its continuing exercise of sovereignty over the Six Counties.

British government-fostered political division between Irish Catholics and Irish Protestants through a system of political, social and economic privilege has fostered the unionist or pro-British tradition in the Six Counties. Unionists seek the maintenance of British rule, on their terms, for a variety of reasons including the perception that it protects their interests as conferred by privilege. Unionists (and their capacity for violence, the so-called 'bloodbath scenario') are held up by the British government as the major reason for its continuing presence in Ireland.

Today's advocates of the unionist perspective represent some 20% of the Irish nation. They are a national minority; a significant minority but a minority nevertheless. To bestow the power of veto over national independence and sovereignty on a national minority is in direct contravention of the principle of self-determination. To prescribe self-determination for a national minority as a distinct entity from the rest of the nation is a perversion of the principle of self-determination. British government policy has created and maintained a division of political allegiances in Ireland — the national allegiance of a clear national majority and the pro-British allegiance of a national minority.

British government policy in Ireland arbitrarily and by coercive force upholds the political allegiance of the unionist community as a national minority against the national and democratic rights of the national majority.

When a people are divided in political allegiance then the democratic principle is that majority rights should prevail; particularly when such fundamentals as national rights are in question.

As individuals and as a significant national minority unionists have democratic rights which not only can be upheld but must be upheld in an independent Ireland. That is the democratic norm. That is an essential ingredient of peace and stability.

Those democratic rights, however, must not extend to a veto over the national rights of the Irish people as a whole.

Moreover the unionist community hold only a limited tenancy of the veto. The title deeds rest in the political vaults of Westminster and Downing Street. The unionist veto is, in fact, the gerrymander perpetrated by a British government which dictated the size and make-up of the respective populations of the Six and 26-County states. The historical and contemporary purpose of that gerrymander was and remains to erect a barrier against Irish reunification in perpetuity. It flaunts all the accepted concepts of democracy. As such it is basically flawed. The inequities which the Six-County statelet has spawned are an inevitable consequence of its very existence. Inequality, injustice and instability is the price which has had to be paid for a statelet founded on

1. failure to account for  
Unionist ambitions
2. failure to explain why  
British want to perpetuate  
partition.

a system of political, social and economic privilege. That price will be demanded and paid for as long as the statelet exists.

The responsibility for partition, for conceiving, enforcing and maintaining it, lies with the British government. The pretext for partition, the wishes of a national minority to maintain British rule in Ireland, holds no validity against the express wishes of a clear national majority.

### 3. Irish sovereignty

For generations, pre and post partition, the Irish people have consistently asserted their nationhood, national independence and sovereignty.

The Irish peoples' nationhood, independence and sovereignty have been reaffirmed in the following historic documents.

#### A. Proclamation of 1916

"We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible... Standing on that fundamental right and again asserting it in arms in the face of the world, we hereby proclaim the Irish Republic as a Sovereign Independent State."

#### B. Declaration of Independence of First Dáil, January 21st, 1919

"And whereas at the threshold of a new era in history, the Irish electorate has in the General Election of December 1918, seized the first occasion to declare by an overwhelming majority its firm allegiance to the Irish Republic:

Now, therefore, we, the elected Representatives of the ancient Irish people in National Parliament assembled, do, in the name of the Irish Nation, ratify the establishment of the Irish Republic and pledge ourselves and our people to make this declaration effective by every means at our command:

We ordain that the elected Representatives of the Irish people alone have power to make laws binding on the people of Ireland, and that the Irish Parliament is the only Parliament to which that people will give its allegiance:

We solemnly declare foreign government in Ireland to be an invasion of our national right which we will never tolerate, and we demand the evacuation of our country by the English garrison."

#### C. The nation as defined by the 1937 Constitution

Article 1. The Irish nation hereby affirms its unalienable, indefeasible and sovereign right to choose its own form of Government, to determine its relations with other nations, and to develop its life, political, economic and cultural, in accordance with its own genius and traditions.

Article 2. The national territory consists of the whole island of Ireland, its island and the territorial seas.

Article 3. Pending the reintegration of the national territory, and without prejudice to the right of the Parliament and Government established by this Constitution to exercise jurisdiction over the whole of that territory, the laws enacted by that Parliament shall have the like area and extent of application as the laws of Saorstát Éireann [The Irish Free State] and like extra-territorial effect.

#### D. Unanimous Declaration adopted by the elected representatives in Leinster House, Dublin, May 10th 1949

"Solemnly reasserting the indefeasible right of the Irish Nation to the unity and integrity of the national territory,

"Reaffirming the sovereign right of the people of Ireland to choose its own form of Government and, through its democratic institutions, to decide all questions of national policy, free from outside interference.

"Repudiating the claim of the British Parliament to enact legislation affecting Ireland's territorial integrity in violation of those rights, and

"Pledging the determination of the Irish people to continue the struggle against

ie. not Unionists, presumably.

by a Govt. which Sinn Féin did not then recognise.

— whose legitimacy SF did not then recognise.

## NOTES

*the unjust and unnatural partition of our country until it is brought to a successful conclusion:*

*"Places on Record its indignant protest against the introduction in the British Parliament of legislation, purporting to endorse and continue the existing Partition of Ireland, and*

*"Calls upon the British government and people to end the present occupation of our Six North Eastern Counties, and thereby enable the unity of Ireland to be restored and the age-long difference between the two nations brought to an end."*

### *E. The New Ireland Forum, May 1984*

*"The particular structure of political unity which the Forum would wish to see established is a unitary state, achieved by agreement and consent, embracing the whole island of Ireland and providing irrevocable guarantees for the protection and preservation of both the Unionist and Nationalist identities.*

*"A unitary state would embrace the island of Ireland governed as a single unit under one government and one parliament elected by all the people of the island. It would seek to unite in agreement the two major identities and traditions in Ireland. Historically up to 1922 Ireland was governed as a single unit and prior to the Act of Union of 1801 was constitutionally a separate and theoretically equal kingdom. Such a state would represent a constitutional change of such magnitude as to require a new constitution that would be non-denominational."*

### *F. Dr. Patrick Hillery, Dublin's Minister for External Affairs told the United Nations Security Council in 1969:*

*"The Six Counties.....are an integral part of the island of Ireland and an important part of a country which throughout history has been universally regarded as one unit. The historic unity of Ireland is so self evident as not to require argument. The claim of the Irish nation to control the totality of Ireland has been asserted over centuries by successive generations of Irish men and women, and it is one which no spokesman for the Irish nation could ever renounce. The representative of Great Britain is certainly aware that that claim has been asserted and sustained without interruption up to the present day, and it has never been conceded that a unilateral action on the part of the British government could sunder an entity which nature and history have made one."*

*"Partition was accomplished by the British government as a concession to an intransigent minority within the Irish nation. Ireland was divided as a result of an Act of the British Parliament in 1920, an Act in favour of which not one Irish vote, either North or South was cast...."*

### *G. The Hillsborough Agreement, November 1985*

The Dublin Supreme Court, the ultimate interpreters of the Irish Constitution, recently ruled in a major legal challenge to the Hillsborough Agreement in *McGimpsey v Ireland & Others* that Article 2 of the Irish Constitution must be construed as a 'claim of legal right' and not a political claim or aspiration. The Supreme Court held that no government of Ireland could repudiate that claim by any legal instrument, and that the Hillsborough Agreement did not concede any recognition by Ireland (or its people) of the right of Britain to maintain control of any part of the national territory.

### *I. International Law*

Ireland's right to reunification, independence and sovereignty — the right of the Irish people, as a whole, to self-determination — is furthermore supported by universally recognised principles of international law.

The right to self-determination is enshrined in the two United Nations' Covenants of 1966 — the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Article 1 of each covenant states:

*"All peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they determine their economic, social and cultural development"*

The landmark Declaration on Principles of International Law Concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation Among States in Accordance with the Charter of the United Nations declares:

"...all people have the right freely to determine, without external influence, their political status and to pursue their economic, social and cultural development and every state has the duty to respect this right in accordance with the provisions of the Charter."

Partition for its part is in clear contravention of the United Nations' Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. Article 6 of which states:

"Any attempt aimed at the partial or total disruption of the national unity and the territorial integrity of a country is incompatible with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations."

That position is explicitly endorsed by the final act of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe.

#### VIII Equal rights and self-determination of peoples.

"The participating States will respect the equal rights of peoples and their right to self-determination, acting at all times in conformity with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and with the relevant norms of international law, including those relating to territorial integrity of States.

"By virtue of the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, all peoples always have the right in full freedom, to determine, when as they wish, their internal and external political status, without external interference, and to pursue as they wish their political, economic, social and cultural development.

"The participating States reaffirm the universal significance of respect for any effective exercise of equal rights and self-determination of peoples for the development of friendly relations among themselves as among all states: they also recall the importance of the elimination of any form of violation of this principle."

## 4. British rule: division and coercion

British rule in Ireland has rested on the twin pillars of division and coercion.

This deliberately fostered division between the people on this island in the interests of maintaining British rule has been developed throughout the 20th Century. The British government's partition of Ireland not only entrenched that initial fracture of national unity but added to it the divisions between the inhabitants of the Six and 26 Counties and the accompanying divisions between nationalists.

The classic colonial divide and rule strategy has driven the Irish nation in several directions. The effect is that only the divisions and their consequences are seen in relief while the cause of the divisions is obscured.

Today's propaganda has made it fashionable, not to say dishonest, to treat those divisions as a free standing entity which has evolved of its own volition. The British government-created divisions are thus addressed as three sets of relationships, that is, between the two communities in the Six Counties; between the Six-County statelet and the 26-County state and between the Dublin and London governments. This approach serves only to distract attention from the fundamental cause of the conflict which is the British presence in Ireland. Only when this issue is tackled explicitly and forcefully will we be able to move towards national reconciliation and democratic compromise in Ireland.

Underpinning the divisions in the Irish nation, which has been central to the maintenance of British rule, lies the threat and use of British force. Partition was imposed on the Irish people under the threat of 'immediate and terrible war'. Since its inception the Six-County statelet has relied for its existence on a system of repressive legislation enforced by military and paramilitary forces and a compliant judiciary. An abnormal state of "permanent emergency" has been the norm.

#### ■ The denial of democracy

"Whatever Ulster's right may be, she cannot stand in the way of the whole of the rest of Ireland. Half a province cannot impose a permanent veto on the nation. Half a province cannot obstruct forever the reconciliation between the British and Irish democracies."

— Winston Churchill, proposing the second reading of the Home Rule Bill in the British House of Commons, 1912.

"

— no - the Crown + membership of the Commonwealth. The Irish delegates effectively accepted partition.

## NOTES

### ■ The denial of democracy

*No British government ought ever to forget that this perilous moment, like many before it, is the outworking of a history for which our country is primarily responsible. England seized Ireland for its own military benefit. It planted Protestant settlers there to make it strategically secure. It humiliated and penalised the native Irish and their Catholic religion; and then, when it could no longer hold on to the whole island, it kept back part to be home for the settlers' descendants, a non-viable solution from which Protestants have suffered as much as anyone.*

*Our injustice created the situation; and by constantly repeating that we will maintain it so long as the majority (in the North) wish it, we actively inhibit Protestant and Catholic from working out a new future together. This is the root of the violence, and the reason why the protesters think of themselves as political offenders."*

— Dr John Austin Baker, Anglican Bishop of Salisbury at the time of the Long Kesh hunger strike in 1980.

*Largely ignored by the Irish people - 1918-22.*

For two continuous decades now repression has been the chief instrument of British rule, substituting the force of the government for the consent of the governed.

During that period more than 30,000 British forces have been deployed as an army of occupation. Almost 3,000 people have been killed and more than 30,000 people injured. Comparatively, in Britain, this would amount to nearly 100,000 dead and over one million injured.

Today, Britain's only argument for the continued partition of Ireland is the wishes of the artificially constructed unionist majority in the Six Counties. To this is added a lurid 'bloodbath scenario' in the event of Irish reunification. Neither of these arguments rest on international law or is definitive, as we have seen. Recognising this, the British government and the British Labour Party have recently attempted to make their positions more credible. Peter Brooke now argues that the British government has "no selfish strategic or economic reason" for maintaining the partition of Ireland and does so simply to keep the peace. The Labour Party goes further and claims a commitment to "unity by consent" in Ireland. We have yet to see much evidence of either claim but, more fundamentally, there is the flaw of continued bi-partisan acceptance of the artificially constructed and bolstered unionist veto on any move beyond the failed policy of partition. Peter Brooke's claim that the British government has "no selfish strategic or economic" reason for remaining in Ireland needs to be set against his other remarks.

Brooke has said:

"The party that sustains the present government remains the Conservative and Unionist Party, and the prime minister, as the leader of that party has made clear that her views are supportive of the Union... The Conservative Party would wish very much to see Northern Ireland remain part of the Union."

SDLP leader John Hume drew the conclusion from Brooke's statement about "no selfish interest" that Britain was now 'neutral' and that it was now up to nationalists to get Britain to join the ranks of the persuaders of unionists to look to Irish unity. Brooke said that this would be "a false analysis if it was thought that the British government is part of the process seeking to exercise that element of persuasion".

(In Pdraig O'Malley *Northern Ireland, Question of Nuance*, 1990.)

The formal British government position, Conservative, Labour or coalition, for the foreseeable future is to be found in clause 1(a) of the Hillsborough Agreement of 1985 between the London and Dublin governments:

"1. *The two governments*

*(a) affirm that any change in the status of Northern Ireland would only come about with the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland."*

It is upon that formal position that this political reality of the continued bi-partisan British position rests. The border partitioning Ireland was drawn by a British government so as to ensure that no such majority would be possible. Hillsborough merely endorses that position and was correctly identified at the time by Fianna Fáil leader Charles Haughey as a "copper-fastening" of partition; and by British government minister Tom King as meaning that "for all practical purposes, and into perpetuity, there will not be a united Ireland".

The British parties public proffering of "no selfish interest" and "unity by consent" is but an attempt to put a veneer of respectability on the violent partition of Ireland by Westminster 70 years ago against the express wishes of the majority of the Irish people.

But implicit in the public political posturing is the suggestion that the responsibility for dismantling partition lies largely with Irish nationalists and their powers and ability to persuade an appropriate percentage of unionists that their best interests lie in a reunited Ireland. This is but a shallow attempt to displace responsibility for resolving a situation which was wholly manufactured by Westminster and whose disastrous

consequences are almost wholly borne by the Irish people. No amount of public political posturing can change that.

For the British government, where there has been real change it has been in the area of its political strategy for ruling the Six Counties. Since 1973 that strategy has aimed to enlist the active support of Irish nationalists, the Dublin government and the SDLP, for partition. It is in that context that the Sunningdale Agreement of 1973, the power-sharing Executive of 1974, the Hillsborough Treaty of 1985 and the Brooke Talks of 1991 should be viewed. All have been instruments which serve the preservation of partition as a policy end.

All seek to address and treat the consequences of partition while leaving the root cause of strife and conflict untouched.

In 1969 the Dublin government, in a letter to the United Nations Security Council, correctly stated that the intervention of British troops was not "... likely to restore peaceful conditions and certainly not in the long term".

This has held true before and since partition and is still a fact today.

British rule in Ireland and conflict have been and are synonymous.

Today, the voices raised for peace in Ireland are many. Yet, there is an almost complete absence of the political will to publicly identify, let alone to tackle, the source of the conflict.

What is, in effect, being advocated is not peace but simply a programme to politically stabilise and perpetuate partition. Peace is, however, not simply the absence of war or conflict. It means also, as we noted above, the existence of conditions which eradicate the causes of war or conflict. Only on that basis can permanent peace rest.

Partition not only defies the accepted norms of democratic principles, it simply does not work by any universally accepted standards.

#### *Social and economic consequences of partition*

Apart from the political conflict and sectarian divisions which partition reinforced, the social and economic consequences have been disastrous for working people North and South. As the New Ireland Forum stated:

*"The division of the island has been a source of continuing costs, especially for trade and development in border areas, but in general also to the two separate administrations which have been pursuing separate economic policies on a small island with shared problems and resources. The North was not a natural economic or administrative unit and its separation from the rest of the island, resulting in separate approaches rather than a single policy for each sector, without provision even for joint planning or capital investment programmes, had heavy economic penalties... In addition, there has been duplication of effort at official and private level and an absence of economies of scale in the transport, tourism and energy sectors and in the health and education services."*

Partition has also led to job discrimination (as unionists tried to perpetuate their majority) and the waste of millions of pounds on 'security' every year. The separation of the two economies has also contributed to the external dependency of both states, which has resulted in levels of industrial underdevelopment, unemployment, emigration and poverty, in the 32 Counties, which are way above European norms.

Partition has allowed social backwardness to prevail throughout Ireland. The creation of two states, both of which were dominated by the most conservative elements on the island set back social progress for decades. The position of women in the two states, the ban on divorce in the 26 Counties, and the degree of clerical control or influence in both states, even to this day, in areas of education, health and other public policy are further signs of the stagnation which partition helps to sustain. A new united Ireland would of necessity be pluralistic and would allow for the development of a tolerant, open society which would respect the freedom of conscience and freedom of choice of the individual.

#### ■ The denial of democracy

*"It remains our view that 'Northern Ireland' is a political anachronism. It is neither a viable political nor a viable economic entity. Whatever level of economic activity it achieves in any period is simply a direct reflection of the amount of resources, financial and economic, the British government is prepared to make available from the British taxpayer. The existence of this artificially sustained economy has prevented the fruitful development of the island as a whole as a natural economic unit. It has also stunted the potential of our people; particularly the Northern people. It is clear that in every economic sector there would be enormous advantage in integrating our efforts and that substantial benefits would follow from eliminating unnecessary and wasteful duplication and competition."*  
— Charles Haughey, New Ireland Forum, May 1983.

- v. wide of the mark.

The recognition and acceptance of the fundamental facts about the partition of Ireland and the development of a strategy based upon them is the starting point of the resolution.

Above all else, the pursuit of a democratic solution capable of making peace self-sustaining is dependent on the recognition of those facts by a British government. Failing that, sufficient political pressure should be brought to bear on the British government to induce it to act in accordance with the logic of those facts by accepting that partition has failed and that the only realistic option is to finally recognise the right of the Irish people as a whole to self-determination. If there is to be a genuine debate about peace these are the fundamental issues to be addressed. It is only in that context that the debate about all of the other problems which beset us can take on a meaningful form and produce policies and measures which can realistically seek their resolution.

## 5. Conditions for democracy and peace

The search for peace in Ireland is everyone's responsibility. In particular it is the responsibility of the representatives of organised society — the political parties, the churches, trade unionists, leaders of industry, the women's movement, cultural organisations and the media. Specifically, it is the responsibility of the two 'sovereign' powers, London and Dublin. They have the power to effect the necessary change.

And in today's 'global village' it is also an international responsibility.

Peace as an aspiration or expressed only in terms of popular desire is of itself of limited use only. The achievement of peace requires a peace process.

Peace, to be both achievable and sustainable, must have as its foundation democracy, of which national self-determination is the cornerstone. The exercise of the right to national self-determination is the core from which flows the ability to promote, exercise and defend all other rights.

The criteria by which any initiative which claims peace as its end is to be judged is the degree to which it promotes the conditions in which the right to national self-determination can be exercised.

An end to conflict is not of itself peace. In the Irish experience to date it has represented but a pause — a postponement of conflict for a decade or a generation.

An end to conflict must of course be an objective. But to have any lasting value it must be in the context of a peace process which eradicates the cause of the conflict.

British rule in Ireland and conflict have been and are synonymous.

British rule in Ireland and peace are incompatible.

The long, tragic, bitter and cyclical experience of the population of this island bear accurate, abundant and irrefutable evidence of that.

It follows that the creation of conditions in which peace can be made permanent in Ireland must involve at some future date the removal of British interference from the political equation in Ireland.

The elements which are needed to bring about conditions for peace are:

(i). A British government which makes the ending of partition its policy end;

(ii). A Dublin government which has the same policy end;

(iii). Co-operation between the British and Dublin governments to bring about their joint purpose in the shortest possible time consistent with obtaining maximum consent to the process and minimising costs of every kind;

(iv). Democracy and practicality demands that this be done in

consultation and co-operation with the representatives of the Irish minority, the Northern unionists, as well as with the representatives of the Northern nationalists. In effect a process of national reconciliation.

These are the requirements towards which those who claim peace as their end should work. These are the criteria against which any claim to peace as an end should be made.

## 6. Armed conflict in Ireland

Violence in Ireland is nothing new. There has been recurring conflict here ever since British interference began; it has happened as a direct result of that interference. Over recent years those politicians who support British rule in Ireland have focused only on republican violence and have dismissed British and pro-British violence as merely a response to IRA actions. The facts of the last 23 years undermine that argument.

At the start of the present phase of Anglo-Irish conflict, as at the time of the Home Rule crisis in 1912, it was unionism and the British state which introduced violence and the threat of violence into the political situation. Having for 50 years maintained in the Six Counties a state founded on violence against the nationalist population the unionist establishment was faced in the late 1960s with a peaceful campaign for democratic rights. At a time when the IRA was dormant the forces of the state — the regular RUC and RUC Special Constabulary — together with unofficial loyalist forces, reacted to that campaign with brute force, claiming the first fatal victims of the conflict and carrying out pogroms against nationalist districts.

The British army was introduced by the British government in 1969, not as a response to the IRA — which was then virtually non-existent as a military organisation — but to shore up a political and security crisis brought about by the violent unionist reaction to the civil rights campaign.

It was seen to be in Britain's interest to maintain partition and the Northern state; the stability of the Northern state seemed threatened; therefore the British government intervened directly. This, and not the protection of the nationalist community, was the motivation for the reintroduction of troops. In previous decades when there had been loyalist and RUC assaults on the nationalist community the British state had seen no need to intervene directly as no threat to its position existed.

In the period from 1969 up to 1971 (when the IRA killed the first British soldier to die in this period of war) the nationalist community was subjected to repeated RUC/loyalist/British army attacks. It was in that context that the present phase of armed struggle by the IRA began. Armed conflict in the North pre-dated the start of the IRA campaign.

As in all wars it is civilians who have suffered most. The majority of civilian deaths, most of them nationalists, have been caused by British forces and loyalists. Over 90 per cent of those killed by loyalists and 55 per cent of those killed by British crown forces have been civilians. When the use of loyalist paramilitaries by the British as unofficial death squads is taken into account a truer picture of the impact of British violence in Ireland is seen. This is the tragedy which has been perpetuated by the failure of successive British governments to change their constitutional position on Ireland. It is ultimately the British government, and not any section of the Irish people, nationalist or unionist, which is responsible for continuing death and injuries in the political conflict in our country.

### *Armed struggle*

Armed struggle has, throughout history and in all parts of the globe, been seen as a legitimate component of peoples' resistance to foreign oppression. In Ireland, it was armed struggle which created the conditions for the removal of British jurisdiction over the 26 Counties and the emergence of a separate (if truncated) Irish state.

*house*

However, armed struggle is recognised by republicans to be an option of last resort when all other avenues to pursue freedom have been attempted and suppressed.

It must be recognised that there has been no consistent constitutional strategy to pursue a national democracy in Ireland. Certainly, there has been no consistent and principled strategy advanced during the last 20 years of continuous conflict.

Objective evaluations of the armed struggle, including those of the British government, recognise that its history to date indicates that it is likely to be sustained for the foreseeable future.

In these circumstances there is an onus on those who proclaim that the armed struggle is counter-productive to advance a credible alternative. Such an alternative would be welcome across the island but nowhere more than in the oppressed nationalist areas of the Six Counties which have borne the brunt of British rule since partition and particularly for over 20 years past. The development of such an alternative would be welcomed by Sinn Féin.

## 7. The British government

British propaganda now claims that while 'preferring' to keep the Six-County statelet within the 'United Kingdom' it has no "selfish strategic or economic" reason for doing so.

British preference in relation to matters internal to Ireland holds no validity against the preference of the clear majority of the Irish people for national independence as expressed for generations.

Moreover, notwithstanding Britain's alleged lack of 'selfish strategic or economic' reasons for maintaining partition there are multiple democratic and practical reasons why partition should go:

- It defies the wishes of the Irish people as a whole;
- It rejects the wishes of the population in Britain as expressed in opinion poll after opinion poll;
- It flouts international law;
- It is undemocratic;
- It is permanently abnormal and can only be maintained by the most extraordinary means;
- It simply does not work by any universally accepted standards;
- Its consequences have made victims of — in greater or lesser degree — the entire Irish nation for generations; North and South; nationalist and unionist;
- It has created a generation of casualties in the Six Counties;
- It perpetuates conditions in which conflict is actual or inevitable;
- It cannot produce lasting peace.

Today the British government, maintains partition in response, it claims, to the wishes of the unionist people. They back up this stance with misleading propaganda about a blood bath should they leave. They have now added to this scare claim the spurious argument that while they prefer the union they have 'no selfish strategic or economic reason' for maintaining partition. The British government cannot have it both ways. It cannot on the one hand claim a 'preference' for maintaining the union while on the other hand claiming no strategic or economic interests in being in Ireland. Governments act out of their perceived political interests and preferences. The British government is no exception.

Formal British government policy as contained in the Hillsborough Agreement — the 'unity by consent' formula — which is also ostensibly British Labour Party policy, supports the maintenance of the status quo of partition.

As has been stated by the late Cardinal Tomás O Fiaich:

*"The present policy of the British government — that there will be no change in the status of Northern Ireland while the majority want British rule to remain — is no policy at all. It means you do nothing and it means that the loyalists in the North are given no encouragement to make any move of any kind. It is an encouragement to sit tight...."*

This stance is an attempt by the British government to minimise its responsibility for resolving the crisis and to shift that task onto the shoulders of the Irish people — nationalist and unionist alike.

Britain created the problem in Ireland. Britain has the major responsibility and role in initiating a strategy which will bring a democratic resolution and lasting peace. That must involve, within the context of accepting the national rights of the majority of the Irish people, a British government joining the ranks of the persuaders in seeking to obtain the consent of a majority of people in the North to the constitutional, political and financial arrangements needed for a United Ireland.

Without the explicit expression of a desire on the British government's part to end partition unionists are unlikely to be influenced and will remain intransigent, in the confidence that the British government will continue to underwrite their contrived majority with force and finance.

## 8. The Dublin government

Notwithstanding the overall responsibility of successive British governments for the creation and maintenance of conditions which have sustained the past 20 years of continuous conflict Dublin has a clear responsibility and a major role to play in providing the democratic resolution which will bring lasting peace. It possesses the resources; the political and diplomatic access to the world centres of power.

For the greater part of the 26-County state's existence, successive Dublin governments have adopted a negative attitude in regard to the issue of national democracy.

For most of that period the issue of the British-imposed border has been addressed largely for purposes of electoral gain.

Since Hillsborough, we now have a firm hands-on approach from Dublin in support of the partition of our country.

Sinn Féin would argue that if there is to be peace in Ireland a Dublin government will have to assume its national responsibility.

Upholding that responsibility must involve the Dublin government in developing a strategy aimed at:

- Persuading the British government that the partition of Ireland has been a disastrous failure;
- Persuading the unionists of the benefits of Irish reunification and seeking their views on the constitutional, political and financial arrangements needed for a united Ireland;
- Persuading the international community through the use of international forums and institutions to support Irish national rights;
- In the interim, promoting and defending the democratic rights of the population of the Six Counties;
- Resisting further erosion of Irish national integrity by the deletion or dilution of that claim as contained in the 1937 Constitution.

*Armed struggle*

## 9. A strategy for change

In the above context the obvious response in Ireland to the continuing division of our country and our people by British government policy

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should be the development of the maximum degree of unity and action possible in the peaceful pursuit of democracy and peace. Sinn Féin has already commenced this process, with the few resources we have at our disposal. We will continue to argue in both the national and international arena for a British withdrawal and a solution based on an Irish national democracy.

Sinn Féin believes that such a scenario is achievable based on the following propositions.

### Aims

To secure maximum national and international political and popular support for the principles:

- The recognition by the British government that the Irish people have the right to national self-determination;
- That the British government change its current policy to one of ending partition and handing over sovereignty to an all-Ireland government whose selection would be a democratic matter for the Irish nation;
- That the future of the unionists lies in this context and that the British government has a responsibility so to influence unionist attitudes;
- That as part of this process the Dublin and London governments should consult together to seek agreement on the policy objective of ending partition.

Having agreed this both governments should issue a public statement outlining the steps they intend taking to bring about a peaceful and orderly British political and military withdrawal from Ireland within a specified period.

If the British government refuses to do the above then the Dublin government should strive :

1. (a) To win international support and commitment for the Irish demand through a campaign utilising to the full Irish diplomatic skills and resources and maximising the good will which the Irish nation enjoys internationally;
  - (b) To mobilise support for the Irish demands among Irish people and descendants of Irish people exiled abroad, especially in the USA, Britain and Australia;
  - (c) To utilise every avenue available in international forums, including the United Nations and the CSCE in support of Irish demands;
  - (d) To mobilise political and popular support in Britain itself, to create conditions in which the right to Irish national self-determination can be secured;
  - (e) To initiate a debate leading to dialogue with Northern unionist opinion on the democratic nature of national self-determination. To assure the unionist community of full commitment to their civil and religious rights and to persuade them of the need for their participation in building an Irish society based on equality and national reconciliation.
2. (a) To launch a concerted national campaign to mobilise popular support for the above in every aspect of Irish life, whether social or economic and including cultural, community, religious and sporting organisations and trade unions. To review all treaties which commit Dublin to co-operation with the British on issues such as extradition with a view to ending these commitments;
  - (b) To launch a concerted international campaign to mobilise political and economic support for the above principles and objectives. As part of this campaign particular attention to be paid to mobilising British opinion;
  - (c) In conjunction with the above to organise through concerted political action, nationally and internationally the defence of democratic social and economic rights, and to improve social and economic conditions for Irish citizens;

not lifetime part  
as in 'scenario' →

(d) To establish a democratic structure by which the above strategy can be agreed, implemented and overseen.

## 10. The role of the nationalist parties

Those parties in Ireland which describe themselves as nationalist, including Fianna Fáil and the SDLP, wield considerable political influence, be it in the corridors of Westminster, Washington or Brussels. This, of itself, places on them a responsibility to forcefully and continuously represent the interests of the nationalist people.

These parties are in a position to harness the considerable sympathy for Irish reunification and sovereignty which exists in Europe and further afield. It is essential that they move decisively to implement their stated objectives and policies. If the Six Counties is regarded by the SDLP and the Dublin government as a non-viable context for a resolution of the conflict let them firmly and explicitly reject partitionist scenarios.

No serious international observer believes that Britain's role in Ireland is simply that of 'honest broker' between the 'warring factions'. The SDLP and the Dublin government are in a position of international legitimacy where they can, with considerable credibility, reject this spurious interpretation.

If the nationalist parties wish to believe that Britain has 'no selfish interest' in remaining in Ireland they should demand that Britain actually carries out that statement to its logical conclusion, and formally accept the right of the Irish people to self-determination.

Accepting that the pathway to peace will not be quick and easy, these parties have a responsibility to highlight any abuses of human rights committed directly or indirectly as a result of Britain's continued presence in Ireland. They should, in particular, demand that the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe should monitor the abuse of human rights currently being perpetrated in the Six Counties.

## 11. The unionists

Unionists represent around one fifth of the Irish people and will thus have a considerable impact, be it negative or positive, on the peace process proposed in this document. We recognise that peace in Ireland requires a settlement of the long-standing conflict between Irish nationalism and Irish unionism. We would like to see that conflict, often bloody, replaced by a process of national reconciliation, a constructive dialogue and debate.

At present there is one overwhelming obstacle to the commencement of that debate. That is, the British guarantee of the artificially constructed unionist majority in the Six Counties. These circumstances mean that Unionists have no reason to engage in debate for as John Hume has said:

*"The whole thrust of the guarantee is that it is a sectarian guarantee... it is a guarantee of perpetual sectarianism. When the state came into being it was set up on a basis of a sectarian headcount. That having been done the British government then said 'We guarantee you can stay with us as long as the majority want to'. By doing that they trapped the unionists into perpetual sectarianism because in effect what they were saying is 'In order to maintain your power and privilege you must behave as a sectarian bloc!' And that's exactly how unionism has behaved. No other group of people in the same circumstances would behave any differently.*

*"If one is to break down sectarianism one has to remove that guarantee... The British should join the ranks of the persuaders."*

John Hume should follow the logic of his analysis, on which he has failed to act, and work to remove the British guarantee of the unionist veto.

If there is to be movement towards conditions in which the debate about national reconciliation can take place, the British government-bestowed unionist veto needs to be removed. If, in the interim, a British government recognises the failure of partition and its Six-County state that would help create the conditions for dialogue.

In the meantime, while we recognise the obstacles to a unionist-nationalist dialogue, we believe it is necessary to break out of the present conception of politics prevalent in Ireland, where one person's gain is conceived automatically as another person's loss. The Protestant people of the Six Counties who are presently committed to a pro-British unionism have nothing to fear from a democratic and secular Ireland. We can all gain from a democratic settlement. We all lose from a continuation of the present impasse.

Irish republicans realise that to achieve national reconciliation the deep fears held by people must be addressed. We need to address those fears honestly, going beyond political rhetoric to the real underlying issues. Democratic debate may be improbable, but not impossible, under present circumstances, its necessity is none the less urgent. The republican tradition will play a constructive role in the debate for a new Ireland, which "Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter" can all claim as their own.

## 12. The European dimension

Historic changes are taking place in Europe East and West which will have profound implications for the island of Ireland. The break-up of the USSR and the pro-independence development in Eastern Europe opens up a completely new phase of history. There is a process of economic and political restructuring which has raised the issue of national self-determination. Ireland with its colonial experience has a keen interest in this process and can gain valuable lessons.

Irish republicanism has its roots in the crucible of Europe during the great French Revolution. The current and profound changes demand an equivalent breadth of vision and willingness to innovate. Irish republicans will not be found wanting.

Alongside the demand for political democracy in Eastern Europe there is the economic restructuring contained within EC integration after 1992. The stated aim of both processes is to remove artificial barriers and restrictions on the movement of people and goods. German reunification is underway. The partition of Ireland, equally anomalous in international law, and equally repugnant to the majority of Irish people needs to be addressed in the same way.

Within Europe there is a popular consensus, reflected even by some governments, that Irish reunification is not only inevitable but a prerequisite on the road to a durable peace. It is essential that the Dublin government galvanise that opinion and translate it through the political mechanisms of the EC, into practical proposals. Already various EC reports have recognised the 'anomalous' status of Britain's remaining jurisdiction in Ireland.

While we travel the road to peace, continued abuse of human rights seem inevitably to continue. The Conference of Security and Cooperation in Europe is empowered to check abuses of human rights in any European country. Britain should not be allowed to hide behind the argument that human rights are the exclusive preserve of each government.

The political and economic transformation of Europe provides a golden opportunity for Ireland to finally resolve its British problem and embark on a process of economic and political reunification and transformation to the benefit of all its people.

*no - reunification - not the same thing as German reunification abandoned historic claims to land + people in the east.*

## 13. The United Nations

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By any objective international standards the conflict in the North represents a failure of the normal political process. Successive policies implemented by both the London and Dublin governments have patently failed to produce a democratic solution. There is little reason to be confident in the ability and will of both governments to resolve the stalemate in the foreseeable future of their own accord. In view of the intolerable consequences which flow from such a failure, a peaceful resolution may entail international co-operation through the agency of the United Nations.

International law and the United Nations Charter addresses the right of self-determination to peoples rather than to governments. If the governments concerned fail to recognise those inalienable rights, the people may seek to implement that right directly. The United Nations Secretary-General and the UN's Decolonisation Committee share a duty with the member states ( through the Friendly Resolutions Declaration ) to create conditions in which the "freely expressed will of the peoples concerned" can be reliably ascertained.

A necessary precondition for such free expression of the people's will is the removal of all forms of repression by the state apparatus of the administering power. In the context of Ireland this would require not only the abolition of emergency laws and special courts in the Six-County statelet and the 26-County state but also the removal of every barrier created to enforce and maintain the partition of the national territory of Ireland.

In this context it is incumbent on all those, in Ireland and abroad who seek peace and democracy in Ireland to urge the UN Secretary-General to exercise that duty as a contribution to ending the political stalemate in the north of Ireland. This would not be an instant panacea but would concentrate the minds of those in a position of power and influence to seek a definitive resolution of the conflict. In this spirit, the UN Secretary-General should request annual reports from the British government in accordance with Article 73 of the Charter, on its role in Ireland. Furthermore the Decolonisation Committee should undertake as it is empowered to do, an annual review of the toll caused by the partition of Ireland. Intervention by the United Nations need not and should not take the form of the introduction of UN forces into the Six Counties. 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 rerun of the bloodbath-threat scenario.

### *International Conference*

As the process of withdrawal is underway any deadlocks encountered can be dealt with through a number of options open to the London and Dublin governments. During the transitional period joint application to the UN by both governments for assistance can be considered as can a unilateral application by Dublin. In that context the United Nations can be requested to convene an international conference on the democratic resolution of the conflict in Ireland. This bid to break the deadlock would involve representatives of all political views in Ireland meeting together, along with international experts on decolonisation and conflict resolution. It would examine these issues and the need for constitutional guarantees for the economic and political rights of all the people of Ireland, with express protections for the rights of minorities in a united Ireland. Participation by the United Nations, as guarantor of respect for international law and fundamental human rights, could assist discussion to lead to positive action. As a body with the experience and expertise necessary to assist all parties to resolve their differences, the United Nations has an indispensable role to play in creating a democratic and peaceful future for the whole of Ireland.

## 14. Summary

1. Peace requires conditions of democracy, freedom and justice to eradicate the causes of war.
2. The Irish people have the same right to sovereignty and nationhood exercised throughout history and recognised in international law as any other nation. The partition of Ireland contravenes recognised international norms and frustrates national democracy and reconciliation in the country.
3. British rule in Ireland lacks democratic legitimacy either domestically or internationally and has rested predominantly on division and coercion. The British government should recognise the historical failure of the partition of Ireland in 1921.
4. The Dublin government should assume its responsibility to gain the reunification of the country, in co-operation with the British government or, if necessary, independently. *para 8*
5. The unionist minority in Ireland has nothing to fear from a united Ireland. Withdrawal of the unionist veto will open the possibility of a constructive dialogue with the rest of the Irish people. *para 11*
6. Irish republicans are determined to play a constructive role in building a national democracy in Ireland when a British government is convinced either by continuing armed resistance or by an effective unarmed constitutional strategy to adopt a policy of withdrawal from Ireland. *para 10*
7. Ireland is a part of Europe which is undergoing an historic process of political and economic transformation. This will be incomplete while the Anglo-Irish conflict continues. The partition of Ireland and the British claim to jurisdiction over the Six Counties is a European issue. Sinn Féin seeks a democratic and sovereign Ireland which will defend the interests of all sections of the Irish nation. *para 12*
8. The UN has the authority and mandate to monitor a decolonisation process in Ireland. As an interim measure Sinn Féin would propose that the UN Secretary-General request annual reports from the British government on its role in Ireland and conducts a yearly review of the consequences of the continued partition of Ireland. *para 13*