

The Real Irish Peace Process



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A Socialist Democracy Publication

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Prologue to the 2023 edition

In the run up to the referendum on the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, two comrades and I wrote a book; "*The Real Irish Peace Process*".

The book was a critique of the proposed peace settlement from a Marxist perspective. It did not stand alone. Our newspaper carried weekly analysis and reportage. We organised and attended many meetings, as well as mass marches and demonstrations.

All to no avail. The promise of peace was endorsed by the republican leadership and there was no real willingness on any side, outside unionist rejectionists and a small minority of Republicans, to look at the fine print, especially as opposition to the peace process was presented as support for a continuation of violence.

The tone at the time was summed up by a debate between local journalists. Ed Maloney argued that it was the duty of journalists to be objective and, in the name of balance, present the views of those opposing the deal. Eamonn Mallie argued that the opportunity to end violence meant that journalists should promote the agreement. A Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTE) special programme from Belfast saw the authors invited to the programme but not allowed to speak.

Our views had no effect and it's doubtful if any intervention would have had any effect. Endorsed by Sinn Féin, overwhelmingly supported by Nationalism, the agreement came into force.

Today I present these ideas again. I believe that they have stood the test of time, even though the language of anti-imperialism and class struggle may seem opaque to many.

What is left after 25 years of the settlement is the contradictions built into the process itself. Much of the agreement has simply died. What is left is frequently distorted and amended. Despite these changes the Stormont executive is yet again in a state of collapse.

What is left is the passionate determination of Irish constitutional nationalism to smother the old demands for an Irish democracy and substitute a narrative based on identity politics and cultural division.

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Introduction

The Endgame?

The main elements of this book arose from articles and discussion papers written in 1997. They in turn drew on earlier work going back to the Hume-Adams discussions. As we send the final draft to our publishers the outcome of the Stormont talks has been published and endorsed by almost all elements of the body politic outside the Unionist far right, breakaway republicans and sections of the revolutionary left. Referendum campaigns are in full flow.

We can extend our analysis a little further and say something about the forces battling around the Stormont agreement and the future stability of the settlement it proposes.

The major element in the yes campaign is the British government, their Dublin allies and “Nationalist Ireland” tail-ended by Sinn Fein. An interesting feature of this campaign is their lack of interest in the actual details of the agreement. The call is for people to vote yes to peace - that there is no alternative except immediate and terrible war. The parallels

jurisdiction and its repeal '*is largely window dressing*' and an act of '*camouflage*.' The Agreement asserts that '*Northern Ireland in its entirety remains part of the United Kingdom*', (Article 1(I) of Annexe A of the Agreement - quoted in the Sunday Tribune 19.04.98). The Government of Ireland Act is dead. Long live the Government of Ireland Act!

Britain retains possession of the six counties and, as we all know, possession is nine tenths of the law. Even if all the exaggerated legal claims for the deal were correct, which they are not, they would all be beside the point. This includes the claim by an Irish Times journalist that the constitutional changes are '*revolutionary*' because they invest sovereignty in the people, those in the six counties that is (Geraldine Kennedy, Irish Times, 18.04.98). In fact the deal does nothing to affect the sovereignty and supreme authority of the British parliament. What the British do, they can just as easily undo and even careful reading of the deal makes this clear, '*The Westminster Parliament (whose power to make legislation for Northern Ireland would remain unaffected)*..', Strand 1 para. 33. The original Act of Union and Northern Ireland Constitution Act of 1973 remain unaltered.

All this exposes the spin-doctoring of Sinn Fein leaders who have been claiming that the deal makes the union weaker by leaving it with only one '*hinge*', the unionist veto, as if this was not enough. British declarations and legislation basing their rule on the unionist veto are nothing new and mean as little now as they did before. Later in the book we list Britain's interests in Ireland, how these are best safeguarded by partition and how this means supporting a unionist veto. It is Britain that has created the unionist veto, not the unionists.

A letter writer to the Irish Times (24.04.98) pointed out the ludicrousness of nationalist Ireland giving up its claim to the six counties and then expecting to get it back later! The only constitutional change of any note is the proposed changes to articles two and three of the south's constitution. The amendments to these leave Britain's claim to the six counties unchallenged. The Irish people become a nation without a territory. The unionist veto over reunification is legitimised and the right of a minority to thwart the aspiration of the majority to self determination asserted. The only progressive aspect to Irish nationalism, the opposition to imperialist colonial rule and demand for self determination, has been abandoned by its bourgeois leaders. The

whole history of Irish nationalism, as a legitimate reaction to British rule, is being undermined. If the unionist minority is to be allowed to deny self-determination now, why should this not also have been the case in 1918?

It is important that our argument is not misunderstood as an argument in favour of nationalism. As socialists we are internationalists and support only the progressive element to the nationalism of oppressed nations. It is precisely the progressive element to Irish nationalism that is being abandoned. Instead partition and the legitimacy of two Irish states based on sectarian head counts is being legitimised and no socialist worth their salt should fail to oppose this.

Needless to say this has not prevented most parties calling themselves socialists from doing exactly this. The most dishonest argument is that which declares that socialists cannot support a capitalist constitution. This ignores the obvious fact that every capitalist party supports the proposed changes to the amendments. We support their existence as a very weak statement of the Irish people's democratic right to self-determination and oppose their change as an attack on this right. We do not defend them because they have made any difference to the lives of Irish working people, clearly they have not, but they do represent a qualified statement of the desire for a more democratic society. Qualified because although they state the legitimacy of self-determination they also accept in practice the partition of the country.

All the inadequacies of these articles are now suddenly being discovered by the leaders of Irish nationalism including the leadership of Sinn Fein. This is obviously only a cover for a massive retreat. They are not proposing to strengthen the demand for self-determination expressed in the articles, they are planning to exorcise it. A further specious argument has been put forward by Bertie Ahern, that the referenda, north and south on the same day, represent an exercise in self-determination. So the Irish people are exercising self-determination in order to deny themselves that right in the future! Occupation of part of the country by Britain and the threat of violence if the people do not vote yes does not amount to self-determination.

The centrepiece and most important part of the agreement is the creation of a new Stormont Assembly. Despite the detail, it is not totally clear how it will work but there is enough to be sure that it is based on

the most sectarian of principles. Parties elected to it will have to register as orange, green or other. The requirement for '*parallel consent, including a majority of the unionist and nationalist designations present and voting*' (Strand 1 para. 5 (d) (i)) means that in the most contentious issues those who do not register as either orange or green will effectively not have their votes counted. This single provision is enough to condemn the whole deal and silence the nonsense that the deal is about overcoming division. As we can see, it is about precisely the opposite. It is about institutionalising and strengthening sectarianism.

Based, as it is, on the six counties, the Assembly has the artificial unionist majority that the state was created to guarantee. The Assembly also contains an explicit unionist veto. Nationalists are selling the deal on the basis that they have their own veto, if not on existence of the state itself, at least on its workings. As we have seen above, a majority of those declaring themselves nationalist are required to vote in favour of contentious decisions if they are to be passed. This is indeed the single biggest gain of nationalists from the whole agreement, but it is a purely negative one. There is no power to positively change the sectarian fundamentals of the state.

John Taylor, deputy leader of the Unionist Party, said just before the end of the talks process that nationalists could not expect equal rights to unionists because unionists were the majority and nationalists were the minority. What he was signalling was the determination of unionists to use the power given by the Assembly to assert their supremacist agenda. If the SDLP consistently attempt to block these attempts then the whole deal will not work. The deal leaves the door open in the future for changes that would remove such blockages, see Strand 1 para 36.

Having worked for it for so long, basing their whole political credibility and existence on the creation of the deal, the SDLP will be loath to collapse it by consistently opposing unionist demands. SDLP satisfaction with the deal does not arise from any blow to sectarianism that the deal involves, we have seen that it institutionalises it further, but from the power the Agreement gives for the SDLP to dispense its own sectarian favours. Just as the deal divides the structures of power between the sectarian blocs so too will the exercise of that power be dispensed in a sectarian fashion. John Taylor is obviously correct. As the largest bloc

unionism will dispose of the lions share of the patronage and there is no reason for the SDLP to oppose this.

This is the meaning of the SDLP's notion of '*equality of the two traditions*', better understood as an aspiration to equality of sectarianism. Orange bigotry is accepted as the true and legitimate representative of the entire protestant population which must be accorded respect and tolerance by the catholic population, in turn corralled in its entirety into the catholic, nationalist tradition. As we have seen, a non sectarian tradition does not count. This means nationalists will have to respect the rights of a triumphalist and sectarian orange tradition, will have to compromise with it and become reconciled to it and engage with all the other nice sounding words that are euphemisms for lying down before bigotry. We can therefore see that relying on the SDLP to defend the democratic rights of nationalists in the face of unionist reaction is a forlorn hope. Their betrayal will be limited only by the ability to sell their actions to their constituency.

Sectarianism entrenched

In the final analysis this is a reflection of the class nature and interests of the SDLP. Their power will be wielded on behalf of the catholic middle class. Catholic workers can expect only that which does not conflict with these interests and Protestant workers will find no reason to abandon their own right wing, sectarian leaders. Once again we see sectarianism entrenched. The evolution of Sinn Fein promises only that they would offer a more militant stance in defence of catholic rights, but their acceptance of the deal will inevitably entail their acceptance of the sectarian framework. The rules of the game will determine the moves the players can make and what they can expect to win. No amount of Sinn Fein pretending that they can pick the nice bits and leave the rest will alter this. At least in the short term, if not longer, the rules of the game will also mean Sinn Fein will be totally dependent on the SDLP inside the Assembly, assuming they take their seats. This includes the right of Sinn Fein to be in the Assembly at all, see Strand 1 para 25. The attitude of the SDLP during Sinn Fein's talks expulsion, described by the Andersonstown News as, '*nothing to do with me,*' indicates clearly what this means.

Next is an unelected consultative civic forum to give some of the leaders

of business, the trade union bureaucrats and community notables a platform to voice their usually pro-British views. What all these have in common is a dependence on British money and patronage.

Most disingenuous of all are the north-south bodies. Never has so much hot air filled such an empty vessel. These bodies were always meant as camouflage and the aim was to give them enough weight to carry conviction. All nationalists before the conclusion of the talks were adamant that there had to be meaningful, powerful and free-standing north - south institutions, or there would be no deal. The bodies are neither meaningful, powerful nor free-standing. This does not stop them being sold by republicans as transitional to a united Ireland. As the old saying goes, if you are going to lie always make it a big one.

Even some supporters of the deal are honest enough to acknowledge that the north-south bodies are not meaningful, see the editorial in the Sunday Tribune on 19 April. The list of areas for which they are to be responsible makes this abundantly clear: *'animal and plant health..teacher qualifications and exchanges..waste management..social security fraud control..aquaculture..accident and emergency services.'* Only tourism and EU programmes represent anything serious and in these areas cross-border co-operation is already relatively advanced with no discernible influence on the sectarian character of the northern situation. The bodies are not powerful, dependent as they are on the northern Assembly with a unionist majority that can veto any decision it does not like. This reliance on the Assembly ensures the bodies are also not free-standing. Of course none of this prevents many unionists from vociferously opposing these bodies but this must be the poorest reason for supporting anything. The SDLP have claimed that the terms of the Agreement force unionists to work the new bodies so that they cannot be sabotaged from within, but again too much is claimed for the deal. The agreement states only that *'If a holder of a relevant post will not participate normally in the Council, the Taoiseach in the case of the Irish Government and the First and deputy First Minister in the case of the Northern Ireland Administration to be able to make alternative arrangements.'* In other words unionists who are ministers are not compelled to work the north-south bodies and unspecified alternative arrangements will also require the approval of unionists. In a more important sense this is beside the point. The bodies are so meaningless unionists have little to fear from working them anyway.

On top of the north-south bodies is a British-Irish council that will meet twice a year and can therefore have limited competence on this count alone. The unionist bogey of the Anglo-Irish Agreement is replaced by a new British-Irish Agreement. This gives the southern government the power to '*put forward views and proposals*' (Strand 3 British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference para 5) which the British government, as so many times in the past, can ignore. Even this will be reined back as '*justice, prisons, and policing*' are devolved to the new Assembly. As in the Anglo-Irish agreement there is an emphasis on security.

Sinn Fein placed heavy emphasis on what they termed the equality agenda which for them represents their new programme of reforming the north as opposed to the old programme of destroying it. They have therefore been talking up the prospect of significant change. However, what is most significant, is that after all the years of talks the '*equality agenda*' is kicked into touch. Instead of announcements of concrete measures the document is strong on promises hedged with enough qualifications and caveats to justify anything. This allows Sinn Fein to continue promising real change while all around them the most profound changes are all reactionary.

The preamble to the section on rights and equality includes the parties support for equality of opportunity '*regardless of class, creed, disability, gender or ethnicity*'. It is indeed hard to keep a straight face. The unemployed of Ballymurphy, the Creggan and Shankill Road are to be afforded the same opportunities as the executives and middle class of the north Down coast and Cherryvalley! This is just nonsense and gives an indication of the character of all the fine promises contained in the document. The British have had almost thirty years to create a decent society in the north of Ireland. A virtual insurrection was motive enough to force real change from them, yet we are expected to believe that only now will they create a just, fair and equal society.

The promises on Human Rights are meaningless. The only definite proposal is that the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) is to be incorporated into law. It's not clear whether this means the British are to waive their "*derogation*" privilege, but the hint is that they intend not to. The effort to safeguard human rights by resorting to ECHR has not proved very successful in the past. The process is time-consuming and expensive. Worse still the European commission usually came

down on Britain's side. Internment without trial was deemed to be "acceptable". The notorious "*five techniques*" used by the British army on detainees was thought not to amount to "torture". It also found against the "*special category status*" claim and the no-wash protests of the late 1970's.

Most of the human rights violations over the last thirty years were against laws already in existence. Introduction of new laws will not prevent them in the future. The favoured technique in this case as in others is to establish a commission. In this particular case we are again promised a commission '*reflecting the community balance*' and '*independent of government*' (see page 17 of the document). This is exactly what was promised for the Parades Commission whose latest appointments included two Catholics who work(ed) for the RUC and two loyalists. Its '*independence*' was exposed when it withdrew its initial determination on the 1998 marching season on advice from Tony Blair. With such precedents it is obvious that the commissions proposed in the document will produce findings and reports that will not in the least upset the British government. If by some chance they do, they can always be ignored, the British government is under no obligation to implement any particular recommendations. Already the proposed Equality Commission to take over handling of all equality issues has been condemned by human rights activists and workers in the government's own agencies. The Policing Commission is to be headed by former Northern Ireland Office minister Chris Patten. It is not credible to maintain that this person is in any way '*independent*'. It signals what could have been predicted anyway, not only is the RUC not going to be disbanded, it is not going to face fundamental reform either. You only need a sectarian force if the society it is going to protect is going to be sectarian. The continued existence of the RUC tells us all we need to know about the shape of the promised new beginning.

The general approach we can expect of the British was revealed by the Andersonstown News which was able to get hold of a copy of an internal NIO document on how it would deal with demands from the Irish language movement. It revealed British plans to block radical action. As the document notes, '*What these worthy sentiments might mean in practice is a matter of interpretation and we could argue that our interpretation is as valid as anyone's else.*'

The most divisive issue among unionists is the question of

decommissioning. The document leaves open the possibility of Sinn Fein entering the Assembly and taking up ministerial posts without the IRA having disarmed first. While the document declares that the '*relevant schemes*' for decommissioning will come into force by the end of June 1998 the process will only have to be completed after two years. David Trimble claims that his '*letter of comfort*' from Tony Blair means that effective decommissioning will have to start long before the two years elapses. Just like 1969 the nationalist population would be left defenceless against state and loyalist terror, which would have no difficulty in accessing the 100,000 legally held weapons in the north. As we make clear in this book, the British are not particularly fussed if the IRA maintains some weapons. What matters is their willingness to use them and the effective incorporation of the republican movement into the structures of the state, neutering the threat to the state that it once posed. Of course the unionists may not accept this and the British may force the issue, either on their own account or under pressure from the unionists. In the meantime the political leaders of the republican movement will be unable to justify the IRA's existence.

Journalist's reports have indicated that there may be more than one '*comfort letter*' and that Sinn Fein may have its own from the southern government, regarding decommissioning and prisoner releases. It would be little surprise to anyone if such letters existed although their value may be questionable. It all points again to the undemocratic character of the process. Calls by Gerry Adams for the republican base to take ownership of the process is simply empty rhetoric. Secrecy has been a prime feature of the process from the beginning.

Prisoner release within two years is the single biggest concession to the republican movement. Unfortunately it is clear that the prisoners' freedom will be dependent on the good behaviour of the republican movement. They will therefore be treated as hostages to be bartered away in return for the republican movements traditional programme. It is ironic that the armed struggle did not yield British withdrawal but prisoners whose release is conditional on all struggle being abandoned. This is an indictment of the whole military strategy pursued by republicans for over two decades, an indictment that they will no doubt ignore. It is important to point out that even at this point there is no amnesty and no recognition of the prisoners political character or of the political character of the republican struggle. To the last they are

denounced as criminals and terrorists. Of course their release once again shows up '*the rule of law*' in the north to be a plaything of British politicians.

Republican Strategy

The political programme of the republican movement has undergone a sea-change in the past number of years, away from seeking the destruction of the northern state to one of seeking its reform. Of course the new approach is being sold as one that will deliver the goal of a united Ireland and the sincerity of republican leaders is neither here nor there. Our argument is that not only can capitalism not be reformed gradually into socialism but that the northern state cannot be gradually reformed into a '*normal*' capitalist democracy. Arguments by Sinn Fein that reforms to the state delivered by the peace process will undermine the state's existence are mistaken. These arguments ask us to believe that the British will undermine their own rule and the unionists will support this. Our analysis shows that not even the leaders of Irish nationalism will do this. In short, there will be no reforms of any substance and pursuit of a reformist strategy will see the republican movement turn away from attempting to find an effective revolutionary strategy and their incorporation into a modernised, but not reformed, sectarian state. The pursuit of reforms has seen the gradual acceptance of more and more of the structures of partition, all justified in the language of being 'transitional' to a united Ireland.

The outcome of the talks were the big test of this new transitional strategy, and it has been blown out of the water. The deal has demonstrated that the northern state is not going to be reformed, the British are not going to relinquish control, the nationalist family is no friend of equality and democracy and the unionists are not going to accept the mythical '*logic*' and '*need*' for change that Sinn Fein leaders constantly affirm. They have attempted to bring their supporters with them by claiming that Britain and the unionists must face up to their '*responsibilities*.' Since when has it been a British or unionist responsibility to change partition? The responsibility of these people has been to enforce imperialist rule. The responsibility of the Irish capitalist class and its parties, Fianna Fail SDLP etc, has been to create a stable partition where they can continue to pick up the perks from

imperialist investment in the country, whether it be British money in the north or multinational investment in the south.

If the outcome of the talks was the big test of republicanism's new strategy, Gerry Adams has made it very easy for us to measure its success. In an article for Republican News he set out the new reformist approach. Just so that the importance of this new policy statement was not missed an introductory article spelled it out: *'The article is also an important development in the thinking of Sinn Fein. It lays out for the first time the transitional arrangements on the way to a united Ireland.. It is an important political initiative which all republicans should study.'* (Republican News 12/13/98).

In the article Adams lays out the minimum requirements of the talks outcome for them to be part of a transitional dynamic towards a united Ireland. A letter writer to the paper after the deal compared the outcome of the talks to this wish list, in Republican News 23/04/98. The writer comes to the same conclusion as ourselves. Indeed it is the only conclusion possible. The deal fails on all counts but the republican leadership is gearing its membership up to effectively accept it. Of course this will be presented with the usual spin doctoring, but while spin doctoring can change appearances it cannot change reality.

Lets compare Adam's '*minimum*' requirements with the deal. Firstly Adams demands '*powerful all-Ireland bodies exercising significant and meaningful executive..powers. With direct responsibility for policy decisions..overseen..by the two governments. Operating independently. Immune from the veto of any proposed Six-county institutions. With no limit on the nature and extent of their functions. With the dynamic and ability to grow.'* None of this is in the deal.

Secondly Adam's wants '*fundamental constitutional and political change in British jurisdiction.'* This has not happened either. He wants '*.. in any Irish constitutional change - the definition of the Irish national territory should not be diluted'* and '*the constitutional imperative must remain.'* In both cases the opposite has happened. On the equality agenda, '*The securing of equality, rights and justice needs to be visible and immediately tangible.'* In fact they have become invisible behind pious phrases and postponed to commissions that will inevitably fail to deliver. There is no '*human rights commission.. established on an all-Ireland basis*' or '*an*

all-Ireland constitutional court responsible to a North/South council.' The RUC is not going to be 'disbanded', 'interrogation centres' are not going to be 'closed' and the British army is not going to be 'withdrawn to barracks as a first step in overall demilitarisation.'

That the Sinn Fein leadership did not immediately reject the deal speaks volumes for the tattered sectarian state that they are prepared to work with. Promises of their ultimate goals not changing are worthless. It is current political strategy and programme that determines the end goal a political movement seeks, and is able, to achieve, not the nice ideas in its head. The slide into a failed reformism is so deep it often goes unnoticed. Thus some republicans have acknowledged the reactionary constitutional elements of the deal but have attempted to argue that there are positive elements in the document around the equality agenda. Even if this were true, and it is not, this argument could only be put if it was believed that the northern state actually could be reformed. The argument that it cannot has been the core one of republicanism for the last thirty years yet their present political strategy finds them arguing for exactly such an analysis, regardless of formal positions. This is what we mean when we say that political strategy determines ultimate goals.

This is also revealed in Martin McGuinness's account of Sinn Fein's part in the negotiations leading up to the deal. Thus he outlines their opposition to a northern Assembly but also how they felt compelled to lobby the SDLP and Dublin government over specific mechanisms by which it would work! By being so utterly reliant on these people it was obvious a new tattered Stormont was to be put in place and Sinn Fein's role was reduced to determining how much make-up was to be applied, and this only if they could get the support of the SDLP and Bertie Ahern. Republicans profess loyalty to their leadership because, among other things, they are '*sophisticated*' and '*skilled*' political operators. They may well indeed have been very sophisticated and sharp in their dealings with the other parties to the talks. In this particular case they may have been very clever in their political manoeuvres to introduce specific measures into the workings of the new Stormont. But what is not very clever, at least from a traditional republican perspective never mind a socialist one, is finding oneself in the position of having to negotiate a new Stormont Assembly in the first place and having to rely on your enemies in the process. In fact McGuinness's whole report to

the Sinn Fein Ard Fheis revealed the dependence of Sinn Fein on the southern government in particular.

Republican Reaction

When the IRA called their first ceasefire there were cavalcades up and down the Falls Road. Many republicans believed that their leadership had achieved a great victory that, for reasons of politic, had to be kept under wraps. The leadership did nothing to dissuade them of their illusions. Of course it became clear that the only thing up the movement's sleeve was its arm. There was no secret deal with the British. Later Gerry Adams was promising Irish unity from the talks. When it became obvious this was not going to happen the promise was given of fundamental change. Later the minimum requirements for a transitional settlement were outlined, as above. Now that the talks have failed to deliver these, the republican leadership are offering even vaguer definitions of what their strategy has and will achieve. The common thread is one of retreat while the language is always one of advance. So Adam's claimed 1998 to be a high point for republicanism and McGuinness could not help claiming the rotten deal as a product of Sinn Fein strategy, '*it was Sinn Fein who dragged this document into this visible playing field*' he said at the Ard Fheis (Republican News 23.04.98).

The language of advance is only credible to many republicans because of the electoral gains that Sinn Fein has made. Like true reformists they confuse advancement to the real objective with their own success. However their own success has been reliant on accepting the ground rules and assumptions of their traditional enemies. It has been constructed around creating powerful and rich friends who are in reality enemies. It has been achieved not by winning greater support to the traditional republican banner but by diluting the republican programme until it is palatable to these newly won '*friends*.'

All this is presented in terms of purely tactical considerations in which republicans are the driving force of the process. This illusion allows the leadership to carry on with the same disastrous policy while claiming more advances are ahead. All possible because the peace process is supposedly their initiative and they can veto it at any time. The exaggerated illusions of many republicans was most memorably

illustrated when a member of Sinn Fein youth declared at a public meeting in Belfast that republicans had '*Bill Clinton by the testicles*' because he needed the Irish American vote. The media and celebrity attention combined with the high profile meetings with the worlds most powerful politicians has blinded republicans to what is happening and their own role in events. The exaggerations of youth are simply exaggerations. Many other republicans have similar if less colourful illusions. As one wag put it, many people have recently had Bill Clinton by the testicles but Sinn Fein isn't one of them.

If republicans are the driving force of the process how can they explain their retreat from demanding a united Ireland to one of raking over a document that asserts British control, partition, the unionist veto and minimal change to the RUC? The longer the process goes on the clearer becomes the betrayal and the more conscious it becomes in the heads of those leading it.

Sinn Fein clearly intends pursuing its failed peace process strategy, its alliance with the nationalist family and its unprincipled course, described by it as pragmatism. As we have said, the justifications for the strategy become vaguer and vaguer. The new deal has now become '*a new phase of struggle*', '*a basis for advancement*' and '*could become a transitional stage towards reunification.*' These arguments are worthless but they are only the fig leaves which cover the real dilemmas that many republicans feel they face.

Rejecting the deal would be unpopular with many nationalists but republicans cannot understand that this only highlights the need for a massive political struggle to overcome illusions. There is the belief that if Sinn Fein became the largest nationalist party in the north partition would be fatally undermined. This sits beside another view that Sinn Fein participation in working the new deal will cause the unionists to walk out, or at the very least to be irreparably split. The British would then have no alternative but to deal with nationalism alone and more and more accept its demands. What this ignores is the consistent policy of Britain to hold on to the north because of its own interests, not those of the unionists, and its realisation that it needs the unionists on board to run the northern state for them. They have never given up on the unionists despite their wrecking of previous British plans such as Sunningdale, and they are not going to start now. It is pie in the sky for republicans to believe that even if nationalists are the

only ones to work the British Agreement the British will suddenly turn to them to fashion a new process in line with nationalism's long term goal of unity. Sinn Fein as the largest nationalist party in the north with a souped-up reformist programme will cause instability but it will not herald the destruction of the northern state and the end of partition.

Rejecting the deal would also mean an acknowledgement that the peace process strategy has been a complete failure and that it is time to dump any notion of unity of the nationalist family. This would require real courage and it would also require an alternative. Even open republican dissidents lack the latter.

However the fundamental argument is that the movement must remain united, and principled opposition to the deal could only mean a split. For many older republicans who have survived previous splits this is a cardinal lesson. For younger republicans it has been passed down to them as a sacred totem that cannot be violated. For socialists it is only evidence of loyalty to personalities over unity around political principles. It is but one more example of something that is highlighted throughout this book. Many republicans have forgotten why certain things are done. Thus young people rioting in the streets of Belfast or Derry will often high jack buses or lorries, burn them and then run away. They do not know that the purpose of building barricades is so that you do not run away, you use the barricades to expel the British army and RUC from working class areas. Otherwise the whole thing becomes an exercise in politically motivated vandalism. If there is not the mass movement to defend the barricades then you do not set them up, and you dedicate yourself to building the political movement that will be able to defend them.

Similarly the demand for unity is a demand for unity in action against the enemy while protecting that unity by encouraging debate on the way forward between political organisations involved in the struggle. The slogan of unity as it is currently presented is a call to swallow disagreements for a purely organisational unity around a strategy and programme that has failed. The lowest point of such 'unity' which ditches political principle was Gerry Adams call at the special Ard Fheis; "*Vote with the Ard chomhairle today and on May 22nd vote whatever way you want.*"

Peace and Pacification

If we are to move on we must look beyond the political collapse of the republicans to the whole history of the struggle. Part of the struggle in

Ireland over the past 30 years has been the battle to define the problem. Initially it was defined in terms of equality and justice and then broadened, when these were denied, to freedom and self-determination. As the struggle declined it became possible to define it narrowly as a problem of terrorism. The struggle to tackle the causes of violence were subsumed in a single demand for peace.

There's a term for a peace process in which demands for justice, equality and democratic rights are subordinated. That term is pacification.

The pacification of Ireland has already had great success. It is accepted by almost everyone - implicitly even by the republicans themselves - that they were to blame. The people in charge, those who unleashed torture, internment, the death squads - the British themselves - are already invisible.

This might be shrugged off if Britain's transgressions were a thing of the past, but in fact British violence has been built into the peace process. They have used the state forces to push loyalist bigots through nationalist areas and turned a blind eye to a constant regime of violence by the "*pro-peace*" loyalist paramilitaries. The final Stormont "*agreement*" only became possible when the Orange card was played in an outburst of Loyalist sectarian killing which was used to change the peace agenda from the framework document to Trimble's heads of agreement. British secretary of state Mo Mowlam brazenly played this Orange card by rushing to meet the chief killers in prison.

The alternative of mass violence, posed by the British and their loyalist allies, applies to the call for a yes in the referendum, the Stormont vote, the actual setting up of the new Stormont, accepting the sectarian measures it will apply, and so on. Every step so far has been accompanied with implied threats that the only alternative is violence. This will continue to be the case.

Peace on British terms excludes an end to the division and sectarianism caused by partition. Peace on British terms excludes equality and justice. Peace on British terms rules out a society controlled by its working people. A return to '*normality*' in the north means a return to some modern version of the sectarian society that existed before 1969. The process will be accelerated by the presence of a large loyalist rump

in the new assembly, They will need to be conciliated and Trimble will need extra support. This will mean conciliating Orange bigots on the streets, demonstrating that the Unionists are masters in the new Stormont, demonstrating that all the other aspects of the agreement are meaningless. Without resistance it will sink quickly into a modern version of the little sectarian hell-hole that existed in the past.

Peace dividend.

Many supporters of the British hope that there is a way to conciliate Orangeism while mitigating its effects. A Peace dividend will produce prosperity in the North and cut the ground from the economic roots of sectarian rivalry. While there may well be a modest boom there is little likelihood that this will transform the North. Firstly capital inflow has been a feature of the peace process for some time without radically changing peoples lives. Official funds have been simply bribes. They have helped to stabilise support for a settlement among unionist businesspeople. EU and British funds to the community have created the social base for the peace process by employing republican and loyalist supporters. This has helped develop a reformist ideology without providing the economic base for reform - in the long run all it can feed is small-scale clientelism. Where funds have been used directly for economic development we have the usual multi-national suspects providing a low-wage economy with a choice of sweetheart deals with unions or straight union-busting. The Montupet plant in Belfast is a perfect illustration of low wage multinational investment which provides appalling conditions for the workforce.

The two main structural weaknesses of the peace process - capitulation to the right and lack of any commitment to social justice - can be seen globally in the Palestinian and South African situations. Arafat has to hold onto the illusion of a process, totally a prisoner of Israel, because the alternative is his own collapse. Even if by some miracle a deal were to be done it would leave Palestinian workers as virtual slaves of the Israeli state. The South African experience was illustrated in the run-up to the referenda by the visit of a South African delegation. Even though we have the massive gain of universal suffrage in South Africa peace involved the full retention of white economic power. As a result the position of most of the population remains unchanged, while

the leadership are co-opted on to the boards of the white multi-nationals.

Those then are the two poles of the Irish Process. Success would leave partition, sectarianism and social inequality intact. More likely is a constant slippage to the right, with a demoralised opposition hanging on desperately without even the power to let go.

Alternative

Instead of seeking alliances with the green capitalist class and its supporters in the nationalist family, Fianna Fail and the SDLP, or with multi-millionaires in the US, the struggle for democracy should seek support from the Irish working class, as James Connolly put it, the incorruptible inheritors of the Irish fight for freedom. This means seeking support from, and giving leadership to, those workers who come into conflict with the right wing leaders of the nationalist family. This means adopting not just a democratic programme but a socialist one also. In our earlier book 'Ireland: The Promise of Socialism' we indicate what such a socialist programme would look like. It is not possible to ride two horses at the same time, pretending to base oneself on mass working class struggle while secret diplomacy is conducted in alliance with the opposition to this mass struggle.

That there will be mass upsurges of class struggle, both north and south, should not be in any doubt. The difficult task is to establish a leadership of these struggles that can unite them and give them a revolutionary programme. That is the purpose of Socialist Democracy and we invite those in agreement with our analysis to join us in this task.

When Bernadette McAliskey visited America after the deal she was asked by American socialists *What do you think can be done now?* She answered by saying, *'Two things. We have to look for opportunities to mobilise people on specific issues, even limited ones. We also try to engage in political discussion, encourage people to examine the basic realities of the relationship between Ireland and England. We need analysis and new thinking. It has been a problem in the Irish movement for some time that there has been little study of history or political discussion. That has to be overcome. The deeper the understanding that*

people have of the basic issues, the less likely they are to be misled. This is the first step that has to be taken before we can start to move forward again.'

This book is a contribution to this first step. It is designed to promote study and political discussion. For many it will offer a new analysis and new thinking. Its success will ultimately be judged on whether it encourages new mobilisations based on an educated political movement determined not to be misled. On one thing we can agree with Gerry Adams, the Irish make great rebels but poor revolutionaries. This book can help them make good revolutionaries.

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Chapter 1

“Britain has no selfish interest in Ireland”

Three or four years ago during the August internment commemoration festival in West Belfast a meeting was held which looked at the financial cost of the last 25 years of conflict. The speaker, an academic from Queens University, went to great lengths to determine the total cost and to convey the enormity of it to his audience. He came to the conclusion that the British state had borne a cost of at least £23.5 billion over the period. However when he was asked why Britain’s ruling class spared no expense in order to remain in Ireland he had no answer and neither did any of the one hundred or so republicans in the audience. This was an audience that contained many of the leadership of the republican movement, including Gerry Adams.

This question is not just quite important. It is absolutely fundamental, not just to understanding the present so-called peace process but the last 25 years, if not longer. That the question cannot be answered by the republican leadership or membership is a damning indictment of a movement which in effect cannot explain why it was fighting, had to fight at all, over the last quarter of a century.

When confronted with the question republican leaders sometimes repeat the propaganda line of the British state itself. Thus Martin McGuinness in 1992 said that he doesn't " *buy a lot of the (previous) notions about British strategic interests. Personally I believe they're here because they wish to uphold the right and support the position of unionism within the six counties, rather than any strategic or economic interests...*" (quoted in Explaining Northern Ireland, J. McGarry & B. O'Leary, Oxford 1995). This leads to agreement with the public position of the British establishment that it is only interested in the democratic rights of the 'majority' unionists. It is thus also possible to see Britain as neutral between two warring factions whom it is simply trying to stop killing one another. It follows that there is no anti-imperialist struggle and indeed that imperialism can actually play a progressive role by becoming persuaders of the unionists to throw their lot in with the rest of the Irish people. The barrier to Irish unity is therefore the unionists and not Britain. If all this was true then republicans have a lot of explaining to do. Why has it engaged in an armed struggle against an enemy that was not really an enemy at all since Britain has no real interests of its own to defend?

Of course if Britain does have its own selfish interests then all this is wrong and the peace process is doomed to ultimate failure. Britain will not voluntarily leave Ireland no matter how strong the arguments or how slick the negotiating tactics of the republican leaders. Not unless the republican movement is claiming, and can demonstrate, that it can safeguard Britain's interests in a new united Ireland. In this case it would have the difficult job of being more efficiently pro-British than the unionists while presumably still claiming to its supporters that it was anti-imperialist and even socialist.

We can see that if you get the answer to our original question wrong you can get everything else wrong as well. Unfortunately the republican leadership is not alone in getting it wrong. Even those who claim an understanding of what imperialism is really about essentially go along with the same analysis. Many socialists today endorse the claim that Britain has no selfish or strategic interest in Ireland. They repeat the 1974 statement of Eamonn McCann that " *The British interest lay in balancing between Orange, and Green capitalism, between north and south, between Protestant and Catholic.*" This can lead socialists associated with groups like Socialist Worker and others to predict that

the peace process would lead to an ideal solution for Britain based on sharing sovereignty with Dublin.

The willingness of republicans and most of the left to believe British claims of a disinterested and neutral position in relation to the political framework in Ireland is common across the political spectrum. The unionists frequently express a belief that Britain has no interest in Ireland and are continually proclaiming a sell out. The SDLP loudly welcome and repeat ad nauseum Britain's claim of benign neutrality and Dublin echoes them. What presents itself as the mainstream left in Ireland, the Labour Party and Democratic Left, agrees. In part to bolster their own claims that there is no anti-imperialist dynamic to the northern struggle and cover up their own support for the undemocratic unionist veto, now dressed up as 'consent.' In other words everyone who is anyone seems to agree with Britain's own spin on its involvement in Ireland.

However like many a previous statement from perfidious Albion it is a lie. The belief in its veracity is no more than a popular prejudice. We are asked to believe that Britain has spent £23.5 billion in the north to defend the 'democratic rights' of 900,000 unionists in Ireland out of the goodness of its heart. The whole idea has no precedent in British imperialist history. That it pumps in a subvention of nearly £4 billion every year for this purpose. That it has conducted a brutal and dirty war in Ireland that has often sullied its international reputation out of a loyal obligation for the unionist people. Unfortunately, like any popular prejudice, rational analysis and argument are often of very little use in combating it. Thus it is argued that the money poured into the north of Ireland is proof that Britain has no interest in the place!

History

Those who argue that Britain has no interests in Ireland have a lot of explaining to do. In the first half of the century Ireland provided an example to other parts of the Empire in their struggles for independence from Britain. Britain only withdrew from the 26 counties after a gruelling guerrilla war combined with widespread popular mobilisation coinciding with a domestic economy in crisis, exhaustion after the First World War, and the prospect of only a full scale war with an army of 100,000 men being able to provide complete victory. This after a conflict

in which even the Archbishop of Canterbury condemned Britain and the British Labour Party charged that "*things are being done in the name of Britain which must make our name stink in the nostrils of the whole world.*"

While partition was not Britain's favoured solution Lloyd George managed to hail it as "*the greatest day in the history of the British Empire.*" While studiously ignoring this assessment unionist historians have attempted to claim that partition was not central to British strategy in Ireland and that therefore, by implication, has been expendable ever since. As evidence they point to Britain's prioritisation of support for the Free State forces in the Treaty settlement and Britain's declared policy of support for Irish unity after the creation of two parliaments in Belfast and Dublin.

Why support for the Free State forces should be antithetical to partition and northern unionism is a mystery. For Churchill support for the southern state meant re-invasion of the south to support the Free State forces against the anti-treaty IRA; "*we must act like a sledgehammer*" he said. In the end it proved unnecessary as the Free State was able, with British guns to defeat the IRA. Even after the Free State victory, when there remained a question mark over the survival of the state, Britain again considered re-invasion of the south. It did not do so because of the cost and the necessity of an army now estimated as 200,000 strong; a fear of collapse of the native reactionary forces, the spread of Bolshevik revolution and the loss of markets for England. Instead Britain opted for financial and political support to the new southern state. Britain did indeed foresee possible unification after partition but for them this was not '*Ulster*' joining the 26 counties but the south rejoining the northern state within the British empire.

What this showed was that support for the northern state was only part of an overall strategy in which partition guaranteed the existence of, and provided support for, the southern state which in turn also helped safeguard the fundamental interests of Britain on the island.

Unionist historians also hold up the offer of unity during the Second World war as evidence of the lack of commitment to partition by Britain. This episode is also presented as a demonstration of the effective independence of the southern state, refuting any notion of it having any neo-colonial binds to Britain. In fact the 26 counties was utterly

dependent on Britain for its survival during the war and could have been economically strangled if Britain had the least interest in doing so. That it did not want to is again evidence of Britain's continuing interests in the south, during the thirties the latter had been Britain's second most important trading partner.

The offer of unity demonstrated at one and the same time the strategic importance of Ireland and also the unwillingness of Britain to confront and destroy its loyalist supporters in the north. The 'offer' of unity was conditional on the 26 counties entering the war, British troops re-entering the south and unity being conditional on unionist agreement, which the British of course said they would deliver. The mere promise of unity for involvement in a war which Britain looked to be losing was naturally rejected. Nationalist Ireland had fought for Britain in the First World war on the promise of Home Rule and that promise had been betrayed.

Strategic Importance

The Second World War reinforced for Britain the view that Ireland was of vital strategic importance. In 1949 the British Labour government approved a secret report drawn up by civil servants which stated that *"as a matter of first-class strategic importance Northern Ireland should continue to form part of His Majesty's dominions. . . it seems unlikely that Britain would ever be able to agree to Northern Ireland leaving His Majesty's jurisdiction. . . even if the people of Northern Ireland desired it."*

A British Commonwealth Relations Office document from 1951 stated that: *"Historically, Ireland which has never been able to protect herself against invasion, has been, as she is today, a potential base of attack on the United Kingdom. It is the more important that a part of the island, and that strategically well placed, should, and of its own free will, wish to remain part of the United Kingdom and of the United Kingdom defence scheme."*

This strategic concern was repeated in 1982 by Vice-Admiral Sir Ian McGough, former Royal Navy commander for NATO's North Atlantic area: *"The sea above the continental shelf, and the airspace above it, constitute the North Western approaches to NATO in western Europe. .*

To the north and west, soviet forces would have to make the lengthy transit from the North Cape, and if their target was trans-Atlantic shipping, that transit would be increased by 500 miles or more if the shipping were to be brought in via the south of Ireland. Indeed the strategic importance of Ireland (the island) in any scheme of protecting shipping in the approaches to the British Isles can hardly be exaggerated. The current unrest in Northern Ireland . . . therefore, has serious implications for allied strength and unity.”

Forced back by such open declarations of imperialist interest the apologists for Britain make two points. Firstly that concern with a potential Soviet threat was much exaggerated and that the end of the Cold War makes such concerns redundant. This latter point asks us to believe that it is only within the last ten or so years that Britain has lost any reason to see strategic interests in Ireland although the argument usually requires us to believe a lack of such interests at a much earlier date. The first argument has more merit but misses the point. The dangers of a Soviet threat were always grossly exaggerated all over the world. What it did do was to justify imperialist control of other people's countries and their resources. The eminently rational core of the concern expressed above is that Britain might lose influence over the country exposing a strategic weakness. In Ireland, as everywhere else, the big, bad Soviet Union became a surrogate for every threat to British power and interests.

Ireland, because of geography, political proximity and economic ties , still continues to be of strategic interest to a capitalist and imperialist Britain. At its most basic it was expressed by Herbert Morrison, leader of the House of Commons in 1949: *“It is, of course the case that Ireland, geographically . . . is very near to our shores and we cannot be indifferent to the circumstances which obtain there.”* At different times the threat to Britain's strategic interests changes. After the First World War Germany and even France were the potential threats, just as the Soviet Union was post World War Two. Sometimes the threat is seen as one of subversion. According to Sir Nicholas Scott, former Parliamentary under-secretary for Northern Ireland: *“The biggest challenge that the governments of the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, and, I believe, the governments of Europe face is that the IRA campaign should succeed in the North, because if it (did) it would certainly mean that they would turn their sights on a government of the Republic and pursue their aim of a thirty-two-county socialist workers republic, and Europe would*

then be faced with an offshore island and centre for subversion that would not be very dissimilar from what the United States and the central and northern parts of Latin America have endured from Cuba for the last twenty years. I think that's the first danger and the first real problem of instability that we face, and that's one of the reasons why we're determined to make sure that the IRA campaign does not succeed in the North."

This echoes then Secretary of State, Jim Prior's warning in 1986 of an 'Irish Cuba' off the coast of Britain. Given the enormous Irish population in Britain, estimated by some as one million native and four million first generation, it is easy to see one transmission belt for any radical change in Ireland moving across to Britain. The fact that the republican movement, especially now, is a very unlikely candidate for a revolutionary threat, ingratiating itself as it is with corporate America (declaring that it "*has no problem with capitalism*"), does not mean that Britain is going to withdraw to leave its interests to the policy whims of Irish republicanism. The rightward lurch of republicanism is testimony to the success of British imperialism's strategy of squeezing it as hard as it can. It is ultimately testimony to the strength and commitment of Britain to stay in Ireland.

Economics

The defenders of Britain's stated policy of neutrality usually present economic arguments to bolster their claims. It is claimed that the withdrawal of much British capital from Ireland, the shrinking of the Unionist capitalist class and its industrial base, and the general declining power of British capitalism means that Britain no longer wants to remain in Ireland. What stops it coming out they say, is the destabilisation that would result from their withdrawal.

Why, if no interests are involved, Britain would be in the least concerned about lack of stability if they withdrew is not explained. In fact the argument has to assume some interests that would be threatened by instability consequent on a British withdrawal. It is of course possible to argue that imperialism is interested in more than immediate protection of foreign investment and trade. It is correct to point out the well-known decline of British productive investment and the decline in Ireland's dependence on the British market. British

owned manufacturing plants in Northern Ireland declined from 83 per cent of the total number in 1973 to 58 per cent in 1990, while in the 26 counties manufacturing employment in British owned firms fell from nearly 27,000 in 1973 to just over 14,000 in 1985. This decline needs to be analysed in the context of the general British failure to compete in the manufacturing sector, but it seldom ever is.

However three aspects need to be appreciated before we can come to a full understanding of imperialism's interests in Ireland. Britain does continue to have a real interest in Ireland as a market for its goods. The 26 counties alone is the U.K's fifth most important export destination and is the only one with which it has a trade surplus. For the ten years from 1981 to 1990 Britain had a surplus of over £6.5 billion. In recent years both north and south have become sites for major investments in the retail sector, which is an expanding sector of British controlled capital. In the past two years several British supermarket chains have very quickly captured Irish markets; Tesco bought out Ireland's biggest retailer at a cost of £650 million and Boots has recently cornered the Irish Chemist market. Another important area of British capitalist expansion is in the area of popular mass media. Nor is the new flow of capital confined to the retail sector. The setting up of a Financial Services Centre in Dublin, has attracted over 400 banks and finance companies, offering modern facilities and a low 10 per cent tax on profits and lots of ways of hiding profit. Today Dublin has taken over from the Channel Islands as Britain's largest offshore fund management centre, catering for over 600 funds. So whilst British owned manufacturing has declined other sectors are actually expanding.

In addition , no matter how important Ireland might be for Britain, Britain is absolutely crucial for Ireland. Overall nearly 70 per cent of the value of Irish based exports depends on the EU, but the UK remains the most important export market accounting for nearly twice the value of exports to the second most important market Germany. Approaching 40 per cent of employment in manufacturing industry in the 26 counties is dependent on the British market not to mention the employment in British owned firms which direct half of their output to the local market. While the proportion of employment in British owned firms has declined it still accounts for around 60 per cent of foreign manufacturing employment in the north and almost 20 per cent in the south.

It is hardly surprising then that the macro-economic stability of capitalism in Ireland is very much tied to what takes place in Britain. Despite the southern state's break from sterling in 1979 and membership of the European Monetary System the Irish pound has had to be devalued three times, the last two being the biggest devaluations within the system at that point in time, precisely because of the southern economy's continuing dependence on Britain. This fact continues to arouse fears as to the wisdom of the southern state's project of an early entry into the single European currency at a time when Britain is keeping its options open.

Despite relative decline Britain remains a major imperialist power, one of the veto-wielding five members of the United Nations Security Council, one of the G8 major industrial powers, one of the five recognised nuclear powers and one of the few powers with a military capacity capable of being deployed around the globe. Britain is the world's fifth largest trader and its exports account for 22 per cent of its Gross Domestic Product. The City of London is a world centre for international finance. In the 1980's 27 per cent of all international lending took place from London. Almost 17 per cent of the world's direct foreign investment came from Britain in 1989 and it is itself a major site of US and Japanese investment. In 1982 75 per cent of British capital exports went to the US and in the same year North America received seven times as much U.K. direct investment as did Western Europe. (By the way this money connection helps explain the 'special' relationship between Washington and London which no fake sentimentalism expressed in New York on St. Patrick's day can hope to compete with.) In 1991 foreign assets as a percentage of total domestic assets were over 34 per cent, much higher than in any other major imperialist power.

What this means is that Britain is a major imperialist power with world-wide interests to defend. It is inconceivable that it would allow its credibility or stability to be threatened so close to its shores when it has sought to project its power and influence in places such as the Falklands, in the Gulf war and in Bosnia. Britain is the imperialist power in Ireland because of geography, history and economic ties between the two countries. Ireland, especially the south, is an important area for imperialist exploitation. Nineteen ninety-five was a record year for foreign investment, 114 projects were secured, almost half of which were 'greenfield' or new investments, 14 per cent of all 'greenfield' multinational investment in Europe. Ireland now accounts for 40 per

cent of all European investment by US electronics companies. The Industrial Development Authority estimates that the 26 counties accounts for 25 per cent of European Telemarketing investment. Of the 1,100 overseas companies now in the south, one in five has some key strategic function such as design, product development, customer support and marketing sited in the country. Old fashioned imperialism is alive and well and not a day goes by without some politician lamenting the adverse impact 'violence' is having in discouraging investment. The island of Ireland is therefore important to imperialism and partition is the mechanism which has allowed the political stability (in the South) which has facilitated and protected imperialist investments. No sector of international capital or imperialist power has any interest in radically altering the current political framework, a framework which does not inhibit capital from accumulating profits.

These economic foundations explain the third, political, aspect to be considered. The declining role of purely British economic interests, albeit within the limits noted above, has in no way created an independent capitalist power on the island capable of inserting itself on the world market on equal terms (even if only on a smaller scale) with the imperialist powers. This is true both economically and politically. Ireland remains in a semi-colonial relationship to the world capitalist economy, with an economy that is subordinated to the demands of capital accumulation determined by multinational companies and the trade policies pursued by major imperialist states. Given the historic, and proximate role of Britain, 'imperialism's interests', whether they be American or European, are in a period of political instability ultimately safeguarded by Britain. This remains so notwithstanding the recent more public involvement of America and explains why, contrary to republican wishful thinking, US imperialism has no real conflict of interest with British imperialism. The US has always appreciated that Ireland is as much Britain's back yard as the Caribbean is hers.

Empire

Belief that Britain is relaxed about evacuating from Ireland is partly inspired by its history of retreat from empire and the process of decolonisation after the Second World War. In part this is a misreading of what actually happened which involves swallowing whole the idea

put about by Britain that this was a voluntary process in which negotiation with former 'terrorists' played a major role.

In fact Britain did everything it could to hold on to as much of the empire as possible and the state was prepared to pay enormous costs to do so. This created real strains on the economy and puts into perspective the subvention to Northern Ireland. This subvention is not so much a motivation to leave Ireland as an incentive to achieve a settlement which may allow the British to reduce it. Following the Second World War Britain was prepared to shoulder huge debt and skirt with economic disaster in order to hold on to its empire and maintain its defence commitments. As late as 1965, nearly a decade after the humiliation at Suez, Harold Wilson was proclaiming that "*Britain's frontiers are on the Himalayas.*" It fought tooth and nail to maintain its great power status and was forced to retreat only by economic weakness, US encroachment and too many challenges to its ambitions.

Today Britain still desperately clings to its great power pretensions despite the high cost. The nuclear programme, for example, dwarfs the cost of financing 'Northern Ireland' and its plan to pay £15 billion on a new and almost immediately obsolete Eurofighter show that Britain "*still punches above her weight*" as the then Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, put it. Britain is not going to be driven out of Northern Ireland through either an armed campaign by republicans which has been an irritant rather than a strategic threat, or at the negotiating table where everyone but the republicans will support the British presence. It has been said that Britain cannot afford to leave in circumstances where this could be interpreted as a defeat but without a veritable revolution there is otherwise no reason for them to contemplate withdrawal.

In conclusion none of the three factors noted above as crucial to Britain's retreat from empire operates, or does so to sufficient degree, to offer the prospect of British decolonisation of Ireland on the model of previous exits from direct colonial rule.

There is an additional argument reinforcing the case that Britain is not about to withdraw from Ireland without being forced by something more powerful than a small armed campaign or pleadings from any pan-nationalist alliance. Britain doesn't claim the north of Ireland as part of its empire but as part of the British state itself. Defeat in Ireland

would therefore not just be a defeat for the policy of the British state but a defeat for the state itself. This would be of much more significance and exemplary power than any other defeat incurred in its imperialist history. This is shown by the experience of other imperialist states which claimed foreign possessions as part of their own country, most notably the French in Algeria. Defeat for the British in Ireland would be an enormous blow against every reactionary force in Britain itself and corresponding boost for every progressive force. It would have profound implications for the integrity of the rest of the British state, especially Scotland. The London 'Times' put it like this in 1971: "*Ireland is an issue on which, conceivably, the political stability of the nation could again be put at risk, as it was in the nineteenth century, when, besides nearly bringing parliamentary life to the brink of collapse, it was a deeply destructive force threatening the coherence of British society.*"

One recent left wing analysis sees this as the only real reason for British commitment to a presence in Ireland ('War and Peace in Ireland', Mark Ryan, Pluto Press): "*What is at stake in Ireland is the British state itself.*" While we recognise this aspect of Britain's interest in maintaining power in Ireland the author overstates the case. The 6 counties are not part of Britain and defeat would not be one within Britain proper. This is recognised by the majority of the British people themselves who regard the loyalists of Ireland as Irish.

Present Policy

For those who claim that Britain is really neutral, or even wants to leave Ireland, the insuperable problem is explaining British policy over the last 25 years. Every one of the various plans hatched over this period and presented as possible solutions has involved Britain remaining firmly in control. Incapable of explaining the total contradiction between observable current policy and their own baseless speculation even the most thoughtful proponents simply ignore the problem.

This prejudice that Britain is somehow trying to find a graceful way of leaving (when it didn't mind leaving ungracefully in many other places) leads, as we have seen, to completely wrong perspectives on what is really happening. Thus the most fevered speculation, arousing loyalist paranoia and repeated republican predictions of victory, occurred during the mid-seventies when the combination of withdrawal of many

British multinationals from the north coincided with the policy of Ulsterisation. In reality however this period saw the start of the British state's injection of large amounts of money in order to finance a new counter-insurgency strategy and its more direct control and responsibility for nearly every aspect of life in the north. Far from leaving it saw the drawing up of a new strategy for staying.

If Britain were leaving it would hardly adopt a strategy of putting more and more guns into the hands of a loyalist population that might be expected to resist any British withdrawal. This loyalist population is not a candidate for securing stable capitalist rule in the whole island which is what partition and British rule in the north is designed to achieve. The British state would hardly pump in millions of pounds, increasing the subvention from £126m in 1971/72 to £1.8bn in 1988/89, if it were going to withdraw. If the British were attempting to legitimise increasing Dublin involvement with a view to eventual hand-over why have they been pushing for the amendment to articles two and three of the south's constitution? Even right wing nationalists have despaired of Britain's strategy as this passage from the New Ireland Forum report indicates: *"Despite the British government's stated intentions of obtaining political consensus in Northern Ireland, the only policy that is implemented in practice is one of crisis management, that is, the effort to contain the violence through emergency measures by the military forces and the police and through extraordinary judicial measures and a greatly expanded prison system."*

Those who claim that all this changed with the Anglo-Irish Agreement should recall Garrett Fitzgerald's judgement of its results, that *"nothing substantive had changed."* Even the motives of the Dublin government were not as unionists have claimed, the end of the union. A top British official of the time described their objectives: *"Dr. Fitzgerald was prepared drastically to lower nationalist sights on Irish unification in the interests of promoting stability in Northern Ireland and halting the political advance of Sinn Fein. This meant trying to reconcile nationalists to the Union rather than breaking it; but . . . this could only be done if the Republic were associated in some institutionalised way with the government of Northern Ireland."*

For the British the Anglo-Irish Agreement had some other real benefits. It recorded Dublin's legitimising of partition by accepting the unionist veto and provided a cover against any international criticism of it's Irish

policy for which Dublin now supposedly had some responsibility. Tom King, as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, was able to claim that there was now no prospect of a united Ireland and Douglas Hurd could claim at the Tory party conference in 1991 that the debate on partition was over. The confidence trick that is the Anglo-Irish Agreement was graphically exposed when the Dublin government only found out from the television that the Orangemen were being forced down the Garvaghy Road at Drumcree in 1996. The speech of Tony Blair on his first visit to Northern Ireland showed that New Labour was just as in favour of partition as the old Tories.

Behind all the different policy initiatives of successive British Secretaries of State certain constants have remained. The first is to continue to hold on to the north and the second is to move to a position where it can do so at arm's length, as it did under the old Stormont regime. It is however in no particular rush to get to this position. The third constant is not to seriously de-sectarianise the state, as this would threaten the position of the only 'justification' for its presence, that is, the sectarian privileges of the Protestant population. This sectarian privilege is summed up in their supposed necessity to have their own state separate from the rest of the Irish people. The boundaries of the northern state and very existence is determined in the last analysis by a sectarian head count. This population is disproportionately relied on to run and defend the state, in the police, top civil service and judiciary. From this flows the need for such marginal sectarian privileges as exist. The economic and political weakness of a declining, if still powerful imperialism, means that the British do not have the option of buying off the Catholic population while maintaining a superior position for the Protestant one.

Despite over 25 years of direct rule the rate of Catholic unemployment to Protestant has hardly shifted. Catholic male unemployment is still over twice that of Protestant. The British have no excuses. Over the last 20 or so years the structure of employment in the north has changed dramatically, giving ample opportunity to move this differential, never mind the opportunities afforded by the normal turnover of employment. The proportion of employment that is the direct responsibility of the British government has increased from 25 per cent in 1971 to 36 per cent today. The British have spread the idea that changing this ratio is largely out of their control and is not easy. Both of these are a lie. On the outskirts of East Belfast, a mainly Protestant area, there is a huge

complex of government departments. How many have been relocated to West Belfast to encourage Catholic employment? The biggest subsidies to private industry over the last 25 years have been given to the most notorious discriminators. In the 15 years up to 1989, Harland and Wolff the ship builders was subsidised to the tune of £1 billion. When Shorts aircraft was sold off it was promised that £390m of debt would be written off, there would be a grant of £79m over four years, a further provision of £18m for other costs, £275m for recapitalisation and a £60m interest free loan. In other words the British state has had a very real and direct influence on the pattern of employment and the religious balance in unemployment is it's responsibility.

Of course socialists will defend the employment rights of all workers and cannot be in favour of Protestant workers being sacked to be replaced by Catholics but equally we must strenuously oppose and condemn the sectarian policy of the British state that publicly opposes inequality while quietly reinforcing it.

The conscious refusal to reform this aspect of the northern state is matched by their policy of refusing to reform the repressive nature of the state. The B- specials were disbanded and replaced by the equally sectarian UDR which were then renamed the RIR. The Special Powers Act was removed from the statute book and replaced by the Emergency Provisions Act. The state has resorted to torture and murder to defend its interests including the sponsorship of loyalist death squads. It has gone to enormous lengths to cover up its misdeeds, from the Widgery whitewash of Bloody Sunday to the suppression of the Stalker and Stevens reports into the collusion of the RUC with loyalist killers.

British policy after 1969 was one of minimal involvement in order to allow the Unionists to sort out the mess followed by the reluctant introduction of direct rule when they proved capable of only making things worse. Whilst not being seriously threatened with defeat themselves the weakness which does afflict imperialism is shown by their inability to defeat the resistance to their rule and their need to enlist Dublin to provide cover for their attempts to do so. The present 'peace process' now puts this British victory on the agenda by bringing closer another political 'solution' grounded in another partition. The current conditions for a settlement grounded in partition can now no longer be guaranteed by relying on a crude and unchecked loyalist domination but needs to draw on the support of a developing yet

politically compliant catholic middle class which does require some form of British recognition of their 'identity' . The task for the British is to find a way of reconciling the need to formally recognise the existence of an Irish identity while maintaining the more political essentials of unionist sectarian privilege. Meanwhile the Catholic working class will remain at the bottom of the heap with the Protestant working class not far above them, kept loyal to its own exploitation by the continuance of the states unchanged sectarian character.

The South

The present peace process is fed by two other illusions: that the southern capitalist class holds to a design and is capable of incorporating the north into its own state and that in this process of reunification the United States would have some progressive role to play.

It should not be necessary, but unfortunately is, to remind republicans that successive governments in the 26 counties (especially Fianna Fail ones) have done everything in their power to repress those who have struggled for a united Ireland. This repression has often exceeded that of the British or Unionists. All the major southern parties are partitionist in ideology and to a greater or lesser extent try to condition the Irish population to assent to a reactionary agenda that legitimises British policies in the north.

The southern establishment, again led by Fianna Fail, gave up any idea of an independent road of development in the late 1950's when they opened the doors of the country to multinational exploitation. This at once made clear, very directly, the state's dependence on the big imperialist powers (notwithstanding recent boasts of being a 'Celtic Tiger'). It assisted the destruction of much of native Irish business and created a large number of smaller companies utterly dependent on supplying the multinationals and the market they created. The imperialist demands for free trade, opportunities for investment with minimal taxation and large grants, and a flexible workforce, have created an Irish business class with exactly the same interests and requirements as the multinationals. This confluence of economic interests is replicated by agreement on political objectives. Political stability and a compliant working class are prime objectives of imperialism - both American and British - and the southern

establishment. The last thing the latter wants to see is the instability and potential for radical change generated by a process of national reunification. The policies of free trade and attracting multinationals means any concern about this, caused by the defeat of British imperialism and the reactionary northern state, would quickly lead to the export of money by both multinationals and native capitalists.

Over the past 25 years the southern state has collaborated with Britain to suppress anti-imperialist resistance and spends around £1R250m every year doing so, proportionately more than Britain itself. Again, why spend all this money if it is not in the interests of the southern establishment to maintain partition? In the past decade even the verbal commitment to a united Ireland as a practical objective has been dropped to be replaced by support for the unionist veto and the legitimacy of the northern state; expressed in both the Anglo-Irish agreement and the Downing Street Declaration. Yet it is the parties that have constructed these agreements who are expected, in a pan-nationalist alliance with the SDLP(whose own history republicans are trying to forget), which is supposed to spearhead opposition to British intransigence.

Underlying such wilful blindness is an equally misguided belief in the potential of a capitalist united Irish economy which would supposedly develop out of a successful peace process. This new 'island economy' would, it is claimed, create 75,000 jobs through increased trade across what is now the border, harmonise economic policy and institutions north and south, and produce a dynamic economic corridor between Belfast and Dublin. Unfortunately it's all wishful thinking. Unionists have delighted in picking holes in the arguments while ignoring the failure of the economic entity called Northern Ireland.

If we examine some of the arguments we can see their weakness. The forecast of 75,000 jobs coming from increased trade assumes, among other things, that the extra goods produced on one side of the border would not displace goods produced by firms on the other side. This is plainly not the case and more sober estimates of the potential jobs created from increased trade divide the inflated figure by ten. Already northern manufacturing sales per capita to the south exceeds those to Britain. Harmonisation of policies and institutions is hardly likely to create significant growth and the whole idea of removing barriers to the free market being the key to growth has already taken a dent with the

failure of the Single European Market to deliver the much promised growth on a European-wide basis. Finally the idea of a dynamic corridor from Belfast to Dublin assumes that it is enough to state an ideal situation for one to be in a position to actually achieve it. It is of course realistic if all the problems of developing a flowering Irish capitalism have already been solved but since it is not explained how this is to be done the whole discussion has an Alice in Wonderland quality.

Essentially unionists are correct to ask how the southern state could afford to take on the north and they estimate that taxation would have to increase by 25 per cent for the present living standards to be maintained. This is why nationalists and republicans talk of Britain pulling out and continuing to fork out money to support a united Irish capitalism. So we are asked to accept at one and the same time that Britain wants to leave because it costs too much but that when it leaves it will continue to pour millions of pounds into the country! We are asked by Sinn Fein to believe that the new island economy can be democratic while British imperialism still pays the piper and multinationals are begged to increase their investments. It is not explained why British and US imperialism should support a democratic economy under some sort of popular control when they have, throughout their history, attempted to throttle every attempt to do the same everywhere else in the world.

Behind support for the idea of a dynamic united Ireland economy is the unstated belief that partition is a barrier to the workings of the free market on the island and that its removal will greatly assist the development of a more efficient economy. It is therefore, in origin, 'free market' economics of the most right wing variety and is promoted just as it is being more and more clearly seen to have failed. In a pamphlet published by Sinn Fein "The Economics of a United Ireland," socialism is not mentioned once. Unfortunately if the new Ireland is not going to be socialist it isn't going to be democratic either.

A fundamental reason why Ireland was partitioned in the first place was because the predominantly southern, 'green', capitalist and middle classes were not strong enough to secure capitalism on the whole of the island on their own. As we have noted the attempt under Fianna Fail to create a strong native capitalism failed and was eventually abandoned when the fate of the 26 counties was surrendered to the multinationals. The 26 counties is therefore a semi-colony highly dependent on the

economies of international imperialism and politically subordinated to the interests of British imperialism in particular. Gerry Adams could not be more wrong when he says “*Ireland is no longer the junior partner in Anglo-Irish relationships*” (‘Irish News’ 2/7/97). The capitalist parties have enough problems maintaining legitimacy in the South without the challenge of providing political leadership in the north as well. Repeated devaluations of the punt demonstrates that as far as the world’s money men are concerned the Irish state is only a satellite of the British one. In short there is not the least prospect of a democratic resolution of the national question coming out of Leinster House.

The United States

Contrary to popular perception interventions by the United States into Ireland’s British problem have been few and almost universally pro-British. As we have said the US views Ireland as Britain’s backyard and has regarded Britain as an ally of major importance. America has often had exactly the same strategic interests in Ireland as the British, during the Second World War and Cold war for example. It has rejected intervention against Britain because its own record has been as bad as Britain’s. It rejected support for the civil rights movement because it had its own civil rights movement to deal with. It opposed the hunger strikers, supported the Anglo-Irish Agreement and is now fully behind the reactionary peace process which it sees as one more pro-imperialist solution like those in Palestine, South Africa and Bosnia.

The belief that Clinton is more progressive than previous Presidents is fanciful. If the behaviour of the US and British imperialism is compared at a tactical level it only appears as the old ploy of good cop, bad cop; both with exactly the same ends in mind. The same can be said of the most prominent Irish-American politicians who in the past have been more successful in marginalising republican supporters in Noraid than in influencing British policy. At the official level the view of the US was expressed by John Moore former US ambassador to Dublin: “*Many Catholics and Protestants alike are coming to believe that Britain will eventually pull out completely, even if no visible political solution can be achieved. The press is full of parallels from earlier outposts of Empire. Most of the commentators overlook one thing; in terms of national interest, it made sense for Britain to leave most of its empire. It would not seem to make much sense for any British government to abandon its*

backyard to civil war. . . a Britain that utterly failed to cope in Ulster would lose confidence in its ability to cope anywhere."

Conclusion: Partition the most favoured solution.

We have shown that contrary to it's lies Britain does have '*selfish, strategic and economic interests in Ireland.*' That these interests can only be defended by partition and continued existence of a sectarian and repressive northern state. That Irish capitalism is too divided and weak to replace direct imperialist control and that far from seeking a democratic solution, 26 county capitalism seeks only to assist Britain in maintaining a more stable partitionist framework.

In final defiance against such demonstrable facts the advocates of British neutrality claim that if no loyalists existed in the north there would be no partition, etc. One may as well equally declare that if there were no nationalists in Ireland there would be no partition and no need to talk about imperialism either.

The fundamental interest of Britain in Ireland can be summed up quite succinctly. Partition is fundamentally necessary to maintenance of a stable political framework in Ireland guaranteeing the safety of capitalism on the island. Defeat for Britain, or even voluntary withdrawal, would threaten this and also the integrity and stability of the capitalist state in Britain itself. At the very least it would fatally weaken the most reactionary and sectarian institutions and organisations in the north and remove the key mechanism for dividing the Irish working class, thus opening the prospect of real political worker's unity. Socialists who defend Britain's neutrality claims have, more than others, to explain why British imperialism and Irish capitalism should be neutral about this. It demonstrates clearly why socialists are decisively in favour of defeating British imperialism.

Chapter 2

From Partition to the Framework Documents

The underlying nature of the current political situation has been greatly obscured by the rhetoric of the peace process. The long duration of the conflict, for a long time apparently defined by armed engagement, has led many to forget that initially the political struggle was not defined in terms of peace and war. It was generated by the spontaneous rebellion of tens of thousands of people into mass political agitation against oppressive rule. Today, the peace agenda of the British and Irish establishments exists only to try and mask the determining power of British political oppression in the past. Everyone is being asked to 'compromise' but every compromise offered over the past thirty years has left the drums of British oppression still beating and partition reinforced. The reason for this is quite simple. Partition was and still is Britain's compromise, a semi-colonial and capitalist state for nationalists in the south and a separate bigoted sectarian state for the Protestants in the north. It should therefore come as no surprise if settlements based on the principle of 'compromise' are unjust and mean the continuation of partition.

The Stormont regime was founded between 1919 and 1921 to deny the democratic right of the Irish people to self determination. It was created by Britain with all sorts of all-Ireland links promised and the protection of human rights guaranteed. Religious discrimination was singled out as something that was supposedly not going to be allowed. The actuality turned out differently. A rabidly sectarian state was created which its political leaders did little to hide: "*I have always said that I am an Orangeman first and a politician and member of this parliament afterwards... All I boast is that we have a Protestant State for a Protestant people.*" (J. Craig, Prime Minister 1921- 1941)

"I have not a Roman Catholic about my place...I would appeal to loyalists therefore, wherefore possible, to employ good Protestant lads and lasses." (B. Brooke prime minister 1943-1963)

The Stormont regime ruled by dint of a military police force, the special constabulary (USC), which consisted of a full time and part-time loyalist militia originally recruited from the illegal UVF, instigated by unionists and Conservatives in 1911 to resist Irish Home Rule by force of arms. Home rule promised only a provincial parliament, as Stormont was later to become, but for the unionists in Ireland and the British Tories its enactment was perceived as a threat to the privileges of the House of Lords and to sectarian privilege in Ireland. Stormont ruled through the use of special powers which could cancel democratic rights at the whim of a Unionist party minister. The state was not simply the creation of the unionists. It was an imperialist creation which could survive only with aid from Britain.

In July 1920 the British cabinet held a strategic discussion on policy in relation to Ireland. An assistant under-secretary at Dublin Castle, AW Cope reported that the security situation in Ireland was becoming progressively worse and suggested an offer to Sinn Fein of Dominion Status instead of Home Rule subject to the British Parliament. Churchill was furious with the suggestion of British concessions and proposed increased repression and an escalation of the war in Ireland. To meet the necessity for more troops he floated the idea of arming the Protestants: "*what would happen if the Protestants of the six counties were given weapons and charged with...maintaining law and order and policing the country?*" He suggested raising an army of 30,000 Protestants from the north to be used when necessary in the rest of Ireland. After listening to objections from Dublin Castle it was decided not to use a

Protestant militia to crush the rebellion in the rest of Ireland, instead the Unionists would be encouraged to recruit a force able to safeguard British interests in Ulster.

In October 1920 details of the force (USC) were announced. It consisted of three categories of recruit; full time A-specials, part-time B-specials and a reserve of C-specials. The 3,500 A-specials were to be paid a higher weekly wage than skilled engineers. The B-specials (19,000) were armed and permitted to keep their weapons at home. The membership was recruited from both the illegal UVF and the sectarian gangs that had chased workers from the shipyards. The English Liberal newspaper, the Westminster Gazette, commented: "*All the eager spirits who have driven nationalist workmen from the docks or have demonstrated their loyalty by looting Catholic shops will be eligible for the USC. This is quite the most inhuman expedient the government could have devised.*"

This early sectarian militia was funded not by the unionists but primarily by the British Treasury. Soon the emergent Unionist administration was lobbying for more British assistance. In March 1922 it was proposed that another 20 platoons of A-specials, plus another 300 to train the B-force should be recruited. It was also proposed that another 2,000 B Specials be added, bringing that force to 22,000. In 1925 Craig explained to the Unionist parliament that between 1921 and 1924 the cost of maintaining a force of 5,500 A Specials and 19,500 B Specials had reached £7,420,000 of which £6,780,000 had come directly from a British war chest. The money was made available in a series of half-secretive ad hoc payments. In 1922 the security grant amounted to half the funds available to the emergent state.

In the early years the Unionist regime could not have survived without frequent British political and military intervention and economic subsidies. An historian very sympathetic to Ulster Unionism says "*Northern Ireland was always on the edge of bankruptcy and always financially dependent on Britain*" (Patrick Buckland A History of Northern Ireland)

Ireland was partitioned in December 1920 as a result of the Government of Ireland Act. Some pro-British historians maintain that Britain never actually intended the 1920 Act to instigate a lasting partition. The

cumbersome way by which the British in 1920-1921 transferred powers to Stormont and the several attempts to bring Collins and Craig together are cited as proof that the British were always unenthusiastic about partition. In reality, to suggest that the British were not predisposed towards partition is to completely misunderstand British imperial strategy in 1920.

To clear things up it is important to remember that the Government of Ireland Act was originally intended by the British to apply to the whole of Ireland. The 1920 Act was in fact an attempt by the British to negate the challenge posed to their colonial rule by the declaration issued by the Irish National Assembly, first Dail, in favour of an Irish Republic. The first Dail issued an Independence Declaration from the Mansion House in Dublin on January 21 1919 and was able to draw on a powerful moral and democratic authority from the Irish people to affirm Ireland as a "*sovereign and independent nation*". Sinn Fein had just won huge support for its political programme at the 1918 general election.

The Government of Ireland Act was envisaged at the time as an important part of a British strategy to strangle the nationalist movement by offering the Irish middle and upper classes some form of belated Home Rule. Although by 1920 most of the nationalist people had swung in behind supporting the leadership of Sinn Fein, the British believed they could halt the independence movement by offering a modest form of Home rule. The offer contained in the 1920 Act was an invitation from the British to the '*moderates*'(in reality the wealthier middle class) in Ireland to break with Sinn Fein.

It is not hard to see why the core leadership of Sinn Fein denounced the 1920 Act and refused to give it any sort of legitimacy. The Ulster Unionists also initially rejected the Government of Ireland Act, but quickly swapped their all Ireland unionist opposition for a provincial sectarian state. The Unionists were initially opposed to the 1920 Act because they believed that any sort of Irish Home Rule, even one which offered them their own separate parliament would sooner or later end in Irish independence.

Sinn Fein was right to repudiate the programme for Home Rule outlined in the 1920 Act. To agree to it would have left the British parliament with a veto over all of the most important areas of Irish national

development. The Act set out a long list of “*exceptional*” and “*reserved*” matters over which the two parliaments were to have no authority. These included the Crown, the armed forces, treaties with other nations, treason, coinage, trade, the postal service and the Supreme court. In addition section 75 laid down a blanket provision that the supreme authority of Westminster remained undiminished. So important were the reserved matters that it would have left the British with the right to declare war on behalf of the Irish people, as indeed Britain did in 1914. In short the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 would have left Ireland in a position of continued colonial subordination.

So in 1920 the British expected to keep the whole of Ireland by offering a form of Home Rule, based on two parliaments linked by a Council of Ireland. When it became obvious that Sinn Fein had no interest in agreeing to the British plan the way was clear for the Unionists to make the most out of the 1920 Act. They seized the opportunity to transform the Parliament they didn't initially want into a fully partitioned Orange State. It was Churchill the arch imperialist who most of all understood the importance for Britain of supporting ‘*Ulster*’ with all the trappings of state power. By mid 1921 the suspicions held by the Ulster Unionists concerning the intentions of the British government and the implications of the Government of Ireland Act had begun to disappear as the British began to bolster the 6 county parliament with all the trappings of a strong state.

The important point about 1920 is that while it is true that the British did not view partition as their most favoured solution, it was also true that the only sort of Irish unity they could tolerate was the unity of Home Rule subject to the British parliament. So the idea around today that the British never really wanted the partition of Ireland is far from the truth. The British began transferring the material means to build up a strong state a few weeks before the Treaty settlement of December 1921. The northern parliament officially took charge of law and order on 22 November 1922. Much of the responsibility for the creation and character of the northern state lies with Britain.

In May 1922 the Collins led wing of Sinn Fein and the De Valera led wing drew up proposals for an electoral pact. The British were furious. They believed that Collins might be at the point of repudiating the terms of the Treaty. As a precaution they decided to fortify the six county state still further with a strong Protestant militia. Almost immediately

23,000 rifles, 15,000 bayonets, 242 Lewis guns and 50 Vickers guns were despatched to the 'Ulster' police force and a loan of £5million towards military spending made available. Churchill then boasted that they had 48,000 armed Ulster men ready and able to help put down any repudiation of the Treaty, It was in such circumstances that he famously exclaimed " *when we begin to act we must act like a sledgehammer so as to cause bewilderment and consternation in southern Ireland.*" Today it may not be fashionable to say so but the fact is that the British ruling class were right behind the unionist creation of a strong sectarian state in Ireland.

Civil Rights

For fifty years Stormont stood supreme. In general the mere threat of state repression was enough to deter radical political opponents. The abandonment of the six counties by the Free State resulted in routine political quiescence. The oppressed nationalists quickly learnt about the futility of trying to influence government by standing in parliamentary elections in a gerrymandered sectarian state with an unassailable Unionist party grip on power. The Nationalist party was barely a political party at all and was mainly the preserve of petty middle class notables intent merely on preserving their local influence.

The only politics that held out any potential as an alternative to Nationalist cretinism - working class and socialist politics, was left enfeebled by partition. A nationally separated trade union movement, increasing sectarian division and a cowardly labour leadership destroyed the cause of working class unity. A few undaunted socialists attempted to by-pass the authority of the Stormont parliament by appealing directly to Britain for justice. In 1935 after a sectarian pogrom provoked by the Ulster Protestant League which left 11 people dead and 300 Catholics driven from their homes, the case for a full British public inquiry was put before the Westminster parliament. In typical fashion the British government buried the petition saying it was a matter solely for the Stormont Parliament to deal with. As long as the Unionists could guarantee Britain's interests plus relative political stability few in ruling British political circles cared much how they went about doing it.

Just to complete the political demoralisation the Nationalist party in

1965 was coaxed by the Dublin government into recognising the de facto permanence of Stormont and became what was mockingly referred to at the time as the 'official opposition.'

Concerted political opposition to the injustices of Stormont arrived only in the late sixties but came not through parliament but spontaneously from local groups like the Dungannon based Campaign for Social Justice. Protests began as peaceful acts of civil disobedience in pursuit of the most basic civil rights: one man one vote, the ending of electoral gerrymandering, machinery to investigate acts of discrimination by public authorities, the fair allocation of public housing, a reform of the draconian special powers act and the disbanding of the B-specials.

Politics took the form of sit down protests and demonstrations. The ground breaking confrontation between the civil rights leaders and the state took place in Derry in 1968. The city was two thirds Catholic and nationalist, but because of unionist gerrymandering it endured under a unionist local council which was famed for its sectarian discriminatory practices. In 1968 seventy percent of the corporation's administrative, clerical and technical employees were Protestant, nine of the ten top positions were also held by Protestants. For sometime Derry socialists and republicans had been co-operating in campaigning around a housing action committee. The group soon ran up against the blatant discrimination against Catholics in housing allocation. They were bad-mouthed by both unionist and nationalist politicians alike but won a good deal of local support.

On October 5th 1968 a civil rights demonstration was arranged. It was the housing action committee which decided on the march and invited the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) to sponsor it. The nationalists and communists who controlled NICRA, the official civil rights body, had never considered it to be an agitational organisation. They reluctantly agreed to support the march and after it was banned held a hurried meeting to call it off. The Derry action committee was outraged. They decided to go ahead regardless. The NICRA caved in and reluctantly agreed to support the march.

On the day of the demonstration two thousand people set off from the Waterside station and got about 200 yards. Nationalist party leader Eddie McAteer had opposed the demonstration but still attended. Gerry

Fitt also attended and was clubbed alongside many others by the RUC. The organisers attempted to hold a public meeting but were baton charged by the RUC and then sprayed by water-cannons. Sporadic fighting then spread into the Bogside and Bogsiders came out to defend their friends. That night barricades were thrown up and petrol bombs thrown at the RUC. At least 75 people were treated for injuries at the local hospital.

For the first time in decades some of the substance of peoples' grievances were graphically depicted and aired by the mass media. Thousands of people across Ireland and Britain were prompted to ask questions about Stormont and British backing for it.

After the march on October 5th events moved with amazing speed. The political postures of various groups immediately before and immediately after the demonstration gave some indication of the roles they were to play in the years to come. The socialists and some republicans were the initiators of the demonstration and carried out agitation and organisation. The Communist party, the official leadership of the republican movement and other reformers in NICRA tried desperately to hold to a conciliatory course. The nationalist workers rallied in support of the radicals.

The role of the Catholic middle class deserves a mention. Shortly after the demonstration a meeting of '*concerned citizens*' was held in a Derry hotel. They set up a '*Citizens Action Committee*' and moved to oust the socialists and radical republicans from any political leadership of the civil rights movement. A small time local businessman who hadn't even attended the demonstration, one John Hume, became leader of the committee. Attempting to hold back the struggle was to be the chief hallmark of the committee and the largely middle class organisers.

After the police attack on the demonstration a wave of anger swept over the nationalist minority and anti-Unionist Protestants. On October 9th students demonstrated in Belfast in support of the call for civil rights and afterwards the Peoples Democracy (PD) was set up. It was to play an important role in future struggles. On October 15th the Nationalist party withdrew from the position of official opposition at Stormont. The next day PD held another demonstration to Belfast City Hall. It was the last anti-Unionist demonstration to get into the city centre until 1978. On 24 October PD took over Stormont buildings and staged a sit-in for

civil rights. In the South Lynch, the Fianna Fail Taoiseach, was forced to complain to the British and they in turn began to ask questions of the Unionist government.

The British Labour government, fearing wide repercussions if further civil rights protests were so openly attacked, advised Terence O'Neill, the Unionist Prime Minister, to steal a march on the civil rights radicals by talking up the prospect of reforms. On 22nd of November a sketchy reform package tailored to fit the situation in Derry was announced by the Unionist government. Derry City Corporation was to be replaced by a nominated Commission, there would be an ombudsman, local authorities would be encouraged to adopt a points system for housing and the company multiple vote would be abolished for local elections. A Parliamentary Commissioner to investigate grievances was also promised as was a probable reform of the local government franchise within three years.

During the weeks that followed the Derry Citizens Action Committee (DCAC) organised large public meetings to discuss the reforms package. The overwhelming feeling was that the package was woefully inadequate, people questioned why it should take a minimum of three years for them to be offered equal voting rights. However taking advice from John Hume and Eddie McAteer the DCAC called a halt to all demonstrations for a month. Only the PD argued that 'one man one vote' had still not been achieved and that it was necessary to keep up the pressure on O'Neill. They decided to go ahead with a civil rights demonstration from Belfast to Derry. On 1st January 1969 around 80 people set off from Belfast. The march was harassed by loyalists along the entire route, with open collaboration from the RUC. The harassment became violent at Burntollet bridge. A mob organised by Derry unionists including Orangemen and a platoon of 'B' specials attacked the marchers. The RUC led the marchers into the ambush and stood aside for a time to let the loyalists do their worst. That night trouble flared in Derry as the RUC followed the march into the city and then went on a wrecking spree. The DCAC lifted the truce on further demonstrations. The following day O'Neill launched a venomous attack on the demonstrators blaming them for all the violence.

The civil rights radicals believed that the pace of reform could be speeded up from below and from above. From below by organising bigger and better peaceful demonstrations and from above by appealing

to the higher political authority of the Labour government in London. On both counts the civil rights leaders miscalculated the level of resistance they would run up against in their endeavour to achieve real reforms. With a few exceptions the civil rights campaigners failed to see that in the immediate aftermath of the October and November 1968 demonstrations the bulk of the ruling Unionist party was shifting ominously to the right. There was no taste for reforms within the ruling Unionist party.

In a last ditch attempt to shore up his authority O'Neill called an election. Peoples Democracy stood in the elections to win support for a militant civil rights agenda and to oust the old-guard of the right-wing Nationalist party. It gained 23,000 votes and many new areas of contact with workers. The old nationalists lost their seats to fresh faced nationalist upstarts like Hume and Cooper. Immediately after the election Hume and others waved good-bye to the DCAC, which in turn accused them of cashing in on the civil rights campaign.

For O'Neill the election was a formal draw, which was as good as a defeat and he limped on under threat from his own right wing. An advance warning of an impending Unionist shift to the right occurred in March 1969 when a new Public Order Bill was enacted to deal with the novel types of peaceful protest pioneered by the civil rights movement and not previously covered by the Special Powers Act. The Bill immediately outlawed things like sit down protests and using loud speakers in public. In an effort to placate the gathering forces on the Unionist hard right O'Neill then promised to get tough with the 'troublemakers.' But he was soon to discover that he could never do enough to placate the growing opposition of the right wing within his own party, and nothing he did could satisfy the legions of sectarian reaction led by Paisley and Craig. In their eyes he had been irredeemably tainted with the stain of reform.

Brian Faulkner, soon to become party leader, captured the essence of O'Neill's problem in early 1969 "*The Unionist Party only accepted the reforms on the understanding that no further concessions to the agitations were contemplated.*"

In an effort to head-off more street protests O'Neill brought about his own downfall by letting it be known that in his view one man one vote was inevitable. A Tory critic of O'Neill, journalist and historian T.E

Utley, described his approach to reform as “*the classic example of the dangers of government by gesture. These gestures-dramatic speeches and appeals on television, for example, elaborate foreign tours, and overtures to the south and the Catholic minority excited Protestant suspicion without materially reducing Catholic grievances.*”

On the 28th April 1969 O'Neill resigned his leadership of the ruling Unionist party, forced out by a combination of the right within his own party, the growing popularity of Paisley and a series of bombs exploded by the loyalist UVF. The very public beheading of O'Neill flashed out a clear message to the civil rights leaders, that if they were to win any serious reforms they could not afford to shrink from organising more mass activities. But they were to find out the hard way that Stormont had opted for all out retrenchment rather than for reform.

The North Explodes

The Unionist hard-liners were now in command of Stormont policy. The right decided to step up repression of the civil rights movement. The tragedy of the civil rights movement in 1969 was that it was largely unprepared for the state repression that was about to be visited upon it. Once again it was Derry that was to be at the eye of the storm. On 12 August 1969, 15,000 loyalists belonging to the Apprentice Boys attempted to march alongside the edge of the nationalist Bogside district. The hypocrisy of a government permitting a sectarian march to proceed at a time when all civil rights marches and related activities had already been banned was lost on nobody .

It was obvious that the Unionist party had decided to shore up its faltering authority by once again playing the Orange card. As the twelfth of August approached a Derry Defence Association was formed to plan for an expected loyalist and police invasion of the Bogside.

Barricades had gone up on the 11th August in anticipation of the confrontation to come. The Bogside was cordoned off by the RUC. As the parade was passing some stones were thrown at the loyalists. The RUC, assisted by hundreds of loyalists, charged into the nationalist youths and so began the battle of the Bogside. Waves of RUC tried to break the barricades with baton charges and tear gas. Each time they were repulsed with stones and petrol bombs. The fighting lasted three days,

hundreds were wounded but the Bogside did not surrender. Instead Free Derry was declared, a no-go area beyond Unionist rule. The RUC, 'exhausted,' took on the demeanour of a broken police force. The Unionist Prime Minister decided to call on the British army for back-up.

As British troops landed on the streets nationalists attempted to relieve the pressure on Derry and a sectarian pogrom began in Belfast. On the Shankill Road hundreds of loyalists and B-specials equipped themselves for the pogrom. They poured into the streets connecting the Falls and Shankill and into other districts like the Ardoyne. Hundreds of petrol bombs were thrown and scores of houses belonging to 'fenians' were set on fire. At the point where the loyalist mob reached Divis Street they were joined by RUC men who fired bursts of machine gun fire into Divis flats. In the Ardoyne the B-Specials and loyalist mobs burned down three entire streets. The death toll for the night of 14th August was six, with hundreds wounded. Around 150 Catholic families were burnt out and hundreds began evacuating their homes the next day. A report compiled in the summer of 1969 found that 1,820 families were forced to flee their homes in Belfast, 87 per cent were Catholic representing 5.3 per cent of the Catholic residents of Belfast.

August 1969 was a watershed for a number of reasons, the most important being that the overt presence of the British army on the streets exposed the simple but deadly truth that it was the guns of the British state that ultimately ensured Unionist domination. A certain folk lore has it that the British army mobilised to save the Catholics from slaughter. Many people were relieved when the British army arrived but they knew next to nothing about the political thinking that had brought the army onto the streets. They were to "aid the civil power." To aid the civil power for the British army meant putting down an anti-colonial rebellion: "*The troops went into Ireland in 1969 against an operational background of colonial counter-insurgency. Many officers had experience of rebellion in places such as Borneo, Malaya and Kenya. A strain ran through military thinking that Northern Ireland and its people were the equivalent of the restless natives encountered in far flung places of the British Empire - a view that was reflected in the range of military techniques used by the army on the streets during the period of 1970-1971: the curfew, searches and the use of special legislation were resonant of previous British campaigns in the colonies.*" (Kennedy- Pipe "The origin of the Present Troubles in Northern Ireland)

In fact it was not *'the people of Northern Ireland'* that were regarded as the enemy, it was the nationalist people alone that was the enemy. The troops were sent in at the request of the Unionist administration to restore the control that had been lost by the RUC and B-specials. The British Home secretary James Callaghan explained the thinking of the Labour government in 1969: *"There was a pathetic inadequacy about the number of RUC available."* The main political task was to rescue the Stormont regime: *"Our whole interest was to work through the Protestant government. The Protestants are the majority and we cannot afford to alienate them as well as the Catholics."* The British government in 1969 was also worried that if they refused to become directly involved the Irish government would go to the United Nations and ask for a peace keeping force to come in and sort things out. Any international intervention would have been felt by the British ruling class as a great humiliation, a humiliation worse than that experienced over the Suez crisis.

In fact the British Labour government misread the signs from Dublin. Since the time of Lemass the Dublin government had pursued a strategy of harmonisation with imperialism, culminating in a free trade treaty with Britain and friendly overtures to the Unionists. Fianna Fail couldn't afford to admit to a dependence on British imperialism and opted for a policy of bluster and mock republicanism. Jack Lynch's answer to the August pogrom was to cry that *"he would not stand idly by"* and to send the tiny Irish army to the border where they promptly stood idly by. This enraged the Unionists, alarmed the British and gave *'Honest Jack'* the republican image Fianna Fail liked to parade. Partly as a result of personal rivalry in the cabinet, partly to keep the unrest in the north and out of the south, some Dublin money was sent across the border for self defence. When the British blew the whistle, Lynch cracked down and sacked the clique behind the secret manoeuvres in the north. By the time of the Falls curfew Fianna Fail was firmly backing British policy, putting the southern state into the fight as the second guarantor of partition. In October 1970 Lynch fully endorsed British handling of the crisis in a speech he gave to the UN, but he surpassed himself by announcing a plot to kidnap diplomats and said internment was now needed in the south. A hostile reaction forced him to drop the internment idea but he had succeeded in clearing a path in that direction for the British.

The rightward moving Unionist regime felt rejuvenated by the arrival of

the troops. The British government had handed them '*the blunt instrument*' (Hamill 'The Army in Northern Ireland') they needed to crack down on the civil rights movement. At first the majority of the nationalist population welcomed the British army, believing wrongly that it meant that the Unionist regime was being disarmed by the British government. In fact just the opposite was the case. There was a widespread belief that the Hunt report on future policing would lead to the disbanding of the B-Specials and the RUC. In fact when the findings of the report were finally delivered in early 1970 it recommended the doubling in size of the RUC and the replacement of the B-Specials with a better trained and better armed Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR). Those who were booted out of the disbanded B-Specials in 1969 simply rejoined the UDR in 1970; sixty per cent of the first UDR contingent were B-Specials .

The British government indicated its political thinking a little more by ditching the plan to bring in Proportional Representation for elections after being advised that it might destabilise the Unionist regime.

With British support the Unionist regime became bolder. At the Unionist party conference in June it voted to reverse the previous plan to set up a central Housing Authority to ensure a fairer allocation of houses. The government began a crackdown on as many civil rights protesters as could be identified and scores of people were dragged into the courts. The RUC men arrested for their part in the attacks on the civil rights march at Burntollet had all the charges against them dropped.

However grievous the repression, it was mild judged by what came after the June 1970 British election. Whilst the new prime minister Heath was primarily occupied with his domestic programme the party still managed to commit itself during the election campaign to "*smashing the IRA.*" The IRA in June 1970 was still in a state of disarray and hardly in need of being smashed. The January split had further weakened an already demoralised organisation. It was to be some time before it could be seriously talked about as the arch enemy. In declaring that they were ready to smash the IRA the new government was simply parroting the Unionist lie that the civil rights movement was an IRA conspiracy.

When the Tory Home Secretary, Maudling, was appointed in June 1970, the British press reported that he was ready to give "*the army its*

head to crush the rebels.” As soon as the Conservatives took office, acts of repression were intensified but this time repression brought mass resistance. The thing that rankled most with the Unionist government by 1970 was the fact that a number of working class nationalist districts had responded to the loyalist attempt at a pogrom in the summer of 1969 by setting up barricades and effectively expelling all police and legal authority. In June and July a concerted attempt was made to bring the no-go areas back under unionist state control. In July it was announced that the RUC would be returning to police all nationalist areas. To clear the way for the RUC the army was instructed to flush out the rebels and search for weapons.

From 3rd to 5th July the army carried out a large scale operation on the Falls Road that decisively succeeded in turning the nationalist population against them. An illegal curfew that lasted thirty-four hours was imposed while house to house searches were carried out. By the time the operation had ended five people lay dead and scores more were injured. More than 300 were dragged off for questioning and hundreds of homes were wrecked. According to Paddy Devlin, a politician strongly opposed to the re-emerging IRA, the way the army “*put the boot in saw the Catholic working class turn almost overnight from neutral or even sympathetic support for the military to outright hatred.*” The house searches were accompanied by a more generalised intelligence gathering operation aimed at the entire nationalist population, much of the information being gathered illegally from p-tests, house searches and the raiding of census and welfare records.

Any civilian opposition to the security clamp-down was harshly dealt with. The army GOC Sir John Freeland appeared on television to say that any rioters spotted using petrol bombs to resist army operations would be shot on sight. In August Daniel O’Hagan an innocent Belfast teenager was shot dead by the army. The Times newspaper infamously described him as “*an assistant petrol bomber*”.

The political task set for the British army in 1970 was to bring all nationalist areas under state control. In fact the first recorded interventions from the IRA against the Crown forces occurred in the late summer of 1970 in response to attempts made by the Army to reconquer those nationalist districts .

Following the military invasions of July and August the political

consciousness of the nationalist working class underwent a sea change from supporting a programme of reform within the context of the state to outright opposition to its very existence. The British army willingly became the instrument of repression in the hands of Stormont. The British government offered little criticism of expanding army brutality believing that their Unionist friends knew best how to deal with Irish 'subversives.'

Yet mass militant resistance increased with every new act of repression. Political awareness and resistance was developed by left wing groups and republicans. The direct confrontation with imperialism now posed massive problems for the civil rights organisations. A minority of working class nationalists now wanted to arm themselves as quickly as possible. The NICRA had no solution. While some wanted to give the British time to see the error of their ways, others argued that any resort to arms would only inflame sectarian conflict. In the end no action was taken. Thus while a fundamental division occurred between reformists and radicals just when local defence committees were being set up, a further division within the radicals between those who emphasised political action and those who prioritised the use of arms developed which was to bedevil the anti-imperialist struggle to the present day.

Local defence groups were being organised just at that moment when the republican movement was splitting into 'Provisionals' and 'Officials'. Rivalries then developed for control of the defence groups. Initially the Officials appeared to be offer the best way forward, offering a political fusion of traditional republicanism and socialism. But for all their talk of class struggle and revolution the main strategy of the Officials centred around parliamentary reform and close cooperation with the middle class, actively discouraging independent working class action. Worst of all they stuck to a stages theory of revolution which implied a certain level of cooperation with the Orange State.

Pundits usually explain the divide in the republican movement in terms of a simple for or against armed struggle but this is an all too superficial an explanation. The Officials rebuilt their military wing in 1970 and 1971 and launched their own armed campaign. The most important difference was over political demands. The 'Provos' put forward the same political demand as the PD; 'Smash the Orange State.' The demand was clear cut and fitted the objective political situation. The political demands of the Officials were reformist and in the context of

the time out of touch with the decisive political reality ie, every decision of the regime only proved that it was hell bent on preventing reforms. The Provisionals had massive problems of their own. They had limited political clarity and no worthwhile political organisation. Many of their veteran leaders were of the green Catholic variety. But the biggest handicap was their committment to immediate armed struggle.

The PD had taken a leading role in nudging the civil rights movement towards revolution. It was the first group to argue publicly that the Northern state was beyond reform. Members took part in organising the first defence committees and played a central role in prompting political discussion through 'Radio Free Belfast' and the 'Barricades Bulletin'. But for all that it was the nationalist ideas of the republicans that assumed the leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle. This was partly due to the weight of Irish nationalist tradition and the novelty of international socialism. Partly it was because the republicans inherited a national organisation that could be reactivated. However another key factor was the poor ideological training of the average PD member and the lack of party organisation. They had limited appreciation of how armed defence fitted into a wider political programme without the former predominating, as it did for republicans. The PD had a series of tactics but no overall programme and lacked roots in the organised working class. Despite the handicaps they achieved a great deal. They raised the banner of revolution over reform and introduced tactics of direct mass action. They also launched a series of mass meetings in all major population centres north and south and developed a healthy respect for open and free debate, something generally absent in the broader anti-imperialist movement.

By the end of 1970 credence was being given in ruling class circles to the notion that the 'rebels' could be crushed with one big hammer blow. Leading Unionists began to lobby the British government to do what had always been done in the past and instigate internment without trial.

Internment

Internment was re-introduced on Monday 9th of August 1971 under section 12 of the Special Powers Act. On the first morning of Operation Demetrius 3,000 troops targeted 450 people but only 342 were found

and arrested. Later in the morning Brian Faulkner appeared on television to ask for support for the new measures from the '*law-abiding section of the community*.' This was a sectarian appeal to the Protestant population. Care was taken to ensure that no loyalists were interned. The leaders of the four main Protestant denominations duly obeyed, issuing a statement calling on people to support the actions of the government. Faulkner also announced an immediate ban on all parades for six months, a move to head-off mass opposition in advance.

The arrests were made using a great deal of brutality. Most of those 'lifted' were beaten, or in some way ill treated and countless homes were wrecked. On arrival at the initial detention centres the abuse was intensified, with men being made to run the gauntlet between lines of baton wielding soldiers.

Militarily and politically the operation was a total disaster for the Unionist government and the British. The structures and leaders of the anti-imperialist political and military bodies remained intact. Most were arrested solely because they had acquired reputations for expressing political opinions opposed to the government. Internees included republican sympathisers, ex-prisoners, public speakers from the civil rights movement and fifteen members from the Peoples Democracy.

The counter-action to internment from the anti-unionist population surprised and even shocked the Unionist government, it was a world away from the passive acceptance of yesteryear. The two years of political agitation and popular protest had generated a new spirit of defiance. Internment was to be fought hardest of all by the nationalist working class. The immediate reaction to the first swoops took the form of bin-lid banging and whistle blowing to alert people to come onto the streets and confront the invaders. Violence broke out in Belfast and Derry as thousands confronted the British army. Barricades were erected to exclude them. In the Ballymurphy area of Belfast people went out and stoned the Henry Taggart Hall where paratroopers were based. The paratroops fired live rounds at the crowd and five civilians were killed including a priest who was administering the last rites at the time. A whirlwind of violent reaction swept across the north and ten people were killed. The street fighting continued for another four days and the death toll reached 22. Thousands of refugees scrambled across

the border to the Free State where camps were set up by the Irish army. Within a few days 7,000 were living under tents.

The entire nationalist population seemed to be at war with the regime. Brian Faulkner appeared on television to say that "*the government and security forces feel that internment is working well.*" Army chiefs declared that internment had been successful and 70 per cent of the province's subversives had been apprehended. By Friday the army were claiming they had killed at least 30 active IRA men.

Despite the ban on marches and mass rallies, opposition quickly emerged. Trade union leaders and middle class politicians from the SDLP were pressured into making a stand against internment. All the anti-Unionist groups united in a call for the withholding of rents and rates as a form of civil disobedience but they were only ratifying a fait accompli as many people had already begun to do so. Soon the government was admitting that 26,000 householders were on strike.

Over the coming months the mass movement against internment expanded its tactics. On 16th of August 8,000 workers in Derry came out in a one day strike. On 18th August after a protest rally in Strabane a British soldier shot dead a deaf mute. On the same day in Derry dozens were arrested at a sit down protest. On 19th 30 prominent public servants in Derry resigned from public office and Jack Lynch the Irish Taoiseach, feeling the white heat of anger, was moved to issue a statement calling for the end of internment. On the 22nd August, 130 non-unionist councillors on 20 local authorities announced that they would withdraw from their positions immediately. On the 26th a series of one day strikes took place in Newry, Derry and Strabane. On the 7th September, 1,000 deep sea dockers in Belfast went on strike. Over the next few days many schools joined the protest. On the 12th September 15,000 people attended an anti-internment rally in Belfast's Casement Park.

The resistance movement began to build its own organisations. Civil resistance committees were formed in housing estates to co-ordinate the rent and rates strike and other forms of protest. A primitive type of local dual power once more existed in many districts. The SDLP had attempted to capture the political leadership of the mass revolt by setting up its own '*Alternative Assembly*' in August. This was a worthless talking shop designed to divert anger and it met only twice.

In the weeks following internment the PD re-iterated a previous call for the formation of a new united front organisation in a copy of the paper '*Unfree Citizen*': " *What is needed is not a parliament of professional parliamentary types but a parliament for the streets made up of all the representatives of the estate committees from all over the north who are actually waging the struggle.*" On the 17th October the Northern Resistance Movement (NRM) was set up after a conference in Omagh to co-ordinate the movement and to plan for even bigger demonstrations. Its united front programme called for the immediate release of all internees and the abolition of the Special Powers Act, all prisoners jailed since 1968 to be released, the smashing of the Unionist government, and the withdrawal of the British troops from Ireland. It also adopted the position that there should be no talks with the representatives of the Stormont or Westminster government until internment was ended. It successfully pressured the SDLP to formally endorse the position.

On Christmas day 1971 over one thousand demonstrators defied the ban on parades and attempted to march to Long Kesh internment camp along the M1 motorway but were stopped by a massive force of police and British army. In the next few weeks six other illegal marches took place and even the SDLP leaders felt compelled to join them. At one march on the beach near Magilligan prison camp in County Derry, at which John Hume was present, paratroopers viciously attacked the demonstrators using CS gas and rubber bullets.

The next big anti-internment march was organised by the NICRA for Derry on the 30th January 1972. Subsequently it became known as Bloody Sunday. The Unionist government were anticipating the biggest demonstration against internment so far. They had arranged for the paratroopers, the toughest regiment in the British army to be brought to Derry specially for the occasion. A lesson was to be taught to the nationalist working class. On the day over 20,000 people marched and when they were stopped by an army checkpoint a minor fracas took place. The paratroops were deployed against the rioters and as the crowd scattered, the British army rushed forward and opened fire in several areas around Rossville street. In the space of a few minutes they shot dead thirteen unarmed civilians, a fourteenth man died later. All the dead were male, six of them seventeen or under.

On Bloody Sunday there had been less rioting than there had been at most other demonstrations. A massacre had been carried out. Young

people joined the IRA in droves believing that the tactics of the socialists weren't militant enough. As late as the summer of 1971 the IRA had still been a small conspiratorial organisation in need of recruits. Internment and Bloody Sunday changed it into a mainstream organisation.

Internment had provoked a revolt mainly in the north of Ireland but Bloody Sunday sparked off protests in the whole of Ireland and abroad. On 1st February it was reported that 10,000 demonstrated in Cork, 10,000 in Waterford, 8,000 in Limerick, 6,000 in Galway, 5,000 in Dundalk and thousands in Monaghan, Tralee, Drogheda, Letterkenny, Kildare, Athlone, Wexford, Sligo and many other areas. The Irish government was compelled on the day of the funerals to go along with a National Day of Mourning because the country would have come to a standstill anyway. On the day of the funerals over 100,000 protested in bitter cold and driving rain in Dublin city centre, despite an absence of public transport caused by workers going on strike in protest. In Dublin after three days of protests a crowd burned down the British embassy. At Westminster Bernadette Devlin punched Maudling in the face. Bloody Sunday was an attempt to scare off the mass movement but it triggered the opposite effect. Fifty thousand took part in the next march in Newry even though the NICRA had tried to limit the numbers involved.

The British only assuaged the fury of the people by finally announcing the suspension of Stormont in March 1972. The movement that had fought off an imperialist military offensive had now smashed the Unionist government that had introduced it.

Despite the fall of Stormont the struggle against internment was still to be fought, the NICRA and the NRM and the PD announced that the struggle would go on. The next period was much less successful; the class divisions within the anti-Unionist coalition returned with a vengeance to fragment the mass movement. The Irish government, the Catholic Church and the SDLP called for an end to the mass protests and for the working class to give '*politics*' a chance. The IRA made a huge contribution to the downturn by breaking with the NRM pledge of '*no talks until internment ends*'. They contacted the British to arrange a truce and talks without as much as a nod or a wink to the NRM; conducting secret negotiations was to become one of the chief hallmarks of the IRA's politics.

The British ceased listening to the advice of the Unionists and eased down on the repression as batches of internees were released, Magilligan prison camp was closed down and by mid June some 550 internees had been released. It was the end of one sort of brutal repression and the beginning of a more subtle and political one.

British Initiatives

The suspension of Stormont was a victory for the mass struggle. The republicans and some socialists read too much into the suspension, inferring that it constituted a strategic shift by Britain away from full support for the Union. The Provos mistakenly believed that the British were now ready to do deals and called a truce. They overlooked the fact that the suspension of Stormont was meant as a '*temporary emergency measure*' and within a very short period the British were trying to get a Unionist led government back in control again. In fact it is now clear that the British government in March 1972 hoped that the Stormont parliament and the Unionist government could continue. It was the Unionists themselves who called time on Stormont by resigning after the British took from them overall policy control over security strategy.

The dynamic towards virtual insurrection that transpired after internment and Bloody Sunday had alarmed the British government. Especially disturbing to them was the spreading of anti-British feeling to the rest of Ireland and even to America and Europe. Mounting evidence that Britain was responsible for inflicting '*inhuman and degrading treatment*' on civilians was received in parts of Britain as an atrocious indictment of the government's policies in Ireland. Surveying the turmoil that followed Bloody Sunday the government made it a top priority to limit the political damage being generated. They hoped to temper the more blatant aspects of the repression and asked the Unionists to voluntarily transfer the main control over security matters to Westminster. To the British government this did not automatically mean the abolition of the Unionist parliament, they hoped the transfer of security could be very specific and temporary.

Within a year of the suspension of Stormont the British were actively seeking Unionist support for an initiative which would put a Unionist parliament and government back in place. The sort of local control the

British now favoured was to be different to the traditional Orange rule on two counts. First they proposed to keep hold over security strategy. Second the next Stormont administration would be obliged, in some obvious sense, to represent the '*identity*' of what they called the minority community. The Unionist monolith was to fracture and move to the right in trying to come to terms with the British plan for a more stable partition.

The Unionist party leadership around Faulkner had resigned in March 1972 over who should have the ultimate say over security policy but within a year they were back preparing to take up the British proposal of a remodelled Stormont.

To smooth the way for a possible deal with Faulkner the British set about demonstrating that their taking over the direct running of security policy did not mean a weakening on the war front, rather it meant a better planned and better executed policy. The relative success of the revised security policy was instrumental in persuading the Unionists to take up the British proposals.

The British launched a two pronged offensive against the nationalist working class. A concerted effort was made to bring all the no-go areas back under official police and military control. The spearhead was a massive military crackdown code named Operation Motorman. Military historians maintain that Motorman was the biggest single British army offensive undertaken since Suez. Four thousand specially prepared troops were added to the sixteen thousand already involved, in order to successfully complete the operation. The smashing of the barricades and destruction of the no-go areas was a huge political victory for the British and the Unionists were mightily impressed by it.

The British were to further regain the trust of the Unionists when they craftily replaced undisguised political internment which aroused mass resistance with a carefully disguised variety of judicial internment which, as it turned out, was less liable to arouse mass opposition. On 20th December 1972 the British government had published the findings of its Diplock Commission. The recommendations included the removal of trial by jury for scheduled offences which of course left verdicts in the hands of the judges, most of whom owed their appointment to the Unionists. It declared in favour of the RUC having the power to detain people for up to a week and permitting interrogations

without access to a solicitor. It also recommended that confessions without any corroborating evidence be taken as acceptable indictable evidence, thus exposing hundreds of people to the threat of police torture. It also advised that the right to apply for bail be removed from those charged with scheduled offences and that the onus of proof in trials be changed to assist prosecution. Diplock also recommended that the army should be given a special legal dispensation to detain and question anyone for up to four hours without legal hindrance.

In July 1973 most of what Diplock recommended was legalised in the form of the Emergency Provisions Act. In essence direct British rule did little to rescind the harsh security regime previously associated with Stormont but merely dressed it up in legal finery. By 1973 quite a few Unionists had begun to wonder why they had ever resigned in the first place.

On 20th March the British published a white paper on the Constitutional proposals for the future government of Northern Ireland. The Stormont Parliament was to be superseded by a regional Assembly to consist of about 80 members elected by proportional representation. The Assembly would nominate committees whose chairmen would form a government or an Executive. The crucial dilemma now facing the Unionist leadership was no longer the vexed question of security but how to react to a crucial clause in the white paper that stipulated

"It is the view of the Government that the Executive itself can no longer be solely based upon any single party, if that party draws its support and its elected representation virtually entirely from only one section of a divided community."

The proposals were a break with tradition in the sense that the uniform sectarian rule of the past was now deemed by the British to be impractical and a recipe for continued political instability. What they were proposing was not what the media hacks dutifully reported as 'power sharing'. The concept of power sharing in no way captured the political essence of what was originally proposed. What Sunningdale was about was a refashioning of Stormont to try and make it less objectionable to a section of the Catholic middle class. The actual proposal espoused by the SDLP that any future Executive would have to be faithfully based on proportional criteria was carefully side stepped by the British white paper.

The British criteria for returning selective powers back to the Unionists merely advocated that some members of the '*minority community*' would need to be involved at the Executive level before powers could be returned to a Unionist administration. The British let it be known that their conditions might be fulfilled by Catholic members of the Alliance party being part of a cross community Executive. This was aimed at spurring on those in the SDLP who feared losing middle class nationalist support to the Alliance. Around this time the British began to wise up to the fact that Dublin was potentially a partner and it looked for help from Dublin to nudge the SDLP forward.

The White paper played up to Unionist hopes by indicating that when peace and normality had returned and the '*non-sectarian*' constitution was operating smoothly, responsibility for internal security could be returned to local control. So by early 1973 a British recipe for long term political stability was beginning to take shape. It began with a security clamp-down and then moved on to offer the Unionists a chance at government again. So determined was the British government to pander to the demands of the Unionists that they even risked stirring things up by conducting a border poll in the same month as their proposals for the future government of the north were published. The sectarian border poll was beefed up by another Unionist confidence building measure, the passing of a constitutional act which guaranteed the Unionists that there could be no change to the status of the six counties without the consent of the majority. The SDLP was then offered a supplicant role as junior partner to the Unionists.

After examining the white paper Faulkner declared that he would accept it subject to certain reservations which he would table for discussion. The SDLP voted to begin negotiations regardless of internment. Inevitably the qualified acceptance by the Unionist leadership outraged the eternal loyalist right-wing. In June, elections to a new Assembly went ahead, Faulkner won 22 seats but the sectarian right wing led by the DUP and Vanguard got 29. The SDLP got 19, Alliance 8 and Northern Ireland Labour 1. When the Assembly met for the first time on 31st July its proceedings ended in disorder, with Paisley having to be carried out of the building. Outside, the sectarian right wing confidently predicted to the waiting media that they would smash the Unionist '*betrayal of Ulster.*'

The British in collaboration with the Irish Coalition government elected in February 1973 spent the next few months persuading the Faulkner Unionists and the SDLP to form a coalition Executive. In September Whitelaw held separate talks with the three parties which broadly supported the White paper, the SDLP, Unionists and the Alliance party. Heath met with the Irish government and asked them to apply as much pressure as they possibly could on the SDLP to get on with the formation of an Executive in advance of any agreement about the SDLP hope for a Council of Ireland. The SDLP called for the end of the rent and rates strike three days before taking office. They had no qualms about ratting on previous commitments and not surprisingly they yielded easily to pressure from Dublin to go ahead with the formation of an Executive without agreement on the Council of Ireland. Soon they would be presiding over security policies that they had no say in formulating and which included the implementation of internment without trial.

On 22 November an Executive was finally ready to take the helm. Faulkner was to be Chief Executive, Fitt was to be his deputy and six other Unionists, four SDLP and one Alliance were named as Executive ministers. The SDLP was only formally signed into the club of political collaboration when they accepted that there could be no change to the status of the 6 county state without the consent of the majority, that is the unionists.

The Unionist-loyalist opposition to the Executive reacted by combining their disparate forces into a united front. The DUP, Vanguard and the West-Taylor Unionists formed the United Ulster Unionist Council to smash the Executive. In April 1974 the United Ulster Unionist Council held an alternative assembly in Portrush attended by a few Tories like Enoch Powell and the leaders of the UDA and UVF. They then released an alternative programme which called for the scrapping of the Executive and a return to the old style Stormont with full security powers.

On 6th December a Conference got under way at Sunningdale to discuss the future brief of the Council of Ireland. After elaborate ritual to give it all the look of something new a set of protocols were agreed. On the constitutional issue the Irish government recognised that any change to the status of the 6 county state would only come about with the consent of the majority within it and the British recognising that if

ever such a majority decided it wanted to join with the rest of Ireland his Majesty's government would not stand in the way.

A Council of ministers was to come into being in the manner of the European Community to explore any areas of common interest, north and south, that might be better dealt with by co-operation. This was essentially a sop to the SDLP to sell the climb-down to the nationalist middle class. On security it was hoped that the Executive would soon be in a position to take full control but in the meantime it was agreed that an onus was now with the Irish government to help bring stability by stepping up the fight against "terrorism." The Irish agreed to the setting up of a new Police Authority to equip the Garda to deal with the renewed IRA threat and a Commission would also be set up to look at the whole question of extradition from the south to the north.

Once again Utley, once editor of the Tory newspaper the Daily Telegraph and a very staunch imperialist, provides a useful comment on all of the Council of Ireland stuff ; *"Examined rationally and calmly, the Sunningdale agreement might be seen to inflict no irreparable sacrifice on the Unionists. To begin with, if agreement were not reached on the question of extradition or its alternatives, Sunningdale might never be ratified at all. In the second place, when the civil servants had done their work, they might find that apart from co-operation in the production of tourist brochures there was no suitable areas for executive action by the Council of Ireland. Any powers which that body got would in any case have to be given by the Northern Irish Executive. As for the consultative all-Irish Assembly if that ever got of the ground, it could be trusted to become a joke"*

The Sunningdale scheme contained much potential to improve the chances for preserving both the interests of the Unionists and Britain. It was this potential that appealed to the calculating instincts of Faulkner the most intelligent of the Unionist contingent. Yet it turned out that both Faulkner and the British had profoundly underestimated the reactionary support the key right-wing leaders like Paisley and Craig had within the Unionist middle class and important sections of the working class.

The British programme for an improved Stormont which included the SDLP was too much for the loyalist right-wing to come to terms with. A loyalist protest was organised to smash the British initiative. On 28th

there was a snap general election. The Unionist middle class rallied to support the three petty-bourgeois parties that made-up the United Ulster Unionist Council. The UUUC won 366,703 votes and won eleven of the twelve Westminster seats; the Faulkner Unionists could only manage 94,331 votes. The UUUC fought the election using classic scare-mongering tactics, maintaining that the Union was in immediate peril and the SDLP was the second arm of the IRA.

The vote caused the British to pause but not to stop, realising that the scare-mongering of the UUUC would be disproved as soon as the Executive was up and running. However yet another force emerged to jeopardise British plans, the Ulster Workers Council. The UWC emerged shortly after the general election and was mainly the product of the coming together of two strains of working class loyalism. One strain organised under the name of the Loyalist Association of Workers, was founded in September 1969 by a group of shipyard shop stewards to defend the privileges of Protestant labour against the demands of the civil rights movement. The other main strain represented the combined forces of the loyalist murder gangs, the UDA and UVF. A third component contradicted its claim to be a workers organisation, Down Orange Welfare, headed by the blimpish figure of Colonel Edward Brush, an example of 'the nobs combining with the jobs.'

Most of those who organised the LAW were shop stewards from workplaces that were notorious for operating bars on employing Catholics. Harry Murray, Billy Hull, Harry Fletcher and Joe Barkley were all shipyard shop stewards. Hugh Petrie was a precision engineer in Shorts aircraft factory and other key organisers came from Mackies, Sirocco and Gallaghers. Shop stewards like Billy Kelly from the electricity supply industry had been attending LAW meetings for a couple of years before they were to become involved with the loyalist strike. Some like Hugh Petrie, a founder member of LAW doubled-up as a Vanguard military organiser and for a time he was one of Craig's bodyguards. The Vanguard party headquarters on Hawthornden Road served as the organisational nerve centre during the strike.

The LAW was linked to loyalist paramilitary bodies from the very beginning. Early LAW meetings were often attended by men like Andy Tyrie a machine fitter in Mackies and an organiser for the UDA. In December the existence of an Ulster Army Council was announced consisting of the UVF, the UDA, the Ulster Special Constabulary

Association (ex B-Specials) and the Red Hand Commandos. Shortly after the February general election the Ulster Workers Council set up a steering committee consisting of Murray, Kelly and Tom Beattie for the LAW, Tyrie on behalf of the UDA, Gibson for the UVF, Green for the B-Specials, Craig, Paisley and West for the political parties and Glen Barr of Vanguard as Chairman.

On 28th May 1974 after a ten day strike organised by the UWC, Faulkner and what remained of his Unionist followers resigned from the Executive signalling its demise. The same afternoon the UWC ended the stoppage and held a victory rally at the Stormont building.

The UWC toppled the Executive because the British government deserted its friends in their hour of need, the only question was why. The Labour minister most identified with the British desertion (Merlyn Rees) still today perpetuates the myth that the UWC strike was simply irresistible. But the truth is very different. It was not so much what the strikers did in May 1974 that decided the fate of the Executive but rather what the British failed to do.

The UWC strike was not an irresistible force. In fact the chief organisers of the strike were lacking in belief and conviction when they began the strike action. Ken Bloomfield an adviser to Faulkner mentions in his memoirs "*I came to know Glenn Barr quite well, and gained from him the impression that the strike organisers themselves were astonished by their own success and by the lack of opposition they faced.*"

In fact the UWC was low in confidence on the day the strike began. Paisley was so anxious that he took off for Canada at the decisive moment. Craig kept changing his mind about the date and West was keen to keep his distance. The workers on the committee were worried that they would be sold out by the politicians on the committee and the loyalists were dismissive of the role of the workers, charging that they had made little preparations. The journalist R. Fisk recalls how "*The strike started badly for the UWC. On Wednesday morning, thousands of workers set off for their factories as usual, not only employees in small firms but shipyard men and aircraft engineers as well, the very men whom the UWC relied upon to back their stoppage.*" Tyrie recalls arriving at the strike headquarters to find nothing happening. "*I suddenly realised that the UWC did not really exist as an organisation. And there was no strike in existence either.*" (R. Fisk "The point of No Return")

To prevent the strike fizzling out on the first day the loyalists gangs

mobilised as many thugs as they could muster to intimidate people from their workplaces. Masked gang members with clubs were posted outside all the big factories. Abuse and threats were hurled at those arriving and leaving work, and owners of shops and factories were visited or phoned and told to close down or else. Barricades were put across most main roads and people going to or returning from work were threatened by gang members manning the barricades. By the late evening of the first day of the strike intimidation had reached epic proportions. Fisk describes a typical scene from the first day of the strike: *"At Larne, where the ferries leave daily for the Scottish port of Stranraer, masked UDA men in camouflage jackets and carrying heavy wooden clubs roamed the streets around the docks. Wearing UDA insignia, they called methodically at every shop in the town and ordered their owners to close down. Several uniformed men hijacked cars and lorries and placed them across the harbour roads, cutting off two engineering works and preventing the sailing of the Irish Sea ferry.. Larne was effectively under siege but no attempt was made by the police to remove the road- blocks and no attempt was made by the Army."*

When the strike was over and done with Faulkner blamed the British. His view that the passivity of the first three days ensured victory to the UWC was not far off the mark. Most foreign journalists were astonished to see the way in which the RUC and British army behaved during the strike: *"For it was the police and the Army who had first allowed the day's anarchy to develop; RUC men on patrol made no effort to shift barricades and, as in the previous week, reports began to flood into newspaper offices that policemen were standing watching the UDA as they hijacked lorries."* During the period of the strike a total of 862 road blockages were recorded yet only 71 people were ever charged and 31 of these were arrested in one incident after an attack on a public house near Ballymena where two Catholics were murdered.

It was obvious to everyone that the RUC and British army were sympathetic to what the loyalists were doing. Fisk describes how *"the Army in their dark green land rovers drove slowly through the streets, discreetly avoiding the human barricades and gingerly squeezing through the gaps in the road blocks. Soldiers on foot patrol walked the pavements of East Belfast but made no attempt to interfere with the uniformed UDA men"*. The strike only became irresistible when people could see for themselves that the forces of the state had no interest in guaranteeing that they were allowed to get to and from work unhindered. After three

days of intimidation and total government inaction many people just decided to go the way of least resistance. After the strike was over the employers organisation published figures which suggested that mass support for the activities of the UWC had been wildly over-estimated by the media of the day. The estimated figure of those actually absent from work at the mid point in the strike was just 40,000.

Immediately afterwards, there was a lot of wild talk of the UWC becoming a proper TUC. This soon faded as its real lack of support in the workplaces became apparent. A few months after its victory, it was organising scabs in a dairy strike. It was clear that defending sectarian privilege rather than organising the working class was its reason for existence and it soon disappeared.

The political leaders were no more effective. Had a real industrial body won such a victory, it could have claimed representation among the political leaders of unionism at Westminster. The UWC members did stake such a claim and were rejected with contempt. Unlike leaders of Unionist Labour in 1918, they had no credibility as working class leaders. When a vacancy in Unionist representation did arise at the general election in October, it was filled by the renegade English Tory blow-in, Enoch Powell.

The British had a strong interest in making a success out of Sunningdale. It was an ambitious programme intended to stabilise partition, return the Unionists to direct political control and fragment the political unity of the anti-Unionists along class lines. They were unwilling however to directly take on and defeat loyalism. In the last instance this was Britain's mass base, the people relied upon to run the state, and defeat of them would critically weaken defence of their own interests against republicanism and socialism. Into this framework it is instructive to note the role of the British army, as given by an unnamed serving officer who four months after the strike ended wrote an article for the right-wing Monday Club magazine;

“ For the first time the Army decided that it was right and that it knew best and the politicians had better toe the line. The consequences of this are yet to be fully appreciated.”

The Unionist 'backlash' was a shock to the British. The plans to stabilise the north based on 'power sharing' were shelved and the mainstay of policy became concentrated on countering the efforts of the

anti-imperialist movement. A principle of British policy became not to get drawn into a serious conflict with the mass base of Unionism.

The UUUC consolidated their leadership over Unionism and at the next election the UUUC completely smashed the Faulkner supporters, taking 11 out of the 12 Westminster seats. The British then convened a Convention to discuss the way forward for the north. The UUUC won a majority of the seats and dictated a final report which called for a return to Stormont. The British could not impose this on the nationalists so they shelved the report and dissolved the Convention. There was little protest, loyalism had proved strong enough to prevent a British settlement when Britain didn't force it but too weak to impose a settlement by itself. An attempt to repeat another loyalist strike flopped. In the last analysis it could never escape ultimate dependency on imperialism.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement

In the period from the demise of Sunningdale to the advent of the peace process, the British were unable to get very far with any of their proposed '*solutions*', all of which were designed to put the unionists back into direct power but with some role for the catholic middle class. The unionists would not buy anything that the SDLP could remotely sell to their constituency and the continued disaffection from the northern state of the majority of nationalists created the potential for a renewal of mass resistance.

The electoral rise of Sinn Fein and the possibility of the slow erosion of the SDLP frightened the southern establishment. Only by re-staking its claim to leadership of nationalist Ireland and by so doing shore up the SDLP, did Dublin believe it could halt the rise of militant republicanism. This led to the New Ireland Forum and the humiliating dismissal of all its options by Margaret Thatcher in her infamous '*Out Out Out*' speech. Some political analysts believe the very severity of Thatcher's response woke the British up to the fact that the collaborationist leadership of Irish nationalism had to be propped up after it's being slapped down too hard. Thus the resulting Anglo-Irish Agreement is seen as a major

concession by Britain. In fact, the need for a deal, no matter how poor, was much, much greater on the Dublin side.

So the centrepiece of the deal was a legally binding international recognition from Dublin of the democratic legitimacy of partition. The Irish state was allowed to raise matters of political importance to the nationalists, that is the SDLP, with the British government in return for Dublin's international legitimisation of British rule and increased security cooperation.

The Irish signing up to the European Convention for the suppression of terrorism was just one example of the working out of this legitimising process. During the 1970s the Irish courts had held firmly to the view that there could be no extradition to Britain for political offences. They had taken the view that IRA activities in Britain's jurisdiction were politically motivated and therefore not subject to British extradition warrants. For years the British had been targeting the political exemption clause in Irish law for diplomatic pressure, not because of an unusually large number of IRA volunteers using the south as a haven but because of the political impact the clause had in legitimising resistance to British rule in the north.

As a consequence of the accord the Dublin government agreed to ratify the 1977 European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism Treaty (ECST) which sought to de-politicise a number of offences for the purpose of extradition. The Dublin government then passed two extradition amendment acts declaring that a whole raft of offences could no longer be deemed to be political. Unlike all the other signatory states that signed the ECST into domestic law the Dublin government entered no reservations on behalf of Irish citizens.

Dublin's willingness to change its extradition laws was of significant international political value to Britain in legitimising the propaganda line that the Irish anti-imperialist struggle was nothing more than what the British had always maintained, a criminal conspiracy against a legitimate democratic state. The overt opposition of the Irish state to the democratic struggle was especially demoralising to many northern nationalists.

The British hoped unionist opposition would be minimised by the further strengthening of partition through its endorsement by Dublin.

British ministers now claimed there would never be a united Ireland. They expected big results from the extra security cooperation and the rapid political marginalisation of republicans. Formal consultation with Dublin when the latter did not fundamentally disagree with it, and did nothing even when on some occasions it did, seemed a small price to pay. In fact by appearing to give Dublin responsibility without power it lessened the public criticism of British policy which Dublin felt compelled to make from time to time.

The predictable unionist opposition was held at bay, helped in part by the RUC '*now boys now*' technique, basically standing on the roads for longer than the loyalists and by the fact that there were few obvious political targets for the loyalists to attack. However the main reason why the unionist revolt ground to a halt was that the agreement contained absolutely no threat to partition and many of the promised reforms - the RUC accompanying the UDR, three Diplock judges sitting instead of one and Irish street signs were so pathetic and not implemented anyway. Built into the deal was the promise of regular review which the British dangled in front of the unionists as a way to entice them to deal with their proposals for devolution. The Agreement made it clear that much of its workings would be superseded by an agreed Stormont assembly. However this carrot failed to produce much unionist compromise and the hope that the deal might pave the way for a return to a devolved administration was not realised.

The Brooke and Mayhew talks were set in train to rectify this situation and this entailed downgrading the Hillsborough deal more and more. That this was so easily done and without major diplomatic fall-out indicated the shallowness of the whole thing. It had, nonetheless, tied Dublin to Britain more closely than before. At one level this showed an underlying weakness on Britain's part, that it could not sort out the mess by itself. At another level it strengthened the hand of Britain in its attempts to work out a settlement and still fundamental to such a settlement was some sort of revamped Stormont.

The SDLP was prepared to make a devolved unionist regime work but John Hume knew the SDLP would loose out to Sinn Fein if he and his party meekly went along with a British led initiative that was heavily weighted towards placating the Unionists by downgrading the Hillsborough Accord, the most prized propaganda weapon of bourgeois nationalism.

Around the time of the Brooke/Mayhew talks the ruling Conservatives began making very strong unionist speeches and initiated a diplomatic campaign to get the Irish to excise articles two and three of the constitution. In late 1991 Douglas Hurd the British foreign secretary made an unusually hard-line speech to the Tory party conference warning that the debate over partition was finished for good. A number of British papers delivered to the Anglo-Irish parliamentary body by senior Tories were very critical of the Hillsborough Agreement and during the 1992 election the Tories led by Brooke attacked the Labour party over its unity by consent policy. Most of those appointed to positions around Mayhew brought with them sure-fire unionist credentials.

In 1992 the British produced a document giving an outline of its own thinking on the way forward. It suggested an 85 member local assembly elected by PR and a series of committees to take over the running of devolved powers, the chairmen of such committees would in effect act as ministers. The British would retain control over security policy. A new feature was the inclusion of a three person panel elected to consult and advise the Secretary of State, inspect Assembly decisions for fairness and approve some appointments to public bodies. The document ended by stating that any individuals or parties that condoned the use of violence would be excluded from executive power. In November 1992 the talks formally ended, off the record briefings from British officials pointing the figure at the SDLP for the collapse.

The British then began a diplomatic and media campaign aimed at the South to raise the matter of articles two and three. In July 1994 Mayhew in an interview with the 'Daily Telegraph' said he was confident that the campaign on article two and three was progressing well in the South, *"What Unionists are looking for in order to gain more confidence is an abandonment of the territorial claim to the North expressed in terms that don't need a constitutional lawyer to tease out the meaning and intent."*

In the drawing up of the later Framework Documents the British pressed Reynolds hard on going for a unilateral repeal of the articles. Major made it the central issue between the two governments at a European Union Conference meeting in 1994 in Corfu and this became known to the British as the '*Corfu test*.' It was hardly surprising the British campaign found favour with the usual suspects of Irish

capitalism and a number of significant newspaper editorials including one by the 'Sunday Tribune' called on the Irish to make a gesture on articles two and three in advance of all party talks. Democratic Left proposed a vote in the Dail on the matter. Just before Reynolds lost the reins of power Fianna Fail drew up a draft proposal for a referendum on the issue. In May 1995 at a session of the Peace and Reconciliation Forum, Bruton argued that the forum should take an historic initiative and go for a referendum as soon as possible '*in the interest of peace.*'

It is out of the shortcomings of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, as seen by the British, and this offensive against the democratic rights of the Irish people that the Downing Street Declaration and Framework Documents must be seen. To look on them as simple responses to the diplomatic efforts of Sinn Fein is to ignore the over-arching framework within which the latter took place.

The Framework Documents were published by the two governments in February 1995. The documents were not drawn up at the behest of the IRA as unionists claimed but were the product of a sustained period of British diplomatic activity. The documents mapped out a strategic orientation for the London and Dublin governments. Just to make it clear that none of this was intended as '*a stepping stone to a United Ireland*' or '*a transitional phase*' the unionists were assured that they would have a veto over all aspects of the implementation of any of the proposals within the documents. Major announced that the unionist minority in Ireland would have a '*triple lock*' veto, party, parliament and referendum. Reynolds agreed and warned republicans not to be expecting a united Ireland for at least another thirty years.

The Documents

In case the Republicans failed to get the message it was spelt out in fine print. Paragraphs 14-23 dealt with the constitutional future. Just as the clause four debate in the British Labour party showed that the Blair leadership could no longer stomach even a hollow aspiration to socialism which was never put into practice, so the eagerness with which all the parties of the Dail united to rip out articles two and three showed there was no longer any room for any fake republicanism, long

used by Irish capitalism to hold popular support.

In fact the democratic right to self-determination which the articles were only a poor substitute for were now condemned as criminal and irredentist and against international law. In reality the 'green' Framework Documents had at their core a complete repudiation of Irish self-determination and a willingness by all the recognised parties in the south to apologise for ever having appeared to insist that Britain recognises Ireland's democratic rights "*..the Irish government will introduce and support proposals for change in the Irish constitution to implement the commitments in the joint declaration. These changes will fully reflect the principle of consent in Northern Ireland and demonstrably be such that no territorial claim of right to jurisdiction over Northern Ireland contrary to the will of its people is asserted*" (para 21)

So the 'bastard state,' the 'artificial creation,' the 'failed political entity,' the 'undemocratic and sectarian state' was to be reborn with the seal of approval from Dublin. Dick Spring declared that this massive betrayal of Irish democracy was balanced by British commitments to amend article 75 of the Government of Ireland Act. Yet as the constitutional lawyer David Trimble explained, this proposal was hardly relevant when the provision in question had already been superseded by the Northern Ireland Constitution Act of 1973, and the primary legislation remained the original Act of Union.

North- South bodies

The nationalist apologists for the Frameworks deal not surprisingly dismissed criticism of the proposed constitutional changes. What really mattered they said, was the new practical arrangements that were being made to overcome outdated quarrels over sovereignty. The proposed north-south bodies would have a lot more than just a symbolic presence, they would pave the way for mutual understanding between the two parts of the island and act as a stepping stone to a united Ireland based on agreement.

A half baked theoretical underpinning of this view is given by Sinn Fein and most left groups who take seriously the British claim in the

Downing Street Declaration, and repeated in paragraph 20 of the Framework Document, that they “*have no selfish, strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland.*” From this point of view it may be possible for the British to disengage from Ireland without a struggle and the north-south bodies might point the way to an eventual exit route.

We have already demonstrated how wrong this view of Britain's interests is. No-one can explain when Britain stopped being an imperialist power. Why it alone has no interest in a neighbouring country which it has dominated for centuries. When and why all the British economic interests cashed in their chips and left Ireland. Who owns most of what is valuable in the north and why, unwilling to meet its aid commitment to the third world, it lavishes billions on the north. Still less are they able to explain why the economically independent post neo-colonial South was forced to devalue its currency in line with the British pound whilst Irish capitalist strategy was so heavily committed to maintaining parity with the rest of Europe.

It is necessary to push all such evidence and argument aside so as to reinforce nationalist illusions. North-south institutions will integrate two capitalist economies which are already moving towards a single island economy and the British will stand by admiring the dynamic new Irish capitalism. The logic of a north-south political institution is given no serious analysis. If Britain was really interested in steady withdrawal, and setting up cross-border institutions were the mechanism, surely there would be some strategy put in place to protect this project from inevitable unionist resistance? In fact the Framework Documents put all the emphasis in the opposite direction. The prologue makes it clear the north-south body is to be subordinate to a unionist majority assembly (see paragraph 35), stridently opposed to any formal obligations with the Dail. The option was available to permit the unionists only a nominal veto of the decisions of the cross-border institution but the British chose not to do this. In any case the functions envisaged for the north-south body were pathetic: ‘*marketing and promotion,*’ ‘*culture and heritage*’ ‘*animal welfare*’ and ‘*mutual recognition of teacher qualifications.*’

In fact the cross-border institution was included to make it easier to get the SDLP into a local unionist controlled Assembly; to get a little desert

the nationalists will have to first eat the main course served up to the unionists by the British. The sort of cross-border bodies proposed are designed to appeal to middle class nationalists in the north who don't seek real social upheaval but merely that their very conservative concept of Irish cultural identity is raised to an equal level of esteem.

A Six county Assembly

The worst setback for Britain in the past 25 years of struggle was the destruction of the Stormont Parliament. It had allowed Britain control without the liability of managing day to day affairs. The sectarian problems inevitably associated with partition could be shifted onto local forces and, if things got out of control, explained away as petty sectarian squabbles between the Irish which was none of their making. Stormont then became a shield, ensuring stability and deflecting attention away from the liberal minded British and their responsibility for the sectarian hell-hole they had created.

The main strategic aim of British policy has been to re-establish that shield. It was significant that the proposals on the internal assembly came in a separate, harder and much more detailed document. A blueprint for a local assembly only makes sense if it is to restore some power to the unionists. The concern is how to ensure that another mass nationalist uprising is not provoked. This can be done by destroying nationalist resistance before a political settlement is established but it has not proved possible for the British to do this despite massive bouts of repression. In some way the unionists have to be saved from themselves by limiting their ability to provoke nationalist resistance. The British, as in the past, would not give a damn how sectarian the unionists were as long as they delivered stable imperialist control. Unfortunately for them the unionists no longer appear able to do so by themselves, not until the nationalist population is sufficiently intimidated, demoralised and politically defeated. The British have realised that some control mechanisms are therefore required, at least until this is achieved. One of the control mechanisms proposed in the past was rolling devolution, if the Unionists behave themselves they will get more powers. Newer mechanisms depend on a last chance veto by one nationalist politician elected to a three person panel and a weighting of certain votes. Significantly the token reform touted by the Unionist party, a bill of rights, was nowhere explicitly mentioned in the

documents. In its place was a reference to human rights protection on lines compatible with British legal norms, which tends to rule it out. In any case there are already many laws which supposedly protect democratic rights but they are enforced by the British state which makes them next to useless. New laws would not change this. In line with earlier British dismissals of Sinn Fein 'clarification' questions on British repression there was no acknowledgement that such repression ever existed and that steps were necessary to end it.

Commenting on the internal arrangements the pro-imperialist Cadogan Group had this to say " *These infinitely complex proposals are supposed to ensure the fair government of only one and a half million people. They presuppose a community of malign children, needing the constant oversight of benign governess from London and Dublin. They institutionalise community divisions and make it impossible for difficult decisions to be taken. They can have no merit as an effective mechanism of regional government.*" In other words the proposals as they stood were simply unworkable, and so they were and meant to be. All the checks and balances existed to help the SDLP sell the thing to the nationalists; once up and running all the complexities of checks and balances would have to be cut out in the interest of workable government. Without realising it the Cadogan Group put their finger on it on the very next page of their publication: " *This does not mean that the idea of a locally elected assembly is redundant... Shed of some, but not all, of its checks and balances, shorn of its panel, the Frameworks Assembly could possibly fill that gap. It could elect a power-sharing Executive along the lines that almost worked in 1974.*" (Cadogan Group, 'Lost Accord,')

In terms of the Frameworks documents, the East-West structures appear almost as an after thought to the main proposals. This is not surprising because the talks of 1991 and 1992 were conceived to find a replacement for the Hillsborough Accord. The eleven paragraphs hint at a new accord but provide little detail. The new accord seems at first to be almost an exact replica of the old one. It says it will maintain the standing Intergovernmental Conference and the Permanent Secretariat. This is hardly surprising, as assistance from Dublin had been instrumental in helping Britain turn the tide against the IRA and Sinn Fein. Nevertheless, the document registers subtle shifts in policy towards appeasing the Unionist position. The new agreement would be arrived at " *through direct discussion between the two governments and the other talks participants,*" and the local representatives " *would play*

a greater part in it than at present.” There is a thread running through the section which promises a reduction in the scope of the Conference if and when the parties agree to devolved structures.

Speaking six weeks after of the Framework documents the Tory Michael Ancram said “ *Nor was A New Framework For Agreement in any shape or form- contrary to some assertions - a Treaty between two governments. It would be a strange Treaty that described itself as a shared understanding to assist discussion and negotiations involving the political parties There may be other ways of addressing the issues and finding the necessary broad agreement.*” This is an important statement for it tells us not to read the documents too literally. In fact if you do read the documents literally you are bound to come up with some conflict of interpretation.

When interpreting a text which is not meant to be taken word for word it is important to place it in its context. The immediate context is an attempt to replace the Hillsborough agreement with something more friendly to the mainstream Unionist party. The British have been pulling back from the Hillsborough Accord since before the 1992 talks. Before those talks the SDLP believed it was on a roll, they were talking up the prospect of joint sovereignty. Today there is no talk coming from the SDLP to the effect that the documents are about joint authority.

When stripped down to its practical basics what is being proposed is very similar to what came crashing down in 1974. First, the British say that whatever happens between the parties control over security, foreign policy, and taxes will be staying in their hands, in other words imperialism is staying in charge. Two, the British hope to put a local administration back in place to perpetuate the fraud that some sort of democracy exists and put a shield between themselves and the Irish. Third there is to be an element of *‘power sharing’* (patronage and sinecures for some nationalists) and the panel stuff will have to go to make it a viable proposition. Fourth there is to be a Council of Ireland that might be based on a cross border institution, but if the unionists have their way it won't be.

Chapter 3

Republicanism and the Peace Process

To make sense of the peace process it is important to begin by recognising that in the present conditions, it is the British who must determine the outcome. The current British policy has much in common with what has gone before but the same can't be said of the approach of the republican movement. The latest '*peace strategy*' is completely at odds with the formal republican programme of 'Brits out' and a united Ireland. It is little more than a thinly disguised admission on the part of the republican leadership that for the foreseeable future realising the ideal of the Republic is simply beyond them.

To understand how republicans came to embrace the peace strategy it is essential to start from an understanding of the class character of the movement.

The republican movement came into existence to achieve Irish national democratic freedom from British colonial domination. Claiming the

right to speak on behalf the whole of the Irish nation did not, and could not, free it from the influence of specific class based economic interests. The economic programme of the nationalist movement was never anti-capitalist but expressed within itself a conflict between an idealised dream of a self-sufficient nation of '*men of no property*' and the reality of a widespread bourgeois hunger for secure private ownership, especially in land, added to an envy of the privileged lifestyles of the wealthy landlords and ranchers.

The class composition of the original Sinn Fein party was predominantly middle class (petty bourgeois). Of the Sinn Fein deputies elected to the first Dail, 31 were professional men, including 9 journalists and 7 teachers, 18 were engaged in commerce, including 10 shop owners, 5 were officials of nationalist cultural organisations, 2 were civil servants and 2 solicitors' clerks.

So in Ireland the attempt at '*national revolution*' was led mainly by the petty bourgeoisie. The landed wealth and the northern industrial capitalists were opposed to the demands and especially the methods of the republicans. For Marxists the petty bourgeoisie is not a lasting dominant class with a unique vision of how society should be organised. In other words there is no other alternative to market capitalism, the programme of the capitalist class, or socialism, the programme of the working class. Claims to a higher '*national interest*' above classes are either spurious or hide the interests of the capitalist class. Talk of a democratic society which does not specify how the economic fundamentals will work is also either spurious or hides continued capitalist rule. The idea that national or democratic struggles do not involve class interests is completely wrong. Both the working class and the capitalist class have contradictory interests in how society should be organised. Modern history demonstrates that it is the working class which has always fought hardest for democratic rights. The middle class may try to temporarily vacillate between the two fundamental class interests by attempting to claim to be above the class struggle but ultimately it cannot avoid taking sides. As a intermediate class it has a very rudimentary political programme of its own which can often be used to support alliances with either the working class or capitalist class and justify changing sides depending on the relative strength of each.

There is no more important instance of the bulk of the petty bourgeoisie

deciding to throw their lot in with the ruling class than over the question of the ratification of the 1921 Treaty. In the 1920's Ireland's class of small landowners was numerically significant. In 1926, 65 per cent of the state's recorded gainfully employed population was engaged in one way or other in agriculture. Only one fifth of the owners were employers of labour and a majority were farmers working their own land on their own account or with the help of a relative. Some 301,000 people were employed in various ways on farms of less than 30 acres. Only 10 per cent of the work force worked in manufacturing.

The small farmers had supported the national independence struggle against the British out of a rising patriotic sentiment but also in the expectation of further land redistribution and the promise of a protected domestic market exempt from foreign competition. However when it came to the decisive political moment, ratification of the Treaty, many of the small owners who had previously supported the republican programme of Sinn Fein deserted the party and joined with the class of big ranchers and the urban rich to vote in favour of the Treaty.

The economic interests of the pro-Treaty political faction were not immediately compatible with those of the small holders. The wealthy landlords and employers espoused a determined defence of the landed status quo and a general free trade policy. The smaller holders required a fairer land distribution and a protected home market. Despite the seeming contradiction, many thousands of middle class farmers came out to support the pro-Treaty party. The wealthy classes won the political battle over the Treaty and took control over the founding of the state apparatus. It is sometimes argued the deserters supported the Treaty in the interest of peace or even under the obedient command of the Catholic church. There is a more mundane truth, they felt the fear of losing what they already owned more profoundly than they felt the hope of further acquisitions.

They sensed a potential social conflict with a class of Irish rural labourers, a class which had shown signs of demanding a genuine revolutionary redistribution of landed wealth. Those who stood firm for the Republic often came from areas where they themselves could benefit from a land redistribution at the expense of the ranchers. The civil war of 1922 expressed more than just a simple choice between war or peace or even an futile division over the concept of political

sovereignty, just below the surface of the Treaty division, smouldered potential for class conflict.

In 1922 the artificial unity of the Sinn Fein nationalist movement was ripped asunder. For a short time the defeated republicans carried on making revolutionary proclamations and continued to wave the republican banner. Sinn Fein was still a potentially hegemonic movement, it won 27 per cent of the vote in the first election and this at a time when most of the political leadership was in prison or had been killed in the civil war.

The bitter feelings of the defeated republicans in 1922 were summed up by Sean Lemass; *"Ireland today is ruled by a British garrison, organised by the Masonic lodges, speaking through the Free State Parliament, and playing the cards of England all the time. If this nation is to get a chance to live we must sweep the Free State and all that it stands for out of existence."*

The implacable republican hostility to the existence of Free State institutions soon waned until today they are seen as the leaders of the nationalist family. In 1926 a formal break was made by De Valera and Lemass from Sinn Fein and out of this was born Fianna Fail. The movement could do little to advance the economic and social interests of the remaining middle class support so long as it existed solely as a rejectionist front. Within a year of the split, over one hundred local branches of Sinn Fein had already transferred directly to Fianna Fail and numerous IRA companies became Fianna Fail cumainn. The Fianna Fail programme was specially tailored to fit the aspirations of the petty bourgeoisie, subsidies for the owner occupiers, every family with a stake in the countryside, inheritance rights, high tariffs, housing reforms to help private buyers and religious conservatism. Sinn Fein was left to make what it could out of those recalcitrant republicans who could not be benefited or seduced by Fianna Fail.

The launch of Fianna Fail in 1926 provoked yet another crisis within the ranks of the recalcitrant armed republicans. When De Valera took political power he carefully set about undermining what remained of respectable middle class support for the IRA. A new volunteer force was established, specifically to attract IRA people into state employment and a military pensions scheme which doled out money to those who had fought in the civil war was also created. Some within the

republican movement tried to resist the Fianna Fail offensive by turning to the working class for support. For a period, a republican left wing emerged led by Peadar O'Donnell. They attempted to outflank Fianna Fail by combining a principled position on the national question with campaigns on social and economic issues. An anti-annuities payment campaign (money owed by small holders to the British exchequer) was launched by the republican left.

However it was not long before the republican left ran into serious opposition from the IRA leadership, especially when they tried to broaden support for the movement by pushing for the formation of a republican congress which would not be a Sinn Fein political party but "*an organising centre for anti-imperialist activities on the part of people irrespective of their party or organisational affiliations.*" An IRA convention in March 1934 rejected the left proposal and the left was compelled to break from the IRA. A group of left wing republicans led by O'Donnell then set up the short lived republican congress. The congress failed to thrive. It collapsed because when it came down to the task of actually finalising a socialist programme, most of the left republicans found it impossible to endorse a programme that was both socialist and revolutionary.

The problem was that the republican left merely wished to attract working class support for republicanism. Explicitly socialist elements remained largely under-explored and O'Donnell had little contact with the urban working class and little ideological training. Moreover Fianna Fail proved capable of absorbing the discontent aroused by the annuities campaign. A minority within the Congress who pressed for the formation of an Irish socialist party and campaigned for a Workers Republic were defeated and forced out of the Congress . As for the IRA, they physically attacked members of the Congress at a Bodenstown march in June 1934, and then got involved in a series of murders which gave Fianna Fail the excuse to outlaw the IRA and arrest its leading members. In general the history of the republican movement is one in which it shifts left and then right but at no point ever becoming a real socialist party and at some points embracing very right wing positions.

By the time the civil rights movement in the north arrived in 1969 the IRA was a rump, with no mass support and engaged in a bitter internal wrangle over political direction. An effort was underway to devise a republican programme that might orient the movement towards winning

support amongst sections of the Irish working class. The ideological content for this second experiment at a republican-socialist synthesis was chiefly supplied by two intellectuals from the Communist Party of Ireland, Anthony Coughlan and Roy Johnston.

The experiment at another republican-socialist synthesis generated a bizarre mixture of Stalinist and traditional republican conceptions and policies. The experiment ended in failure and recrimination. The 'official' republican movement was shamefully caught off-guard by the events of 1969. The errors of the leadership led to a split and the formation of the Provisionals. The immediate political demand of the Provisionals that Stormont should be smashed best fitted with the emerging political circumstances. The Official movement in the north went into a headlong decline, increasingly taking up all sorts of reactionary political positions. It split again in 1974 giving birth to the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP) and Irish National Liberation Army, split once again in 1992, generating the neo-liberal Democratic Left, and has recently split yet again. In the final analysis every republican marriage with international Stalinism generated only a bad hybrid.

It is commonly noted that those who emerged to organise the Provisional republican movement came mainly from working class backgrounds. Socialists do not dispute the fact that a significant layer of the movement's membership is of working class social origin but we vehemently deny that this results in a political movement which fights in the interest of the working class. The working class membership of the republican movement is outweighed by a number of other influences; it's rural petty-bourgeois component and reliance on right wing American support; it's ideological history of left wing and then right wing positions; the dominance of a military body, the IRA, and most important it's nationalist programme which continues to say that *'labour must wait.'*

The Provisional movement recruited its working class membership in very specific circumstances, in the context of a sectarian pogrom and military occupation. These were not characteristic working class militants schooled in typical class struggle politics or even in the trade unions. They were working class teenagers recruited first and foremost into a nationalist movement dominated by a military wing.

Grasping the class character of the republican movement is crucial

because it explains the latest shift and the underlying meaning of the peace strategy. The peace strategy is first and foremost the steady succumbing of the republican movement to the ideology and agenda of bourgeois nationalism. What the peace process is all about is the yielding by a petty bourgeois revolutionary movement to the demands of ruling class bourgeois nationalism. All distinctive revolutionary markings are being stripped away to enable the movement to cohabit with Irish capitalism. Because the class character of republicanism is petty bourgeois revolutionary nationalism there was a possibility that the movement would one day converge with bourgeois nationalism. In fact signs indicating that such a process was well underway have been around for some time. It is important to make clear that this is not a question of conscious intention on the part of individual republican leaders. What matters is that the republican movement has pursued a strategy that has failed and its organisation, history and political education leaves it wide open to illusions in what it calls constitutional nationalism and we have characterised as bourgeois nationalism.

It was during the period of the hunger strike in 1980/81 that the drift towards solutions emanating from bourgeois nationalist sources first began to have a strong influence over the movement. In the battle to win political status for political prisoners they had attempted to mobilise the mass anti-imperialist feeling within the Irish working class with the help of what appeared to be a united front structure. That is a mass democratic movement with representation from lots of different organisations all able to hold to their own programme while uniting on central demands and holding regular debates to modify the demands of the movement and fine tune strategy and tactics.

In the beginning the organisations involved in the united front - Sinn Fein, the Peoples Democracy and other left and community groups - were not substantial enough to win political status for the prisoners. There was a united front structure but not a real united front; that required the participation of sections of the thirty two county working class and a real democracy that excluded the secret negotiations which, as we have said, have always characterised the political practice of the republican movement. There were significant working class forces in the campaign, organised around the trade union sub-committees, but they were a small minority within the official trade union movement and a broader movement would have necessitated taking on the official leadership of the union and labour movements. This could have been

done but it required the campaign to broaden its remit to embrace demands that were of equal importance to Irish workers. This did not happen, the republicans wanted a narrowly focused campaign that did not get mixed up with other working class issues.

Instead Sinn Fein turned to the humanitarian voices within bourgeois nationalism for help. These people seemed much more influential but of course the humanitarians were not interested in winning the struggle but with ending it with as little disruption as possible. During the H blocks protests it was mooted by Gerry Adams that what was required was a "*united nationalist front*". This meant approaching the leaderships of Fianna Fail and the SDLP but the bourgeois nationalists could hardly join with a campaign the political aims of which they didn't agree with.

A covert diplomatic exchange drew Sinn Fein into confidential dealings with the Irish government, the Catholic hierarchy and even the British. Eventually, with help from bourgeois nationalist politicians and humanitarians, a deal was done to settle the H block struggle, but of course the deal was a political defeat. The fight for political status was about a lot more than what clothes a prisoner wore. Political status was about raising the political consciousness of the working class in Ireland, Britain and internationally, to expose that Britain was fighting an imperialist war in Ireland. The humanitarian character given to the campaign by the leadership of the republican movement helped to depoliticise the struggle but the substitution of political status by the five demands was not the central aspect of this.

Masses of the Irish people had been organised and involved in political activity. The H-Block campaign must be considered as a defeat in many ways because not only did ten prisoners die without the British conceding the principle of political status but the mass movement was taken off the streets and its potential lost. The change in prison regime with de facto recognition does not change the judgement of defeat. The failure to win political status allowed the southern state to introduce extradition a short time later. If political status had been won this would have been impossible.

Whilst the republican movement came out of the H-Block struggle having lost the battle over political status they had nevertheless stumbled into political activity and discovered a reservoir of support

amongst the oppressed working class. They came out of the struggle with increased electoral support but with a type of politics which dismissed workers participation, a well oiled practice of secret diplomacy and electoral interventions centred on community politics and networking.

The electoral strategy was a serious bid by Sinn Fein to broaden its political appeal. Initially by raging against oppression the prospects appeared good. Early victories led to Sinn Fein winning seats on councils and there was even talk of out-voting the SDLP at the polls. However by the late 1980's the vote seemed to have peaked at about twelve per cent. The effort to make a similar electoral tactic work in the south badly misfired, the republicans had little idea how to relate to the needs of the southern electorate. They were unsure what social constituency to aim at and they also worried about taking votes away from the green wing of Fianna Fail. The republican programme of national unity first, socialism later, held little appeal or relevance to the bulk of southern workers looking for an alternative, more of whom voted for the Workers Party. At the 1987 general election the party won a paltry 1.9 per cent of the vote. Sinn Fein's explanation for their poor electoral performance was hardly adequate, that media censorship had kept their spokes-people off the airways and stopped them getting the republican message across.

In the north relative electoral success at local government level propelled more and more Sinn Fein activists into a type of community politics based on an ideology of self-help, local pride and business partnership. Soon lobbying the state agencies for a better deal for the socially disadvantaged areas became a way of life. After much hard campaigning some British money began to turn up. By the 1990's '*Brit money*' could be seen funding community schemes which were often as not staffed by well known republican activists. Next money from America and the EEC also arrived. This was explicitly pacification money arising out of the Anglo-Irish agreement and designed to bankroll '*peace and reconciliation.*' The number of self appointed community groups mushroomed and Sinn Fein encouraged '*their people*' to get their fair share.

This helped spawn a narrower version of Irish nationalism. Republican politics became infected with an ideology of local pride and self-help and only a few felt embarrassed about receiving pacification money.

Today in many working class districts a multitude of self appointed community bodies operate, mainly dependent for their financial existence on imperialist largesse. Something resembling a community ethos or morality flourishes. The voluntary sector not only provides employment for an indeterminate number, it redirects social consciousness away from the wider political picture into petty local moralising. One journalist with an eye for the local scene recently remarked how, "*In the community sector in West Belfast generally, it is almost impossible to get a job unless one is a Sinn Fein member or sympathiser. A new republican elite, every bit as exclusivist as the old elite, is taking shape. These 'chuck lites' are usually fairly recent converts to the cause, having outed themselves in the safer and gentler peace process climes. They seem to be the main beneficiaries of a post settlement funding for deprived areas.*" (Suzanne Breen)

There is nothing inherently unprincipled about standing candidates in local elections but it is a tactic that needs to be guided by strategic political insight. The People's Democracy contested and won seats on council chambers and used them to expose the sectarian and undemocratic nature of British rule. There was never any inclination to reform or try to improve them to make the councils work more efficiently. Sinn Fein quickly fell into the trap of seeking to reform the councils, in effect attempting to make one of the layers of institutions of the Orange state work better. The danger they now face is that the British agenda for the peace process may include plans to restore more powers to the local councils. The smashing of Orange patronage at the council level was one of the great successes of the civil rights movement. It would be an irony indeed if those powers were to be restored under the political cover of Sinn Fein's relative success in local elections.

Hume-Adams

The general public first became aware of an Irish peace initiative in September 1993. A joint statement was issued on Saturday 25th on behalf of John Hume and Gerry Adams that an agreement had been reached "*that could provide the basis for peace.*" The Hume-Adams understanding inaugurated the official and public aspect of the Irish peace process.

The impression then conveyed by most of the media was that Hume had shifted his party closer towards the republican camp, that he had brought the men of violence in from the cold, that he had reached a common understanding with the 'terrorists,' that he had betrayed constitutional nationalism, that he had put the lives of other SDLP members at risk, that he had embarrassed the Irish government, that he had aroused anger in London and even that he may have gone mad.

Such screams of outrage suited the republican movement all too well because it served to mask the real story behind Hume-Adams. In reality Hume-Adams presaged a remarkable ideological triumph for SDLP nationalism over republicanism. It symbolised a triumphal moment in Hume's ten year ideological offensive to win the republican movement over to the bourgeois nationalist conception of both the causes of the conflict in Ireland and the way forward to a possible solution.

Because no actual document spelling out Hume-Adams ever saw the light of day, for a long time an aura of mystery surrounded it. However no one within Sinn Fein has so far denied Hume's contention that much of it was imported into the Downing Street Declaration. Insider briefings given to journalists Eamonn Mallie and David McKittrick maintained that Hume-Adams itself was a slightly modified version of an IRA document delivered to Hume and a select Fianna Fail few in June 1992: "*With very few changes, this document would a year later be sent to London as the basis for an IRA cessation and thus the opening of a new period of Irish history.*" (Mallie and McKittrick, *The Fight for Peace*)

The journalists describe an evolving secret process to which the republican leadership was heavily committed and which involved lengthy negotiations with the leaders of bourgeois nationalism and the hierarchy of the Catholic church. Apparently the June 1992 IRA document was in fact a redrafted version of an earlier one sent by Hume with input from Fianna Fail. The secret June 1992 IRA document reproduced by Mallie and McKittrick confirmed what had been evident to socialists for some years, that the republican leadership was capitulating to the political will of the SDLP.

One of the Irish diplomats privy to the secret talks with the republican

leadership and quoted by the journalists sums up the spirit of the whole thing, *"I think he(they) had moved to a position much closer to the analysis which Hume had put before us, all of us, for most of the past generation, which is that this is a divided community which requires a more complex response than simply the imposition of one nationality over another."*(Mallie and McKittrick, 'The Fight for Peace')

A less secret Sinn Fein engagement with the SDLP had been taking place since the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985. After the signing of the Agreement it became apparent that Hume and bourgeois nationalism were experiencing some successes in shifting part of the republican leadership away from uncompromising idealism.

Hume, with the blessing of Fianna Fail, had attempted to lure Sinn Fein into the '*nationalist family*' in 1988. At that time a Sinn Fein team consisting of Adams, Morrison, McLaughlin and Hartley held a set of formal talks with an SDLP team consisting of Hume, Mallon, Currie and Farren. The Sinn Fein team proposed that a popular nationalist front should be constructed around a common nationalist programme. The SDLP response was that they would have nothing to do with a populist nationalist alliance so long as Sinn Fein continued to endorse armed struggle.

The SDLP also sought to persuade Sinn Fein that since the signing of the Hillsborough Agreement British strategy in Ireland had radically changed, *" We sought to persuade them that there was a political way ahead, that the continuation of their campaign was self-defeating, that the British wanted to go anyway-that the job we had to do was to persuade the Unionist people that their future lay in an agreed Ireland."* (Mallie and McKittrick, 'The Fight for Peace')

At the heart of the 1988 stalemate between the two parties was a disagreement over the interests of Britain in relation to Ireland. The SDLP position was that Britain was neutral. Sinn Fein claimed that *"Britain's actions totally contradict SDLP claims that Britain is now neutral."* Sinn Fein argued that the British were defending a selfish military interest in Ireland. Hume replied that *" Britain has no interest of her own in remaining in Ireland. She has no strategic, military or economic interests and if Irish people reached agreement among themselves on for example unity, then Britain would facilitate it,*

legislate for it and leave the Irish to govern themselves.” (Mallie and McKittrick, ‘The Fight for Peace’)

The discussions ended without agreement but they did reveal to the SDLP that the republicans were desperately searching for an alternative to their failed armed struggle and that they were looking in only one political direction, towards bourgeois nationalism. In 1988 some within Sinn Fein were already in favour of agreeing to an informal alliance on terms stipulated by the SDLP. By 1993 Sinn Fein had adjusted to the SDLP position on imperialism and, like Hume, started to talk about Britain becoming a persuader for a new Ireland.

A formal Sinn Fein-SDLP alliance became possible only after the republican leadership had finally acted to shift the thinking of the movement to synchronise with those policies long associated with the SDLP. The main policy shifts were: the need for a negotiated settlement; the post-imperialist role of Britain, the substitution of the principle of self-determination by the formula of an agreed Ireland which, at the very least, left open the insertion of the unionist veto, the ditching of the anti-EU policy and finally a turn towards welcoming and promoting greater American involvement in the ‘*Irish situation*.’ All this on top of the acceptance that it was the IRA who could stop the war if they declared a ceasefire, something the British had claimed for years and the republicans had vehemently denied.

Secret messages relayed to the IRA by the British between February 1990 and October 1993 helped the leadership arrive at the conclusion that on the crucial area of Britain’s interests Hume had been right all along. Hume became convinced that his dialogue with the republican movement was getting through. In an ‘*Irish News*’ article of Jan 5th 1994 he recalled that from 1988 onwards he had been working to persuade Sinn Fein that their analysis of Britain’s imperialist role was flawed. In the same article he admitted that he had discussed his dialogue with Sinn Fein with the British:

“ The stated reasons by the IRA for armed struggle were that the British were in Ireland defending their own interests by force- economic and strategic- and that they were preventing the Irish people from exercising the right to self determination. I have argued that while these reasons were historically correct, they are no longer true in today’s new Europe. Indeed following our published dialogue of 1988 in which Sinn Fein

spelled out those reasons, reasons to which I drew the attention of the British government and asked them to make clear that they had no longer any selfish economic or strategic interest in Ireland, the then secretary of State, Peter Brooke, stated that very clearly in a major speech in 1990. The statement is repeated in the Downing Street Declaration....they go further and underline that they would work together with the Irish government to achieve such agreement."

As soon as the message that the British no longer had any selfish, strategic, or economic interests in Ireland was assimilated by the republican leadership the movement's revolutionary programme and strategy became redundant. This opened the floodgates to allow all of the other ideological claims of bourgeois nationalism to come flooding in.

All Party Talks Now!

The Hume-Adams agreement was meant to clear the way for a speedy entry of Sinn Fein into a negotiating process sponsored by the Irish and British governments but right from the start things began to go drastically wrong for the republicans. On 15th December, after considerable behind the scenes diplomacy, the two governments issued their Downing Street declaration. The Declaration was an agreed imperialist response to Hume-Adams.

It attempted to exact a surrender from both ends of the republican movement. Before talks there had to be peace and "*peace must involve a permanent end to the use of, or support for para-military violence,*" then "*democratically mandated parties which showed a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods and which have shown that they abide by the democratic process*" could participate. The two governments made it clear that an IRA ceasefire in itself would not be enough to secure Sinn Fein a place at the talks table. The two governments insisted that only the IRA side to the conflict was really culpable for the violence and the Downing Street Declaration placed the onus firmly on the IRA to unilaterally take on all of the responsibility for ending the conflict.

It also presented Sinn Fein with serious political difficulties. The core of republican politics has always emphasised the concept of self-determination for the Irish people. Hume-Adams hinted at a possible

reformulating of the traditional language of self determination to include the SDLP inspired notion of an 'agreed Ireland.' Hume's talk of 'an agreed Ireland' included a recognition of the unionist veto, now dressed up in softer sounding term 'consent.' When it came down to defining what an agreed Ireland really meant the language of the Declaration was a lot less republican friendly than Hume-Adams:

" The Taoiseach accepts, on behalf of the Irish Government, that the democratic right of self-determination by the people of Ireland as a whole must be achieved and exercised with and subject to the agreement and consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland."

With Unionist consent now paramount, how could the republican leadership get beyond the document? John Major, the British Prime Minister, underscored the difficulty when he spelt out the British understanding of the text: *"What is not in the Declaration is, any suggestion that the British government should join the ranks of the persuaders of the value or legitimacy of a united Ireland; that is not there. Nor is there any suggestion that the future status of Northern Ireland should be decided by a single act of self-determination by the people of Ireland as a whole, that is not there either. Nor is there any timetable for constitutional change, or any arrangement for joint authority. In sum, the Declaration provides that it is and must be for the people of Northern Ireland to determine their own future."*

In fact in the government to government talks that preceded the unveiling of the Declaration the British government had exacted from Fianna Fail a cast iron guarantee that the Irish would soon override articles two and three of the Irish constitution. In a speech to the Law Society of University College Dublin on 20th January 1994, Reynolds hit out at those who questioned the worth of the Declaration in the name of preserving the Irish constitution: *"It has been suggested in some quarters that the Joint Declaration provides insufficient recognition of the Irish people's right to self-determination. It is also held that the so-called Unionist guarantee is in contradiction to it. It is essential to examine these assertions. It would be tragic if the peace process were to be blocked because of basic misunderstandings about how self-determination operates in international law and international politics, and because something unattainable was being sought that was not consistent with international law. Those who quote Article one of the*

United Nations Charter in support of Irish self-determination often tend to forget article two, which states that all members should settle their international disputes by peaceful means, a principle to which Ireland was already committed by Article 29 of its constitution. Unlike the colonies in Africa and elsewhere at the time of their independence, Irish self-determination involves an already sovereign Irish state, which is a member of the UN and directly bound by its charter.” No firmer statement of the ‘Free State’ position could be made yet Reynolds is still paraded as a great friend of the republican cause.

Faced with the Declaration the republican leadership now had to decide on its highest priority. One option was to drop Hume-Adams and open up a wide-ranging and democratic debate about past and future revolutionary strategy. What they chose to do was to stick with the ‘nationalist family’ and go through the motions of holding a fake democratic debate about the merits or otherwise of the document. For seven months the republicans delayed making a definitive response. During this period IRA activity continued, though at a reduced level.

Impatient with the republican delay the Irish bourgeoisie went into condemnation overdrive. Hume was mercilessly ridiculed by the usual suspects for making common cause with the ‘*absolutely irredeemable Provos.*’ Rumblings of discontent shot through the SDLP. Mallon, deputy leader of the SDLP, screamed that if the republicans did not deliver what the two governments had ordered in the document then they “*should be removed from any further involvement in the process of creating peace.*”

Hume stepped up the pressure by writing an open letter to Sinn Fein explaining “*... that the Downing Street Declaration contains the substance of the proposed joint declaration that arose from our dialogue, finalised in what we have consistently described as the June document. The Downing Street Declaration contains a clear affirmation of what our June document asked the British government to say in relation to its own interests.*” Sinn Fein spent the next six months supposedly ‘*listening*’ to what the grass roots felt about the document.

In remarks later published by his press spokesperson Albert Reynolds stated the real attitude of the Irish bourgeoisie towards Sinn Fein’s delaying tactics, “*I’ve told them if they don’t do this right, they can shag off, I don’t want to hear anything about a six months or six year ceasefire,*

no temporary indefinite or conditional stuff, no defending or retaliating against anyone, just that its over ...period...full stop. Otherwise I'll walk away, I'll go off down that three strand talks framework document road with John Major, and they can detour away for another 25 years of killing and being killed-for what?"

Finally a Sinn Fein national delegate conference was convened in Letterkenny in July 1994 to give the long awaited reply to the programme outlined in the joint declaration. The verdict was that the republican movement had some difficulties agreeing to all that was contained in the Declaration but nevertheless the movement was prepared to make the most out of it and move on to the next stage, "*Sinn Fein's position on the Downing Street Declaration is a balanced assessment. The two governments never said that the Declaration was a solution. The two governments acknowledged the right of any party to take whatever it wanted, and our approach has been to identify the positive elements which can be built upon and to isolate the areas of concern which need to be overcome. This is a positive and considered approach.*"

Sinn Fein's approach was based on talking-up what they liked about it whilst pretending that what they didn't like really didn't matter that much but this approach was to turn out to be very damaging. The Declaration was not intended as a loose scrap of paper that could be played with. The two governments had not spent months drafting the document to let Sinn Fein interpret it in any way they wished. On the day the Declaration was ratified by the Irish parliament, Dick Spring, clearly signalled that if the republican movement assented to the Declaration then there would be an onus on the IRA to begin to disarm. After receiving a qualified yes from Letterkenny the British acted to make the surrender of the IRA a top priority.

An IRA cessation was announced at the end of August 1994. Sinn Fein leaders primed the celebrations on the streets. In West Belfast a speakers platform was hastily erected and a cheerful crowd gathered to toast a new era of peace. Sinn Fein made the most out of the sentiment for peace and solidarity and acted to copper-fasten the national partnership with the SDLP and Fianna Fail. Reynolds milked the notoriety for three months then promptly fell from grace. His government collapsed after it was exposed that it had lied to the Irish Parliament about certain legal proceedings arising out of a scandal concerning a paedophile priest. To the annoyance of Sinn Fein, a new

coalition came to power with the unashamedly pro-imperialist John Bruton at its head.

In March 1995 the British seized the new opportunity to tighten the screw on Sinn Fein. Patrick Mayhew laid out three preconditions for a Sinn Fein entry into talks, the IRA must show a willingness in principle to disarm, it must come to an understanding of the practicalities of disarming and the IRA had to actually decommission some of its weapons ahead of talks as a '*confidence building*' measure.

The importance of these demands was momentarily questioned by the head of the RUC who realised that it was the willingness of people to use arms rather than the arms themselves that was important. The British demand was not based on any military assessment but was part of a larger political strategy. They realised that the republicans were desperate to preserve the nationalist front and that this meant following Hume into all party talks. It was rational therefore for the British to keep upping the political ante to see how far the republicans would go. The British were eager to know just how far the republicans might be prepared to compromise before they took the risk of admitting them into talks. In comprehending British tactics at this time it should not be forgotten that they already had a political settlement in mind before the republicans ever came on to the talks horizon. The Framework Documents of February 1995 were not a hurried response to the IRA cessation but were an offshoot from the Brooke and Mayhew talks of 1992. The British needed to be sure that if they allowed Sinn Fein into the talks process that this did not stiffen the nationalism of the SDLP and jeopardise the sort of settlement they already had in mind. The British provocation was a way of probing the political weaknesses of the republicans. The republican's strategy of the nationalist family left them wide open to the British strategy of squeezing them further and further. In order to sustain their alliance with the nationalist family they were compelled to retreat before the British political offensive while attempting to hide this by manoeuvring around issues instead of confronting them.

Predictably, Bruton responded by calling on Sinn Fein "*to make a gesture on decommissioning.*" It seemed they were to be excluded from the talks until the IRA formally surrendered. They were informed that they were to be barred from an investment conference to discuss the so called peace dividend while the sectarian killer gangs of loyalism were

given the most outrageous preferential treatment including receptions in ten Downing Street.

Funding towards the upkeep of a single Irish language school was refused despite the fact that money was given by right in Wales and Scotland. There was little progress on prisoners and conditions for republican prisoners in England actually worsened. A British soldier, Lee Clegg, was released after serving only two years of a prison sentence for murdering a young joyrider from West Belfast. There was nothing said or done on police reform, on the contrary two police authority members were sacked for proposing that the name and the uniform of the RUC might be changed to help the peace process. Finally, just to rub salt in the wounds there was the British government performances at Drumcree one and two. The 'peace process' was delivering hypocrisy and ever more open sectarianism. The ceasefire ended when an IRA bomb exploded near London's Canary Wharf killing two civilians and damaging hundreds of homes in a working class estate.

The ending of the IRA cessation in no way marked a republican rethink. John Hume excused British intransigence by claiming that the Major government was chronically dependent on Unionist votes for its survival and so was operating under Unionist duress. The republicans for the most part went along with Hume's excuses but were unable to explain why current British strategy was no different than before and was supported by every major party so that on the question of Ireland there was in reality no dependence on Unionist votes. A Hume-Adams mark two was proposed to restart the peace process but was trashed when Bruton refused even to meet a delegation which included 'IRA/Sinn Fein.' A Hume-Adams two was eventually handed to the British government in November 1996 but without the support of Dublin it was a dead letter.

Hume and Adams turned to American imperialism for help, Bill Clinton was the man to "*move the situation forward.*" Despite the difficulties of the peace process the republican leadership was still enthusiastic about capitalising on links Hume had made with corporate Irish America. A leaked IRA internal document argued that "*There is potentially a very powerful Irish-American lobby not in hock to any particular party in Ireland or Britain,*" and that "*Clinton is perhaps the first US President in decades to be substantially influenced by such a lobby.*"

By the early 1990's Sinn Fein had already established close communications with the American lobby. The contacts were different from earlier ones in that the freshly created 'Friends of Sinn Fein' included several millionaire capitalists. Impressed by the IRA cessation Chuck Feeny, a billionaire Irish-American, began bankrolling a new look Sinn Fein lobby and a \$200,000 a year office in downtown Washington was opened. Noraid, the long serving republican organisation in the US was substantially downgraded in favour of the big business oriented Friends of Sinn Fein.

In early 1995 Gerry Adams applied for a visa to go to the United States, seeking permission to raise funds. The British government lobbied to prevent his trip but were thwarted by a group of senators close to Edward Kennedy. Access to the White House did not come cheap and Sinn Fein felt pressured by the Americans to come to terms with the British prerequisite of decommissioning.

Within three months of the IRA ceasefire Clinton appointed retiring Senate majority leader George Mitchell to help the peace process. An inter-departmental committee chaired by Nancy Soderberg was established to consider economic initiatives and in December 1994 Secretary Ron Brown led a delegation of American capitalists to an investment conference in Belfast. This was followed up by the White House itself sponsoring an investment conference in May 1995. Sinn Fein leapt at the chance to raise money from the rich and famous: \$200 a plate dinners were hosted and the guest lists included Donald Trump, Bianca Jagger and Oliver Stone. In the new up-market social setting a few American journalists raised the question of Sinn Fein's professed socialism. P.O'Hara of Sinn Fein stepped in to assure the questioners that "*Republicans had no problem with capitalism.*"

In late November 1995 President Clinton visited London, Belfast, Derry and Dublin. The visit was a populist celebration of the peace process. The visit was carefully choreographed with visits to the nationalist Falls and the loyalist Shankill. The Sinn Fein party newspaper gushed with praise for Clinton, describing his visit as "*the biggest celebrity appearance in Ireland since JFK and the Pope.*" The paper gleefully reported how big burly secret service men ordered RUC officers about the place, the RUC were just "*onlookers at history.*" Republican News delighted in reporting how sullen Patrick Mayhew looked, sitting next to Clinton

"...someone bigger and more powerful than the Brits had finally arrived." A handful of socialists went out to protest, mainly against the American boycott on Cuba and Sinn Fein activists moaned that the 'reds' were spoiling the party. The political message delivered by Clinton was totally ignored. Middle East correspondent Robert Fisk reported *"I found that President Clinton's words in Northern Ireland conjured up a speech I'd heard almost 3,000 miles away in the Jordanian parliament. Fresh from signing the peace agreement between Israel and Jordan in 1994, Clinton told the overflowing gerrymandered assembly in Amman that peace was at hand in the Middle East and that those who opposed it- 'terrorists' is what he called them- were finished. 'You are the past, your day is over'.. and what did he say in Northern Ireland?"*

It transpired that there was more to the Presidential visit than just media hype. Dick Spring used the American angle to increase the pressure on Sinn Fein. In the Summer of 1995 Spring came up with the idea of introducing an international commission to deal with the problem of the IRA's objection to decommissioning. He claimed to have picked up the idea from a Unionist MP, Ken Maginnis. Spring's reasoning was that it was obvious that the IRA wouldn't decommission at the command of the hated 'Brits,' however they just might at the behest of an international commission, especially one backed by the Americans, *"An American chair would be best, as he would be placed to exert moral pressure on the Provisionals."* Spring floated the idea in Washington and Clinton found it acceptable, the tactic of the twin track was launched.

On the evening of November 28th, as Clinton flew to Ireland, the British were able to squeeze the Irish government into issuing a joint communiqué outlining a twin-track approach and recommending all-party talks within three months. The impending American visit was used by the British to wring acceptance from Irish nationalism of a plan they had earlier rejected. A three member international commission, chaired by George Mitchell was to be set up to deal with the question of decommissioning. The unionists once again displayed their uncontrollable bigotry by denouncing Mitchell for being a catholic and an Irish-American. In fact he was neither. Nevertheless American pressure did eventually lead the republicans to soften their line on decommissioning.

Sinn Fein then submitted a comprehensive presentation to the Mitchell international commission, arguing that if weapons were going to be scrutinised then the military arsenal of the 'security' forces, including the British Army, should form part of the process. Indeed they called for a comprehensive demilitarisation of the conflict. Whatever the merit of Sinn Fein's demilitarisation proposal, the fact is that the submission was mere window dressing, everyone knew in advance that the British had only allowed Mitchell into the process to apply pressure on the IRA and there was no prospect of his commission ruling against British weapons.

Sinn Fein were very careful not to upset the Americans and Gerry Adams praised the even-handed approach of the commission, "*I am very impressed by the speed and the urgency with which the International Body have approached their task. These are very busy people who have come from distant parts of the world.*" The Mitchell report eventually recommended that the IRA should have to decommission but since it wouldn't do so before talks then it should do so during the talks. He also suggested six principles that every party hoping to participate in the talks process should swear by and adhere to:

1. Only exclusively peaceful means must be used to resolve political issues.
2. Paramilitary organisations must eventually disarm.
3. Disarmament must be verifiable to the satisfaction of an International Commission.
4. All parties must renounce for themselves, and oppose any efforts by others to use or threaten to use force to influence negotiations.
5. Any majority agreements arising from the all-party talks must be accepted by all those engaged in the talks and opposed only by peaceful and democratic methods.
6. All paramilitary activities; surveillance, targeting, punishment beatings etc. must cease.

If the Republicans were to be literally bound by the Mitchell principles then in a matter of months the IRA would be out of business. The Mitchell principles contradicted the IRA's constitution: General Order No 5, Part 1, which insists that a volunteer "*Shall not swear or pledge himself/herself in any way to refrain from using arms or other methods of struggle to overthrow British rule in Ireland. Minimal penalty for breaches; dismissal.*" A special IRA dispensation had to be given before

Sinn Fein could negotiate under the terms set out by Mitchell. As Ed Maloney from the Sunday Tribune put it *"If the IRA can't police its own areas, recruit, train and arm, it has no function in life. Without anything to do, the chances are that the organisation will begin to disintegrate and its volunteers drift away."*

Sinn Fein attempted to bluff their way past the Mitchell report by highlighting the distinction between themselves and the IRA. In May 1996, after the breakdown in the IRA cessation, Sinn Fein announced that they would sign up to the Mitchell proposals while stating that *"Sinn Fein was not the IRA."* The distinction did not earn Sinn Fein a place at the opening of the all party talks and when they turned up for the first session were locked out.

Once again Sinn Fein had made a massive political retreat while attempting to cover themselves by clever manoeuvring. In accepting Mitchell they accepted imperialism's definition of what constituted democracy and what it regarded as legitimate opposition. Republican opposition to imperialist violence was ignored by Mitchell which in turn was ignored by Sinn Fein. Republican demands had been rejected and Sinn Fein's position was so weak they could not even make an issue of it.

Despite the breakdown in the cessation, the Mitchell report and the lock out from the talks the republicans kept to their core demand for immediate all party talks without preconditions. With the peace strategy under stress, holding on to the formal agreement with the SDLP became an ever greater priority for Sinn Fein and again this only led to further compromises.

On March 21st, picking up on a suggestion in the Mitchell report, the British government suddenly announced elections would take place to a Unionist Forum at the end of May. Mitchell had inserted the election idea in his report at the request of the DUP. The SDLP was cool on the election and assembly but true to character decided to go along with it. Judged against any usual standard the election was a disgrace. Parties that wished to contest the election had to apply for a government recommendation. *'A dogs breakfast of an election'* was the description given by one political scientist but this was too kind. Effectively the British, through specially designed electoral procedures and deciding who could, and could not, participate had once again confirmed how

undemocratic the 6 county state was. To ensure loyalist paramilitary participation in the talks, two seats were awarded to each of the top ten parties in the election to provide for an additional twenty members to top up the ninety elected in the constituencies. The upshot was that the loyalists were now being written in as trusted democrats.

A turnout of 65 per cent demonstrated that illusions in the peace process were widespread and Sinn Fein registered their best vote ever in a Northern election. Nationalists had been angered by British obstruction and repression. Many had made up their minds that it was the British who were to blame for the breakdown of the IRA cessation. Rather than feeling defeated or demoralised and ready to accept any political solution the British threw at them, they still had higher expectations.

The election result was a worry to the SDLP. In West Belfast Sinn Fein took four of the five available seats and the sitting SDLP MP was reduced to calling them fascists. The downside of the result was that Sinn Fein had fought the election as the peace party, arguing that Sinn Fein was more in tune with John Hume than his own party and charging that fellow SDLP politicians were being disloyal to Hume. Sinn Fein were accused, quite correctly, of political body snatching. In the run up to the election Sinn Fein had pushed all out for an electoral pact with the SDLP. The success was solely an electoral one and the electoral pitch of Sinn Fein was that with respect to the peace process you couldn't put a cigarette paper between themselves and Hume. It was not an increased vote for traditional republicanism.

The focus of political attention then switched to the Orange marching season and to anticipate a Drumcree two. Drumcree one had been a victory for the sectarian Orange Order and it had spotlighted David Trimble who, on the strength of his performance, was able to surprise most political hacks and win the leadership of the main unionist party in September 1995. The election of Trimble was a sure sign that the peace process was in for an even more rocky ride. In a comic aside the journalist David McMittrick reported a British government minister recounting his reaction to seeing Trimble, the new leader of the unionist party, described in a national newspaper as a '*moderate Unionist*,' "*I was having my breakfast when I read that. I nearly puked up my Frosties.*"

Seven Days in July

A week, as the cliché says, is a long time in politics. It certainly was for the 1,500 nationalists residents on the Garvaghy Road in July 1996. For decades working class nationalists had kept their heads down as the various loyal orders paraded their sectarian domination over them. These marches have been sold as innocent occasions of celebration for deliverance from a tyrant. This covers the real meaning of their passage through Catholic districts: a reminder that, whatever happens the other days of the year, Ulster is Orange and that the Irish Catholic is there only on sufferance. Every summer they were imprisoned behind corrugated curtains and police land rovers to facilitate the privileged marching of the loyal orders. Whenever they stepped out to complain they were beaten back by the RUC and often arrested.

A sense of long endured humiliations and events on Belfast's Ormeau Road and Portadown's Garvaghy Road combined by the summer of 1995 to create a highly charged feeling of contempt for Orange bigotry. Collisions between local residents and the Orange marchers had been occurring on the Ormeau Road for a number of years but things really came to a head in the aftermath of the brutal murders by loyalists of five local people in a betting shop. A group of Ormeau residents appealed to the Orangemen to consider re-routing a handful of their parades but the Orangemen refused to even consider the idea.

After one particular parade when bands-men were widely shown on television gloating over the five murders (they raised five fingers and chanted five nil, others stopped outside the betting shop and played their sectarian tunes as loud as they could) an expanded Ormeau residents committee was formed to contest the privileged 'right' of the Orangemen to storm down the Ormeau Road belting out their sectarian message.

A sit down protest was organised against an Apprentice Boys parade which made a regular point of going down the Ormeau Road on 12th August despite the fact the venue for the parade was 90 miles away. The riot clad RUC moved in to clear the protesters from the road and three protesters were badly hurt by plastic bullets fired at point blank range. To top it all 55 residents were arrested and charged with disorderly

behaviour or blocking the highway.

Opposition to sectarian parades grew in the wake of the brutalities on the Ormeau Road. The nationalist residents of the Garvaghy Road epitomised the new mood. Local people formed a residents group and called on the Orange Order to wake-up to the fact that nationalists had rights too. In simple terms the residents were claiming a right to be consulted before a major parade passed by their homes. The Orange Order refused point blank to countenance or discuss the rights of the Garvaghy community. In the summer of 1995 a mediation group stepped into the controversy and brokered a deal. The deal was that Orangemen could parade as usual in 1995 but next time there would have to be at least some consultation with the residents. The march went unhindered, but as soon as the march ended Trimble and Paisley triumphantly claimed that no deal on future parades had been struck with the residents group and that the Orange Order had a right to march where it liked.

For a whole year the residents group attempted to meet the Orangemen to discuss future parades but the Orangemen refused to become involved in any debate. On 7th July 1996 the RUC issued an order stopping the Orange Order from marching down the Garvaghy Road. Almost immediately Orangemen began to assemble at the parade's start off point. By the end of the first day the number of marchers had swelled to 5,000 and by the next morning had swelled even further. That same morning Michael McGoldrick, a Catholic taxi driver, was found murdered by loyalists, clearly intended as a grim threat to those living on the Garvaghy Road.

The Orange Order then called on their 'brethren' to make a stand with the men from Portadown. Violent Orange demonstrations broke out and disturbances were reported in Belfast, Carrickfergus, Armagh, Ballymena, Derry, Lurgan, Newtownards and Portadown. The RUC reports confirmed that a minimum of 75 main roads were blocked and 85 vehicles hijacked. Unionist MPs rushed to the support of the Orangemen and the two Unionist party leaders left the talks venue to stand with the Orangemen.

The RUC and British army did next to nothing to interfere with the mass upsurge of Orange disorder and took no steps to prevent thousands more Orangemen travelling to lay siege to the Garvaghy Road. In many

places it was the RUC who closed roads down and not Orange protesters. By Tuesday 9th July some 10,000 angry Orangemen had massed at Drumcree. Up to 1,000 Orangemen and loyalists cut off roads leading to Belfast's international airport. In Derry Orangemen, including the Unionist Mayor, blocked the two main roads out of the city while others blocked the Foyle bridge. The main port of Larne was blocked by a large crowd which included a Unionist MP. As the unrest spread the British government announced that it was bringing in another 1,000 troops which brought the total deployed to 18,500, the highest number since 1982.

On Wednesday the RUC released figures showing that from 7th July 87 people had been arrested and 339 plastic bullets fired in riot control. At the invitation of the Northern Ireland Office four churchmen, including the Catholic Cardinal Daly were asked to mediate. Rumours began to emerge that the British government was applying heavy political pressure on the Chief Constable to change his decision and allow the Orangemen to march. The rumours did not stop the trouble and buildings were burnt in Coleraine, Ballymena and Bangor. A Catholic primary school was set alight in Lurgan, Markethill was completely cut off by Orange roadblocks for four days while it was reported that the RUC were under strict orders not to intervene. David Trimble ruled out talking with the residents group on the grounds that one of them had a previous 'terrorist' conviction. A few days later it emerged that at the time he was maintaining he could not talk to 'terrorists' he was secretly in conclave with Billy Wright, the most notorious of the loyalist assassins.

By 10th July the Housing Executive was reporting dozens of Catholic families coming to them in search of emergency accommodation, many had had their homes petrol bombed. The RUC confirmed that over the period 600 families had been forced to leave their homes. Several dozen Catholic schools and churches were attacked and some were badly burned.

A meeting between the Northern Ireland Office and the Garvaghy residents group was convened for July 10th. The government informed the residents that there had to be a solution "*based on some Orange feet walking on the Garvaghy Road.*" That evening Cardinal Daly under advice from British and Irish civil servants intervened and a meeting was finally arranged between the Orange leaders and some spokespeople

from the Garvaghy group for the following morning.

That Thursday morning the residents delegation waited for two hours for the Orangemen to show. They never appeared. A telephone call from friends on the Garvaghy Road informed them that the Orangemen were already walking down the road. The rumour that a decision reversing the Chief constable's banning order had been taken some days ago by the British government proved to be true and the Orange leaders knew they were marching well in advance of the announcement. In an effort to clear the residents off the Road the RUC attacked with complete abandon and the open police brutality made a dramatic contrast with the kid gloves treatment of the Orangemen. In a matter of minutes hundreds of plastic bullets were fired at those blocking the road. When they reached the centre of Portadown the Orangemen celebrated as if they had won the battle of the Boyne all over again.

At 6 p.m. that evening a massive contingent of RUC and army sealed off the Lower Ormeau Road and adjoining streets, effectively curfewing the entire area. The following morning 200 members of the Orange Order led by a band from Scotland were escorted by the RUC down the road and because the march would be returning that evening an effective curfew was maintained on all residents and visitors to the area until late in the evening.

The oppression of the people of the Garvaghy and Ormeau Roads brought hundreds of nationalist youths onto the streets to confront the RUC. The police waded into the rioters with batons and plastic bullets. Only plastic bullets fired by the RUC are officially recorded and the record shows that in the period of Orange protests between 7th-11th police fired 662 plastic bullets. In the period of nationalist protest 5,340 were fired, eight times more. The riots in nationalist districts were in fact concentrated in a handful of places and caused a lot less damage to property than the widely spread and more destructive Orange riots. The most sustained bout of nationalist rioting occurred in Derry where 3,000 plastic bullets were fired at nationalist youths over two nights. Hundreds of youths were injured by plastic bullets and one man, Dermot McShane, was killed when he was run over by a British army Saxon. The RUC sent a riot squad of about a dozen into the Altnagelvin hospital and baton charged the relatives of some of the injured youths while dozens of youths started turning up at the Letterkenny hospital across the border.

The horrors of the summer did not provoke a storm of official and media protest, the official indifference marked a vivid contrast with the reaction to the breakdown of the IRA ceasefire. The Irish trades union leadership and their friends in organisations like the 'peace train' did not organise mass rallies to protest against sectarian bigotry. The British government refused to condemn the law breaking tactics of Trimble, in fact Major praised Trimble for his moderation! Mayhew declared that there could be no guarantee that the RUC would not be overwhelmed by some future Orange demonstration which was effectively an open invitation to the bigots to plan for their next victory. The spokesperson for the Irish government, Pronsias De Rossa "*sympathised with the predicament of the RUC, caught between two warring tribes.*"

In the nationalist parts of the six counties the largest demonstrations since the hunger strikes were organised to protest against the state and in its police force. On Sunday afternoon Gerry Adams addressed a mass rally gathered in West Belfast and an estimated 10,000 came out to a protest rally in Newry. Derry's Guild Hall Square was packed solid and the crowd was so large, perhaps 30,000, that it stretched back from Shantallow along the Strand Road as far as Clarendon street. Smaller rallies took place in north Belfast and in many of the small towns. Armagh and Strabane attracted the most people and there was also a sizeable rally at Dublin's Stephen's Green on Wednesday night and smaller ones in Monaghan, Dundalk, Drogheda, Sligo, Letterkenny and Shannon.

Accompanying the demonstrations was a deluge of letter writing and phone calls taken by newspapers and radio stations. For a couple of weeks the Irish News was replete with letters from SDLP supporters expressing fury at the conduct of the RUC. The anger was so strong that even people who were politically to the right of the SDLP demanded the immediate disbanding of the RUC: an ex-SDLP councillor on the Police Authority, Francis Rocks, said "*the Orange Order has finally flushed the RUC down the toilet....the RUC is no longer capable of giving a police service in Northern Ireland. I am calling for the disbanding of the RUC.*"

An editorial in the 'Irish News' questioned the value of participating in the talks process. The SDLP, feeling under intense pressure, convened an emergency meeting to decide what to do, and then did nothing. The SDLP did not pull the plug on the talks process mainly because they

had no need to, there was no political opposition from Sinn Fein calling for a withdrawal from the talks.

The tactics deployed by Sinn Fein in response to Drumcree two only served to assist the SDLP in defusing the mass protests. Sinn Fein's chief ploy was to try and aim the explosion of anger at pressurising the Irish government into re-opening the 'official doors' that had been closed to Sinn Fein after the breakdown in the IRA cessation and this was just what the SDLP had bargained on. Sinn Fein used the mass rallies to try and retrieve the token political unity of Irish nationalism. At all of the big rallies senior SDLP figures were invited onto the platforms to call for all party talks and for mutual understanding between orangemen and nationalists.

This of course was a literal application of Hume's equality of two traditions approach to conflict resolution. This began as a liberal sounding discourse for '*accommodating cultural difference*' but ended up placating a carnival of reaction. Working class people whether they liked it or not were allocated a fixed communal or cultural identity. No longer was Orange sectarianism to be seen for what it is, the political expression of naked sectarianism that keeps Catholics in an unequal position and reminds Protestant workers of the advantages they get from remaining loyal to the ruling class; rather it is to be welcomed and valued as the authentic expression of 'Protestant culture'. The result is that Protestants are abandoned en masse to the lead of the loyal orders.

The idea that there is a way out of the trap of identity politics - that Catholic and Protestant workers have a common interest as part of the Irish working class is abandoned. All the political methods of action and demands that should be applied to the Irish and British labour and trade union organisations are dropped. Where once civil rights were claimed for everyone, now communal rights are claimed for two sectarian tribes.

The fixation with all party talks even led Sinn Fein to help steer the residents groups away from sticking to a simple demand in favour of the re-routing of the most provocative parades, instead calling for face to face dialogue with Orangemen. The demand for talks with local Orangemen was intended to act as a stimulant to help bring about the all party peace talks Sinn Fein had been so desperately seeking. The call for local dialogue with bigots confused all those involved and distorted

the political rationale behind opposition to sectarian parades.

Worse still was the clumsy attempt to use the Drumcree and Ormeau situations to reconvene Reynold's wretched nationalist Peace and Reconciliation Forum which backed the unionist veto. The 'Irish News' reported "*Sinn Fein called yesterday for a formal resumption of the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation. The call came after a party delegation meet with the secretariat of the body which has suspended sittings since the IRA campaign resumed. Sinn Fein vice-president Pat Doherty said the work of the Forum was constructive. He also said that it was a stabilising influence on the peace process in times of crisis.*"

Instead of maintaining that orangeman would never willingly surrender their privileges to lord it over nationalists they encouraged the mistaken idea that they could be talked round and that Dublin could persuade the British to take the big stick to the orangemen. One of the worst practices pioneered by the post Hillsborough SDLP was running off to Dublin to seek token redress for British and unionist injustices and misdemeanours committed in the north. The SDLP pioneered the tactic that whenever the latest injustice was exposed in the north the SDLP would promise the victims to speak to Dublin about it.

The Irish government was expected to demonstrate the validity of a reformist strategy for nationalists by curbing a handful of the most openly provocative marches. What Drumcree proved was that they could not do it and that for the next umpteen years it would not just be the SDLP that would go banging on the doors of Dublin for token help, in all likelihood Sinn Fein would be there first. The faith northern nationalists retain in Dublin, after nearly 30 years of back-stabbing is nothing short of miraculous.

If Drumcree spelt out the dangers of Sinn Fein playing the reformist card, then the August loyalist march in Derry underlined just how far they would have to travel to catch up with the SDLP and keep in with bourgeois nationalism. At all cost a principled opposition to sectarianism had to be avoided. For the SDLP this meant resistance had to be defused and the loyalist marches had to go ahead. In Derry, John Hume held a series of 'negotiations' which led to bizarre scenes when republicans agreed to 95 per cent of the march route and actually accompanied the bigots on part of their ceremonies. For their part the bigots conceded next to nothing and later completed the rest of their

march on the walls of the city. They did this with the blessing of Hume who defended their right to express their cultural identity, that is sectarian privileges. The bourgeois nationalists had lowered their political sights so low that it now felt moved to stand up for the right of loyalist bigotry.

A couple of damning footnotes to Drumcree two are worth mentioning. Everything associated with Drumcree occurred after the formal commencement of all party talks. One obvious question worth making a big noise about was to ask to what extent the unionist parties had broken with the Mitchell principles? In fact at Drumcree the unionist leaders had driven a bulldozer through the Mitchell principles. Incredibly the only party to make much out of unionist breaching of Mitchell's principles was the Alliance party. Left utterly dependent on a talks strategy and a deal with unionism, the SDLP sided with the British and Irish governments and decided to turn a blind eye. Sinn Fein with a strategy equally reliant on talks followed the example of the SDLP.

The utter bankruptcy of Sinn Fein's strategy was revealed when they defended the right of the loyalist assassins to keep their place at the talks no matter how terrible the atrocity committed. In an issue of 'Republican News' (Jan 25th 1997) Sinn Fein went so far as to criticise the 'Irish Times' for suggesting that Sinn Fein wanted the loyalists out: *"Attempts have been made to misrepresent the position of Sinn Fein on the issue of the attendance of the loyalist parties. An editorial in the Irish Times on 14th January stated wrongly that the party was one with Paisley and McCartney in denouncing the continued presence of the political parties linked to the loyalist paramilitaries. With warped logic the editorial said Sinn Fein desperately wants justification for its own exclusion."* The article went on to restate Sinn Fein's true position, *"that despite the recent loyalist attacks Sinn Fein refrained from calling for or supporting, the expulsion of the loyalist representatives ."*

Throughout the present conflict the loyalist death squads have acted as auxiliaries to the state, using random sectarian killing as the first political method. The spokespersons for the Progressive Unionist Party, representing the UVF, are quite open in what they say today. They personally would prefer a break from the bloodshed and would like to see a political settlement and cross community co-operation on bread and butter issues. This is within the context of a loyalist ceasefire

conditional on the union with Britain being '*absolutely safe*.' In the event of the union staying absolutely safe they will personally express regret at sectarian killings but cannot guarantee that they will actually cease or that the sectarian assassin gangs will disband. Meanwhile they will continue to publicly represent the chief assassin organisations. Of course in the event of the union not being absolutely safe then the '*true remorse*' expressed for their murders will be replaced with sectarian butchery again.

They make great play out of a tired old theme within working class loyalism - rivalry with what they refer to as the '*fur coat brigade*.' They neglect to point out that the rivalry is based on unionist capitalists not being sincere enough about the common loyalist identity - keeping their distance from the dirty work while reaping the economic rewards. Some within the PUP, depending on the audience being addressed, claim to be socialists but only if they are free to stick with the 'what socialism means to me' variety - doing community work to broaden the working class loyalist base. Nowhere is socialism defined as the unity of the Irish working class built around a revolutionary or even a reformist socialist programme. The height of their ambition is to have share-outs for two different working classes with some minimal cross community co-operation.

New Labour, New Sinn Fein

The Sinn Fein leadership's explanation for the failure of the peace process was based on what they saw as John Major's dependence on unionist votes and an unsympathetic regime in Dublin. They looked forward to the elections in 1997 to sweep away the obstacles. What they hoped for from the elections was new Labour winning in Britain, Clinton staying on in America and a Fianna Fail victory in the south of Ireland. All three came to pass.

A mere two weeks after he was elected as British Prime Minister, Tony Blair rushed to Belfast to outline the principles by which 'new' Labour would be guided in conducting the peace process. His message was uncompromising. On all essentials the future would be continuous with the Tory past;" *My message is simple. I am committed to Northern Ireland. I am committed to the principle of consent. My agenda is not a united Ireland-I wonder just how many see it as a realistic possibility in the foreseeable future. Northern Ireland will remain part of the United*

Kingdom as long as a majority here wish.”

He outlined in advance the only possible outcome to the talks, “*None of us in this hall today, even the youngest, is likely to see Northern Ireland as anything but a part of the United Kingdom. That is the reality, because the consent principle is now almost universally accepted. All the constitutional parties, including the SDLP are committed to it, which means a majority of the nationalist community is committed to it. The parties in the republic are committed to it. The one glaring exception is Sinn Fein and the republican movement. They too, I hope, will soon come to accept that vital principle.*”

In a short speech Blair mentioned the principle of consent about eight times, he said he stood four-square by the Downing Street Declaration and he called on the Irish government to amend articles two and three of the Irish constitution. He took the opportunity to thank the loyalist death squads for their restraint - on a day when one of their latest victims was being buried. The one big departure was that he was opening up the talks doors to Sinn Fein provided there was a reinstatement of the cessation.

In the election in the north Sinn Fein called for an electoral pact with the SDLP whilst the SDLP and Fianna Fail pounded away at Sinn Fein with the slogan that a “*vote for Sinn Fein was a vote for murder.*” The new leader of Fianna Fail, Bertie Ahern, respected the integrity of the nationalist pact by intervening in the election with an article in the ‘Irish News’. Its content was summarised on the front page as “*Tell Sinn Fein no ceasefire no vote.*”

The new Secretary of State, Mo Mowlam, adopted a new ‘breath of fresh air’ meet the people diplomacy. The new language delivered the same result, on the 6th July the RUC moved in at dawn to attack the civilian population of the Garvaghy Road in order to support the ‘right’ of the bigots of the Orange Order to parade their supremacy. A leaked official document, ‘*a game plan,*’ showed that the British had decided weeks in advance that this would be their policy and all the handshaking and friendly talk was just new Labour spin doctoring. Mowlam had hoped to talk or bribe the loyalists into making some concessions but given that her predecessor had already made it clear that as far as the state was concerned Orange marchers were irresistible there was never any prospect of her succeeding.

The game plan was backed by the supposed independent head of the Parades Commission. It had also been hinted that there were possible financial handouts to the Order for good behaviour and the inclusion of Irish culture under the remit of the Parades Commission. The British genius for fostering sectarianism was being exercised once again. Irish culture was to be put on a par with sectarian bigotry which was to be funded directly by the state. One part of the British 'solution' to Drumcree was to tell the Catholics that they too could have their sectarian parade on St. Patrick's day and the Orangeman could therefore be free to have their sectarian parades. This was but a small taster of what a solution based on 'parity of esteem' of the 'two traditions' born out of the peace process would be like.

Sinn Fein called Drumcree three a test for new Labour. It turned out to be more of a test for Sinn Fein and it highlighted a seriously disorientated movement. There can be no doubt that the leadership expected a progressive outcome on the Garvaghy Road. All the talking had convinced them that the British would face-down the Orangemen. The leadership was completely taken by surprise by yet another RUC riot. Gerry Adams rushed back from a conference in Tralee to a chaotic rally on the Falls Road and assured the audience at least eight times that Sinn Fein was a republican party. The crowd's anger at Mowlam's betrayal was so palpable that it compelled Sinn Fein momentarily to call for mass opposition and open democratic debate about political strategy. For a couple of days Sinn Fein broke with the peace process approach, criticising the Dublin government and the trade unions for capitulating to Orange sectarianism.

Unfortunately before a promised public meeting to debate a different political strategy was held Sinn Fein had turned tail; debate was shut down and a bizarre 'no politics' session was conducted at the meeting which did take place. The same worn out line was trotted out and Sinn Fein's fatal attraction for Fianna Fail flared up again. What emerged was a call on Fianna Fail to get tough with the British. Fianna Fail's new party leader duly obliged, issuing a public statement saying he was "*disappointed with the British decision.*" Irish foreign minister Ray Burke pleaded with northern nationalists "*not to be hyper-critical of Mo Mowlam*"

So the vehicle for protest continued to be the narrowly based residents

committees. With no attempt to build a national solidarity organisation or appeal to workers, these committees are local expressions of the nationalist family and the local clergy are encouraged to play a leading role. Because they are evidently 'Catholic' committees this allows the craven leaders of organisations like the trades unions to keep their heads down and obscures the fact that Orange sectarianism is not just anti-Catholic but anti-democratic, anti-labour and exclusively sexist and therefore to be opposed by everyone. Despite the limitations, at least the demonstrations were on a firmer basis than in 1996 when the resistance was demobilised in favour of diplomacy. For a brief period mass action proved decisive, forcing the British and the Orange leadership into a half-time cancellation of a handful of parades.

Within a few days a new IRA cessation was announced. Rarely had the timetables of diplomacy and mass action been so at variance. The decision on a new cessation was too close to a raw exhibition of the sectarianism of the state for any genuine peace celebration to spontaneously materialise. The IRA described the grounds for its new cessation: *"The previous British government, under John Major, had imposed a number of blocking mechanisms or obstacles to prevent inclusive and meaningful peace talks taking place. The new British government moved publicly and speedily to address these issues. They removed the precondition of decommissioning, they set a time frame for substantive talks of between now and May next year, they made it clear that such talks would be substantive and inclusive when they were convened on September 15th and that bilateral meetings would start almost immediately after any announcement of an IRA cessation. They also gave public commitments to move on a series of confidence building measures."*

So the basis for the second cessation was that the roadblock of prior decommissioning had been lifted but this still left the encumbrance of the Mitchell principles and the IRA did not explain how it was going to deal with them. Whatever assurances the republicans believe they have been given on the decommissioning question, there can be no doubt that Mitchell retains potential to come back and haunt the leadership. The report commanded a commitment to exclusively peaceful means but it made clear that this did not extend to the state forces. It also insisted that those who agreed to participate in the talks abide by the outcome of the talks.

After a break for the British general election and a summer recess the negotiations formally resumed on 15th September. Thus, three years into the process Sinn Fein were finally admitted into the talks.

As they got underway the main worry the British had was with the parties that represented unionism. The DUP vowed to wreck the talks from the outside and were joined by the small party of UK Unionists. The British calculated that they could keep the process going without the approval of the 20 per cent or so that supports Paisley. A worry was that Paisley's campaign might reach into the ranks of the UVF/PUP and UFF/UDP and undermine their continued participation in the process. The DUP already had some success in breaking away some of the worst sectarian elements from the loyalist organisations. The followers of 'born again' Billy Wright reorganised themselves into the Loyalist Volunteer Force with an agenda encapsulated in the gable wall slogan "*yaba daba do any fenian will do*".

All this meant that to keep the unionists from walking out of the process not only had the end result of the negotiations to be a local assembly and a strengthened partition but also nothing of the reality of the day to day operation of the sectarian state had to change.

Events like the brutal murder of 25 year old Robert Hamill who was kicked to death by a mob of 30 loyalists near Portadown city centre in front of armed RUC men or the continual harassment of Lurgan man Colin Duffy were the most graphic demonstrations of this. The British meanwhile had more personnel in the north in a period of ceasefire than it did during the IRA campaign. Excluding the 7,000 RIR, the British army deployed 10,395 in September 1996 and 11,016 in September 1997. It has also used the IRA cessation to embark on a massive fortification operation costing millions of pounds and the number of formal complaints about harassment by state forces doubled in a year. The absence of a republican campaign allowed the underlying sectarianism of the six county state to be more visible.

None of this rules out the possibility of unionist opposition to the talks or its outcome, or of this opposition succeeding. That this is so is only tribute, once again, to their 'not an inch' programme.

Republican Strategy

The strategy of Sinn Fein is being cruelly exposed by the talks agenda and timetable because for the first time in three years they have had to unveil an negotiating hand. Up until the commencement of talks Sinn Fein had increased its support by highlighting the undemocratic nature of their exclusion from the talks.

With the reality of the negotiations a number of leading figures admitted that the process could not lead to an end to partition. Then Gerry Adams met the requirements of diplomacy by saying that their aim was "*renegotiating the union,*" and rallies were held to calm down rank and file concern by assuring them that the long-term aim was still Irish unity. In a telling phrase a spokesperson for Sinn Fein let slip that the Frameworks proposals were now their "*bottom line*" while the IRA played to the militant gallery by announcing that it had difficulties with the Mitchell principles which Sinn Fein had already accepted. The job was made all the more harder when Ray Burke, the Dublin representative at the talks, announced on a trip to America that Sinn Fein had accepted that the talks were not about ending partition but about getting something that everybody could live with. The fact that Burke was expressing the immovable position of Dublin was underlined when his replacement, David Andrews, in his first public statement reminded everyone that there would be no united Ireland in his lifetime.

For Sinn Fein there is no easy escape, no quick way back across no-mans land to the relative safety of the old republican trenches. Sinn Fein cannot break with the peace process without breaking up with the SDLP and Fianna Fail. Since it has taken at least a decade for Sinn Fein to build up these relationships and a similar one with corporate America it would be extremely difficult for the leadership to wipe the political slate clean and begin anew. This does not mean that a return to some version of armed struggle is completely ruled out. It makes sense for the republican leadership to keep that option open, not least to convince the rank and file that the movement remains incorruptible. It may also be appropriate at a certain point for imperialism not to press too hard on the surrender of weapons and to permit the IRA to retain some of its militant aura with the militants, all the better to keep them in check. Just as they did after the breakdown in the first ceasefire they

will not break politically with the parties of the Irish capitalist class.

The peace process was sold to the mass base as a mere political strategy that would involve no fundamental change of political principle and that could be easily dropped if things went wrong. It was given a chance to prove its worth by so many out of a growing realisation that the military strategy it was replacing had itself failed so badly to deliver any progress. But the new strategy is an equally defeatist one, built on the fatal ground of republicans being obliged to make more and more concessions to the SDLP and Fianna Fail in the interest of maintaining a supposed nationalist unity. Continued embrace of the nationalist family can only mean yet more concessions.

Old style republicans will be left behind and some might look to Republican Sinn Fein and the Continuity Army Council. However RSF are just as much part of the crisis closing in on republicanism as the mainstream republican movement. Decades more of armed struggle is no alternative and only a few will rally to the old banner. The peace strategy came into being to try and makeup for the inadequacy and failure of the armed struggle. This cannot of course succeed but returning to a failed armed struggle won't help either.

Those intent on another round of armed struggle have to explain how it is that an armed struggle can succeed now when in the past a more intense armed struggle failed? Are they saying they are now bigger, better armed and stronger than they were in 1972 and 1973 and that the 'Brits' are now weaker than they used to be? They also have to explain how they intend to win mass political support for a renewed armed struggle. They would certainly need to win more support than the Provisionals ever managed if any political progress is to be registered. How do they intend to win support in the south? How do they intend dealing with the strong moral opposition the Provisionals encountered when, for example, they shot dead two RUC constables in Lurgan? Even a newspaper like the 'Andersonstown News' with its strong nationalist sympathies condemned the killings without qualification. The killings demonstrated that another long war is not going to be backed by the majority of the nationalist working class.

Republicans have increasingly shifted their ground away from promising a united Ireland towards a reformist vision of a transitional process inexorably leading in one direction. Sinn Fein leaders increasingly talk

in vague terms of the 'logic' of the situation leading to unity. However 'situations' are made up of political forces and people, and we have made it abundantly clear that all the existing main forces are strongly in favour of partition.

The arguments put by Sinn Fein and others start with the crude and then go on to the sophisticated but both kinds are of little substance. The crudest one of all is one sometimes trumpeted by nationalist journalist like Tim Pat Coogan. This is the one that maintains that nationalists in the north will simply out-breed the unionists. Coogan has pointed to the rise in the number of Catholics to just over 40 per cent of the North's population. His ideas come straight out of the bottom drawer of right wing Irish Catholic nationalism. There is the automatic equating of religion with politics, that all northern Catholics share the same nationalist political loyalty when there are in fact numerous middle class Catholic unionists. Population projections are notoriously difficult to predict and may take decades to work themselves out. Factors like labour emigration in times of capitalist recession upset everything. In truth socialists have no time for basing political strategy on sectarian head-counting.

The key assertion made is that the enactment of cross border bodies with executive powers will unite north and south in pursuit of common economic interests and this in turn will lead to the political obsolescence of partition. Some of the proposals outlined in the frameworks hint at just such a process but the deal on offer to nationalists is an extremely dishonest one. Agreement to prop up a revamped British and unionist controlled assembly in return for some subordinate cross border bodies and a paper promise to guarantee parity of esteem.

On the other hand the reconstruction of Stormont would signal the achievement of a much greater unity between the British and unionists. It would strengthen the latter while incorporating the catholic middle class into a political framework which would institutionalise and deepen sectarian division still further. Its creation could only be the result of marginalising opposition to partition and its existence would have the potential to accelerate this marginalisation. By the appearance of a solution and democracy it would set back the unity of the whole Irish working class and strengthen imperialist control. For the British this control would be under less threat, would be more stable and secure and could be exercised at arms length from the increased

sectarian bitterness that would inevitably result. It would offer the British opportunities to save money on the subvention which props up the state. For those at the sharpest end, nationalist workers, sectarianism and repression could only get worse because Stormont has no function except to back the needs of bigoted unionism.

Such a deal offers nothing to Irish workers, in justifying and hardening partition it would fundamentally attack the most important political advance so far achieved. Since 1973 British strategy has aimed at re-founding some sort of remoulded Stormont. Although they failed in 1974, successive British governments have never dropped their long term strategic political goal. The frameworks proposals are simply another attempt by the British to realise a by now familiar goal.

In 1974 republicans and socialists united in their opposition to British plans. Today the situation has changed dramatically. Sinn Fein, caught up in a fatal attraction with the SDLP and Fianna Fail are easing the way for a British victory. The oppressed are being led up the garden path with hollow talk about a united Ireland by stages. They are being told that the wisest thing to do at this juncture is to accept an '*interim solution*.' Such an interim solution of course means first and foremost participation in a locally recruited Stormont and Sinn Fein denials of this integral component of the deal do not stand up. A new Stormont has been regarded as the cornerstone of any deal right from the start.

Even including Sinn Fein's cross border bodies no amount of clever word play can disguise the fact that there can be no possible political equivalence between a Stormont assembly and the sort of cross border institutions envisaged. There is no way that an ad hoc public policy orientated towards stimulating a greater degree of economic cooperation north and south can set in train a process leading to political unification. Irish bourgeois nationalism is deliberately exaggerating the potential for progress supposedly locked-up in cross border political institutions.

The case on behalf of cross border economic integration being trumpeted by Irish nationalism is supposedly modelled on the one long associated with the European Community. In the past three years Sinn Fein has also joined the chorus of propaganda. Once upon a time it said that "*The Single European Act would reduce a partitioned Ireland to a powerless part of a new kind of collective imperialism in Western Europe.*" Today

Sinn Fein is saying the complete opposite: "*Ireland should be considered an integrated single economy to maximise the benefits of membership of the European Union.*" By 1993 the party was insisting that the involvement of the British government in Ireland was a matter for the European Union. Sinn Fein's current policy is that post-Maastricht integration will be good for Ireland and a single market will supposedly spur on political unity. The pro-EU policy of Sinn Fein is now almost identical to the one long held by the SDLP, the only difference being that Sinn Fein still expresses reservations concerning some of the military implications of Maastricht.

There is little evidence to suggest that the Council of Ireland under consideration could imitate the integrating logic of the European Community but there is a good deal of evidence that it could do a lot of damage to the Irish working class. The first point is that the history of the European Community itself offers no solace to working class people. The sort of economic integration espoused by the Eurocrats remains a one way street, a capitalist integration in the interests of big business. Even the most respected pro-European historian of the European Community Alan S Milward admits that at no point in the past did the moral idealism '*of an ever closer union of peoples*' drive developments within the EU. His finding is that "*nation States, in order to advance important domestic policy objectives, choose to transfer sovereignty over certain policy areas to a common institution*" thereafter "*their principal national interest will be not only to define and limit that transfer of sovereignty very carefully but also meticulously to structure the central institutions so as to preserve a balance of power within the integrationist framework in favour of the nation-states themselves.*" (The Frontier of National Sovereignty.)

If the all Ireland institution follows the EU model then it will be bound by the 'domestic interests' of the parties north and south and by a 'balance of power' over final decision making in favour of the two national jurisdictions taken separately.

The overriding domestic interest in the south is in maintaining the economic boom. According to the London 'Financial Times' "*Ireland offers the foreign investor emerging market style growth with western European inflation.*" Or expressed in another way, Ireland offers foreign capitalists third world style profit rates without the political instability and threat that often accompanies a third world political location. The

policy to sell Ireland as a prime site for the foreign investor goes back to the late fifties but only with help from a privileged EEC membership has it really taken-off. From the late 1970's every Irish government has welcomed foreign capitalists, offering billions in tax breaks and subsidies to set up shop in Ireland.

Today, foreign owned firms account for over 30 per cent Ireland's output and over 40 per cent of its exports. In manufacturing, the figures are even greater with over 50 per cent of output and 75 per cent of exports. The flow of foreign capital now includes Dublin's International Financial Services Centre, with its four hundred banks and 600 pension funds. Two things threaten to jeopardise the flow of foreign capital, a working class revolt against capitalist exploitation or political instability spreading down from the north. The social partnership deals with the trades unions are designed to head off the threat from the working class, the peace process is designed to head off the second threat.

Dublin is interested in a deal in the north which guarantees the future political stability of partition. The Irish capitalist class has only a small economic stake in the north of Ireland and it trades less than 5 per cent of its exports across the border. In other words there are no ambitious economic interests in the south pressing to end partition. In any case most of the barriers to trade with the north went after the passing of the Single European Act. The northern market is already open to all of the southern based trans-nationals that dominate the southern economy.

The interests of capital in the north point decidedly away from a fast track fusion with the south. The north currently sends 54 per cent of its external sales to Britain and only about 4 per cent goes across the border. The economic interests of the north's capitalist class are also massively tied up with a dependency on the British subvention. The subvention (the difference between what is raised from local tax and what is spent by government) is now £3.7 billion. This results in an annual overspend of 27 per cent of regional income. Overwhelmingly, the subvention advantages the middle class. Of the 12 UK standard economic regions the North is the most socially unequal, the average industrial wage is 16 per cent below the British average. Mainly the subvention featherbeds the middle class, a class that enjoys the second highest level of disposable income of any UK region. A 1993 study by the Northern Ireland Economic Research Council (NIERC) found that

the average profit margin for companies operating in the North was a whopping 60 per cent higher than in the rest of the UK. According to NIERC the high profit rate stems chiefly from local companies taking advantage of government grants and subsidies. A report by two Strathclyde academics estimated that if the subvention was removed regional income would fall by at least 13 per cent. The middle class then, including the nationalist middle class, retains a pronounced interest in preserving the economic link with Britain.

All the nationalist talk about an nascent single island economy goes on with little reference to the underlying economic reality, a reality based on two separate capitalist economies grounded in massive inequalities and exploitation. There is no dammed up economic tidal wave just waiting to sweep away the legacy of partition. In the post Maastricht environment there are fewer and fewer institutional impediments standing in the way of business and trade. Capital takes profits wherever it can find them.

Across border body would add little horsepower to economic fusion. Of course this does not rule out some moderate economic convergence. If Britain and Ireland both enter the single currency then cross border trade would be given a small boost. However the economic consensus predicts that the introduction of a single currency will probably increase trade across the whole of Europe only by about 2 per cent. The truth is that the proselytising on behalf of the vacuous notion of cross border bodies originates not with economic lobbies north or south but political nationalism, especially from the SDLP. A cross border Council of Ireland has been a mainstay of SDLP policy from its foundation. For the SDLP it takes the place of a real united Ireland and excuses SDLP co-operation with imperialism. The political logic for a cross border body was summed up by former SDLP stalwart Brian Feeney, *"What the two governments have to achieve is an outcome which allows nationalists to bring Sinn Fein and their nutters along with them by convincing them that the road to a united Ireland lies open, paved and illuminated by EU grants."*

A cross border body would certainly help the SDLP play the green cultural identity card but there is no prospect of such a body eroding partition. All the official commentary on the frameworks proposal makes it very clear that the unionist controlled Assembly will be given the power of veto over every cross border proposal. As far as the

working class is concerned, a cross border body offers absolutely no benefits. The entire debate is conducted in the language of neo-liberal economics. The last thing Irish workers need north or south is a single currency or further economic penetration by foreign capital. It is not long ago that Sinn Fein argued that the Irish state was in fact a neo-colony, that is a state dominated by imperialism. The irony is that today the same party is beckoning foreign economic and political forces to Ireland in a desperate attempt to get international capitalism to do something they themselves failed to do, unify the country.

Crucially, British reforms have had little positive impact on the life experiences of the nationalist working class which will continue to suffer from sectarian discrimination, mass unemployment, welfare dependency, sub-standard housing and police oppression from the sectarian RUC. Large sections of the Protestant working class will suffer similarly and be more and more trapped by a political movement that promotes division while it is exploited. The return of a local assembly will only certainly make things worse. With the help of a local assembly the unionist parties will resist all efforts at progressive reform. The workings of the Council of Ireland will be bogged down by a unionist veto over every proposal. There is no prospect of the unionist parties agreeing to disarm the RUC never mind its disbanding. The threat posed by recalcitrant republicans will be used as an excuse to retain both a paramilitary RUC and extensive repressive laws. All of the unionist parties are still heavily committed to scrapping things like the fair employment laws and unionist party electoral rivalry will make playing the traditional sectarian card to win votes especially tempting

The talk of a peace dividend is largely mythical. There will only be a one-off injection of peace settlement money from the European Union and from the downgrading of security. There would have to be years of peace before any slimming down of the RUC would be allowed to begin. Even if the force was cut by half, around £500m would be released but a massive part of this would be taken up by long term redundancy payments. As for money from the EU, at the moment it transfers around £200 million annually to the North, about 6 per cent of the British subvention, so to make up for the British subvention the EU would have to increase its contribution by a factor of 18. To do this it would have to hand over to the North 25 per cent of its annual budget- No chance! In fact the European Commission is proposing to withdraw

the objective one grant status of both the north and the south of Ireland. This means that the north stands to experience an annual cut of around £250 million.

The sort of 'transitional settlement' being actively canvassed then is entirely dishonest. It is not being designed to lead to a united Ireland. It is intended to re-legitimise the British colonial partitioning of Ireland in 1920. Every step along the way of the peace process has ended up by signalling that the British have democratic right on their side. The Downing Street Declaration signalled that partition was sound because it was premised on majority consent. The Frameworks documents, in committing Dublin to the excising of articles two and three, signalled that the claim of the Irish people that sovereignty lay with them and not in Westminster was always an injustice against the British. The Mitchell report by ruling out any consideration of state controlled arms signalled that the British were defending a legitimate democratic order against an anti-democratic terrorist threat. The final instalment remains the hardest to deliver, the restitution of a unionist controlled political institution.

It was said that the British needed to get some Orange feet marching down the Garvaghy Road. What the peace process is about is getting Orange bums on Stormont seats.

Chapter 4

The Politics of Armed Struggle

The Peace process thrust the question of arms to the forefront of Irish politics in a new way. Who is entitled to bear arms, who controls arms, who is justified in using arms, what future for arms and many related questions are all vehemently disputed. Socialist Democracy right from the outset rejects any disarmament process based on an adherence to the British government's 'Washington three' plan, or its slightly modified version in the Mitchell Report.

The Mitchell report was sanctioned by the British government only on the condition that the weapons controlled by the state's armed forces were excluded from any review. It also ruled out looking at the thousands of legal weapons owned mainly by loyalists. Mitchell, by agreeing to conduct a review and then make recommendations without even a mention of the state forces, instantly made a mockery out of the notion that his recommendations could be deemed to be impartial. His actual report asked the British state to do absolutely nothing about its armed wing thus absolving it of any responsibility for the violence. The

very fact that the violent crisis has lasted so long should be suspicion enough that the six county state still does not enjoy the sort of democratic legitimacy which could turn a disarmament stipulation into a credible prospect.

In fact the widespread intimidation of thousands of working class people by the so called loyal orders in tandem with the sectarian police force during the summers of 1996 and 1997 merely confirmed the anti-democratic character of the six county state. Drumcree yet again exposed the ugly truth that when right wing unionism chooses that it is an expedient moment to reassert some mythical 'right' of 'Protestant' supremacy all the solemn British government declarations promising equality of treatment and parity of esteem for all counts for next to nothing. It was not so much the annual bigoted pageant staged by the Orange Order that was so telling about Drumcree, but rather of greater political significance was the state's use of violent force to clear a path for the Orangemen. The relish with which the RUC laid into nationalists protesters on the Garvaghy and Ormeau Roads, amounted to irrefutable evidence that the state is as sectarian and oppressive as ever.

Shortly after Drumcree II, a few British government statements permitted us an glimpse into the future by indicating that the government could not promise the basic safety of nationalists if the loyal orders kept with their traditions of supremacist marching. Government statements in the aftermath of Drumcree ninety-six, were not a plea to the loyalists to cease marching but rather a subtle demand on the protesters to prepare to desert the streets or expect a further round of brutality at the hands of an uncontrollable RUC.

In a BBC television 'Panorama' interview relating to Drumcree, when pressed to condemn Unionist politicians stoking up the sectarian inferno, prime minister John Major refused to utter a word against the Unionist leaders. Not only did he refuse to criticise unionist leaders like Trimble he made light of the events saying people should "*rise above these relatively minor matters.*" The "*minor matters*" included the murder of two Catholics, one by loyalists, the other by the British army, the firing of thousands of lethal plastic bullets, primarily at nationalists, 192 reported injuries, hundreds of families forced out of their homes and scores of churches and schools burned or damaged. As if to excuse British politicians, much newspaper comment at the time suggested that the government had good reason to unleash the RUC against the

people of the Garvaghy Road, the government feared a possible mutiny if the police were instructed to hold to the original decision to re-route the Drumcree march. But such excuses amount to no more than an unambiguous admission that the state is inherently sectarian. Instead of making a moral stand against the ways of loyalist supremacy the British rulers offered the victims of sectarian intimidation only the sop of a parades commission with a brief to try and convince abused nationalists that ninety nine percent of what the loyal orders get up to is really quite harmless, expressing the quirky ways of another culture. In short, the official government conclusion was that the nationalists were the makers of their own misfortune, they should not have provoked the loyalists. They were told by chief minister Mayhew to "*cheer up for goodness sake*". Drumcree 1996 was proof positive that the political character of the state remained sectarian and unreformed. Drumcree 1997 proved that new Labour was if anything, even more dishonest.

For many, Drumcree seemed like a throwback to the worst days of sectarian domination. In 1969 the six county state that formally recognised the democratic rights of everyone, was exposed by the civil rights movement to be the main force preventing masses of oppressed people in reality exercising even the most basic of democratic rights. Again some recalled the events in 1974 when under intimidation from a reactionary loyalist strike tens of thousands of workers both Protestant and Catholic were told by a British Labour government that the state was unable to guarantee a basic civil right like journeying out to get to work.

After the suspension of Stormont in 1972 people were told by parties like the SDLP that the bad old days of sectarian repression and privilege were numbered. Drumcree came as such a shock to many because they had managed to fool themselves into believing that continuous sectarian rule depended solely on the Unionist party maintaining their own separate parliament. The suspension of Stormont was certainly a big blow against sectarian domination. However because the state in the final analysis comes down to being an armed body of men in the service of specific class interests the real test for a package of measures needed to include the permanent dismantling of the security-repressive apparatus.

Since its foundation in 1920 Stormont survived under a repressive

battery of emergency powers and a sectarian police force financed by Westminster. The claim that direct British rule has largely reformed the north makes no genuine sense until the entire sectarian state service is dismantled. Drumcree heaped up a pile more evidence to demonstrate that British reform has flunked the most crucial test. The record shows that successive British administrations have never espoused a comprehensive programme of profound judicial and police reform. So despite the demise of the Unionist parliament in 1972, the sectarian security regime stayed intact and in reality was dramatically strengthened by direct rule. In 1969 the RUC numbered 3,044 officers and 8,581 'B' Specials. By March 1993 there were 8,352 full time RUC officers and 4,500 part time, plus 5,627 RIR and 12,898 British soldiers. There were 3,250 back up staff, hundreds of prison officers and an unknown number of intelligence operatives. The yearly bill to cover security had arrived at the £1.5 billion mark.

It is worth remembering today, at a time when we are constantly lectured about the requirement for disarmament how working class nationalists came to have arms in the first place. They desperately tried to arm themselves in 1969 and 1970 in a climate of fear and violence in order to defend themselves against loyalist and state pogroms. Drumcree showed that almost thirty years later the political condition that pertained then is still with us. The legal and security apparatus is still a political weapon geared up for defending a sectarian state and the sectarian privileges of its most bigoted supporters. There is still no evidence to suggest that the British ruling class have any plans to bring about a root and branch reform of the security regime.

The British parliament has had three decades to bring forward the much argued for reforms, three decades to show that the law is impartial, three decades to reform the police, and three decades to end discrimination. Drumcree illustrated how faint previous British efforts at reform in these crucial areas really were.

Experience teaches that the working class and oppressed have only one sure-fire way of securing their democratic rights; to take control over their own political destiny. This of course means not depending on the rulers or the state to make reforms from above but taking policing and legal authority into their own hands - politics from below. Politics from below logically entails the smashing of the sectarian state through mass political action.

Smashing the sectarian state is a task the IRA set for itself over 20 years ago. Today it is clear to almost everyone that the IRA failed and this failure has produced in many a revulsion against all talk about revolution and the growth of illusions that diplomacy spearheaded by something called the 'nationalist family' can bring about fundamental change. As we have seen there is no evidence for such a view but the seeming pointlessness of an increasingly militarist campaign had long ago shut off potential support for the struggle against imperialism in the south and confined it to a hard core in the north. The popularity of much of the peace process has been due to a revulsion against republicanism's military campaign.

It is the view of Socialist Democracy that the sectarian state can be overcome provided that a political strategy based on the application of socialist principles and tactics takes the lead. This of course implies a break from a political past dominated by the political/military strategy of republicanism.

Nationalism versus Socialism

The republican movement is in a headlong retreat as a revolutionary movement because imperialism came to the rescue of the sectarian state and has beaten the IRA military campaign into a corner. The republican leadership can see no way forward besides lowering the political goals of its campaign to merge with those long associated with the SDLP. In all sorts of ways Sinn Fein resembles the SDLP all the more as each day passes, appropriating wholesale the language and politics of constitutional nationalism, even being accused by the latter of political body-snatching its leader John Hume in its election campaign. The movement has long since dropped 'Brits out' as a practical or realisable demand. How is it that a once revolutionary movement has ended up in the desperate condition of looking for its future political inspiration from former enemies like John Hume and Albert Reynolds?

A principal reason why the movement failed to deliver on revolutionary change is that the republican movement always categorically rejected the methods of mass struggle and mass organisation associated with socialism and the working class in favour of the methods of individual struggle associated with revolutionary nationalism and the petty-bourgeoisie (small property owners and middle class).

The Irish republican movement traces its roots back to Wolfe Tone and his well documented sympathies with the French Jacobins, that most revolutionary layer of the middle class in a state of open revolt against monarchism and feudalism. In its heyday of conflict with imperialist interests (1916-1921) the most resolute Irish nationalists shared affinities with a tradition of anti-colonial nationalism with a Jacobin flavour, especially in ideology and class composition. All Irish historians agree that it was the revolutionary petty-bourgeoisie that was in the vanguard of the 1916 rebellion. Sinn Fein in 1920 boycotted the British parliament and organised an armed insurrection. Political boycott and armed struggle is what the rejuvenated IRA of 1970 had handed down to them from their republican forefathers as their main revolutionary weapons.

Writing about the Easter rising of 1916 Lenin said *"To imagine that social revolution is conceivable without revolts of small nations in the colonies and in Europe, without revolutionary outbursts by a section of the petty bourgeoisie with all its prejudices, without a movement of the politically non-conscious proletarian and semi-proletarian masses against oppression by landowners, the church, and the monarchy, against national oppression, to imagine all this is to repudiate social revolution."*

The purpose of Lenin's essay was to make socialists conscious of the need to stand alongside those democrats who fought for the principle of self-determination in general in the context of a fight against imperialism. Revolutionary Russia under Lenin was the first state to recognise Ireland's national democratic rights, and this in a context when America under Wilson supported the British. Lenin understood that the leadership of the Easter rebellion was in the hands of the middle class yet he still defended the legitimacy of its political struggle. Lenin set a precedent that was to be followed by most Irish socialists. Yet it is important to recall that in his comments at the time he never explicitly endorsed the republican recourse to armed rebellion as the essence of socialist strategy. He did not reinforce Connolly who once said of armed struggle that *"You never know if the time is ripe till you try. If you succeed the time is ripe, if not, then it was not ripe."*

In the same article Lenin wrote *"It is the misfortune of the Irish that they rose prematurely, before the European revolt of the proletariat had time to mature."* Socialists do not stand in the way of armed insurrections against imperialism but they certainly disagree with a military vanguard

strategy that believes that revolution is an entirely subjective act of will cut off from the objective mass struggle. Unfortunately the quote from Connolly tends to leave the impression that the process of socialist revolution is a subjective leap of faith. The authentic socialist understanding of armed insurrection is that it occurs as the explosive culmination to an objective process of rising class struggles; demonstrations, strikes, occupations, struggles that have enormously strengthened the political confidence and organisations of the workers and oppressed and weakened the unity of the ruling class.

The moment to begin an armed insurrection (as opposed to necessary armed self defence) is when a situation of dual political power has already developed. Dual power means mass disaffection from the state and the rise of alternative working class organs of political organisation which begin to take over the role of the state, such as workers control of factories and offices, policing and judicial functions. There is a ripe moment for armed insurrection and there is its opposite. Armed struggle is the severest form of political struggle directed against the ruling class and should never be undertaken lightly, if it goes wrong it goes disastrously wrong. If it is premature it gives the ruling class the perfect opportunity to invoke the whole panoply of emergency state powers and to invite imperialist assistance to crush the organisations of the exploited and working class with violence.

The republican movement because of its class character pursued its objectives with an inadequate understanding of armed revolution, greatly downplaying the objective process of mass activity in favour of the subjective will, courage and energy of a dedicated minority. Its strategy for revolution veered towards the conspiratorial and the construction of a small underground army. Political discussion and education were neglected, substituted for by military training and discipline.

The situation that exists in the north today and has existed since the foundation of the state means that armed action of an offensive nature can only be carried out by a few. Focusing energy on such action therefore immediately excludes, at best relegates, the organisation of the majority. When republican armed action is 'successful' it only reinforces the idea that real, effective action can only be achieved by those with the guns. When it results in mistakes, as it inevitably does, it demoralises those who seek to resist British rule and provides cover

for advances by imperialism. Either way it belittles the role of the working class in its own liberation and at the very best places as a secondary consideration their own self organisation

The Provisionals began life as a movement suspicious of politics and in a hurry to get back to the tradition of conspiratorial armed interventions. In other words it launched itself paying little attention to the objective social factors that lead to the crisis of Stormont rule and it seldom paused to take stock of the overall political situation. Today it is now being forced to pick up the tab for these failures.

Socialism and guerrilla warfare

When the Provisional IRA issued the first detailed statement explaining why they had broken with the Officials, five areas of disagreement were touched upon; 1) the ending of abstention and the recognition of legitimacy that this was deemed to confer on the Westminster, Stormont and Leinster House parliaments; 2) the failure to offer adequate protection to '*our people in the north*' during August 1969; 3) the controversy over the leadership's insistence that Stormont should be preserved; 4) the movement's tendency to '*an extreme form of socialism*' and finally 5) the methods used by the leadership to counter dissent through the expulsion of members who objected to the politicisation process.

The Provisional movement quickly recognised that a spontaneous movement intent on armed defence was gathering support after August 1969 and offered themselves as potential organisers. The newly formed Provisionals instinctively backed the right of those residing in oppressed communities to expel the sectarian forces of the state. Many youth sided with the Provisionals looking with contempt at the only 'socialists' they were acquainted with in the form of the Officials for their appeasement of the state forces. During the late sixties and early seventies the Provisionals had good reason to be critical of the disastrous influence of 'conservative socialist' (in reality Stalinist) influences over the left wing leadership of the Official IRA. On the occasion of the crisis of the Stormont regime the Official political leadership was heavily influenced by a world wide decaying Stalinist strategy of peaceful co-existence with imperialism.

Already in the mid-nineteen twenties the Stalinist bureaucracy in Moscow had attempted to impose a stages strategy upon the rest of the international communist movement. The apparent Soviet justification for this conservative strategy of 'socialism by stages' was not to give any of the belligerent imperialist powers a ready-made excuse to attack the Soviet Union. Another reason was to ensure that no alternative leaderships emerged within the international communist movement to challenge the dictatorial powers of the rising Stalinist bureaucracy centred mainly in Moscow.

The only way the Stalinists could achieve their goal of peaceful co-existence with world capitalism was to actively prove to the big capitalist states that the communist parties outside of the Soviet Union were no threat to the interests of world capitalism. This resulted in Moscow fastening conservative strait-jackets around as many of the working class parties of the left as would obey. To keep the Stalinists in Moscow in power the various national communist party leaders were instructed not to make trouble for the capitalist rulers, instead they should seek to dampen down workers expectations of socialism. The stageist dogma facilitated the defeats of revolutionary movements in China in the late twenties, in Spain in the thirties, in Germany in the thirties and in dozens of other countries after the Second World War.

In Ireland Stalinist dogma meant that civil rights had to be achieved within the six county area as a first stage before partition could even be questioned. The first stage in this rigid schema for political progress was meant to be civil reforms, followed by reform of partition to be followed by another stage of socialism in the whole of Ireland. The stageist dogma was of course out of kilter with the rebellious youth who in 1969 and 1970 were already in a state of unswerving revolt against the sectarian state. Most of those who rallied to the Provisionals in 1970 knew little about Stalinist dogmas. They simply observed that the few 'socialists' on the scene were deliberately constraining those determined to push forward.

So the Provisionals began life denouncing the socialists for holding back the struggle. All the angry young rioters were herded into a republican movement which looked back to revolutionary Irish nationalism for its inspiration. Back in 1970 the unambiguous IRA message that military action and not political speech making was the

fast track way to political freedom seemed just about right to many inexperienced youth.

The decision made by the Provisionals around 1969-70 to reject the schema of delaying struggle in the name of a non-existent gradual reform of the sectarian state was sound, however the leadership made a serious mistake in launching an offensive guerrilla war at a premature stage in the unfolding of the political crisis of imperialist rule. The first Provisional army council that met in January 1970 agreed that its first priority was to coalesce with those forces in the process of establishing community defence groups. In June 1970 they established a fighting reputation by repelling an incursion by several thousand loyalists into the Short Strand Catholic enclave in East Belfast. This proved to be a significant intervention because the British army which some believed had been sent to protect the Catholics in precisely such vulnerable enclaves went mysteriously absent at the time of the loyalist attack. Despite this initial valiant emphasis on defence Sean MacStiofain the chief of staff of the recharged IRA later revealed that it was never the plan of the new military organisation to stay as a mere defence force ; *“ As soon as it became feasible and practical the IRA would move from a purely defence position into a phase of defence and retaliation.”* By October 1970 retaliation meant a systematic bombing campaign.

Guerrilla means small war. In his manual on guerrilla warfare Che Guevara played down the meaning of the Spanish word guerrilla, stressing that the essence of guerrilla warfare is not captured by its smallness of scale. After all a guerrilla war is meant to escalate to the point where it can take political power. Che's guerrilla warfare is a political designation, the struggle of the mass of the workers and oppressed people against imperialist rule. In an article entitled *“Guerrilla warfare: A Method”*: he says that *“ those who want to undertake guerrilla warfare...forgetting mass struggle, implying that guerrilla warfare and mass struggle are opposed to each other. We reject this implication, for guerrilla warfare is a people's war; to attempt to carry out this type of war without the population's support is the prelude to inevitable disaster. The guerrilla is the combat vanguard of the people... supported by the peasant worker masses of the region and of the whole territory in which it acts. Without these prerequisites, guerrilla warfare is not possible.”*

For Che, guerrilla warfare in the countryside was the surest and most realistic way to create a people's national liberation army. In his writings we find a series of economic and military arguments to justify

the special role of armed struggle. In underdeveloped countries, where the majority is still dependent on agriculture for economic survival there exists terrible inequality and super-exploitation of the rural labourers. Such is the human materials from which the people's army is formed: *"The soldiers who formed our first guerrilla army of rural people came from that part of this social class which was most aggressive in demonstrating love for the possession of its land."* At the level of military strategy the countryside is the terrain most favourable to a guerrilla war; it offers the most security, a wider area for manoeuvre, areas for retreat, hiding places, places for rest. A war in the countryside is aimed at expelling government writ from important territorial zones and establishing dual political power on a territorial basis. However even in Latin America the experience of guerrilla warfare has been generally one of defeat. The victories in Cuba and Nicaragua were the exception and rather than determine what these exceptional circumstances were others have simply tried to repeat the guerrilla experience and suffered devastating defeats in the process.

In Ireland a social base composed of mainly rural poor from which the Cuban peoples army was created was of course absent. But that taken by itself could not make any sort of armed action inapplicable. Occupied France (and other European nations) during the Second World War was not a peasant society yet the resistance used guerrilla tactics against German imperialism. Of course the exceptional and in many ways unique circumstances of this particular case must be appreciated. The point is that socialists must take into account not just the economic background but all the features of the particular society, the state of the class struggle, the degree of political crisis and that any proposed guerrilla struggle should be made entirely subordinate to the political task of creating a mass revolutionary movement of the working class and oppressed. In other words the liberation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself and in Ireland any credible guerrilla struggle could not involve the whole or at least a majority of the oppressed class. This is our primary objection to guerrilla struggle as an overall strategy, as it has been undertaken by the republican movement, but it does not rule out in principle any and all armed activity. Socialists appraise the armed activity of the republican movement in relation to these considerations, including the strengths and weaknesses of imperialism and the working class and the strategic political task of winning over the mass of the Irish working class to support for a revolutionary programme and party. The question

socialists must consider above all others then is, what effects does the IRA campaign have on the political task of creating a mass revolutionary movement in Ireland, has it facilitated this or been an obstacle making it more difficult? While it has for many been an example of courageous resistance, as a strategy for defeating imperialism it has been a failure and led those who sought such a goal up a blind alley and finished up causing so much exhaustion that a rotten peace process feels like a relief.

As we have said socialists should not oppose armed activity as if it were a course of action in principle totally at odds with working class socialist politics, rather we should insist that it be kept subordinate and instrumental to the creation of a mass political movement. This means that we in Socialist Democracy do not agree with a republican position that espouses offensive armed struggle as if it was an absolute or natural right. It leaves, and has left, the republican movement open to the charge that it has no mandate and therefore no right to wage war on behalf of the Irish people since the vast majority do not support its war. What, of course, any section of the oppressed has is an absolute right of self defence, using arms if and when necessary. Such a right of self defence cannot be subject to the veto of anyone else, even other sections of the class. Unfortunately the republican movement have not viewed, or conducted, their military activity in a purely defensive way but very quickly saw armed struggle as the spearhead of an offensive that would end British rule.

From the right of self defence comes the socialist view that we do not support a ceasefire which necessarily (if it is honest) means rejecting the right of self defence and accepts the capitalist states' monopoly of armed force. This does not mean having to choose between a ceasefire or the continuation of a more and more sickening military campaign. We call on the IRA to subordinate its military capacity to the political needs of the resistance to imperialism.

For socialists the resort to arms is a tactical part of political calculation which must never be allowed to stray free from a detailed consideration of the concrete political context by a political leadership that is democratically accountable to an oppressed class. The right time to consider launching any kind of offensive armed struggle, more properly understood as an insurrection, is when the elements which go into creating dual political power have already fallen into place .

Stunted National Liberation

As we can see the guerrilla struggle conducted by the IRA should be criticised not from the right but from the left. The problem with the IRA campaign is that their leaders have never felt compelled to legitimise their armed campaign by subjecting it to the democratic tests of open debate and attempting to win mass Irish working class support for it. Even Sinn Fein no longer provides any justification for armed struggle or any arguments as to its effectiveness or necessity. For the most part IRA activity is left without any political explanation at all.

Traditionally the IRA has justified itself in the following terms: *“Our movement bases itself on Ireland’s National Rights, the right of the Irish people to the ownership of Ireland...That is the main basis on which we rest our case. We also rest it on the natural and historic right of resistance to British rule .”*

Occasionally the Sinn Fein leadership can be heard saying that the republican movement only uses armed struggle in a tactical sense *“However, armed struggle is recognised by republicans to be an option of last resort when all avenues to pursue freedom have been attempted and suppressed. We do not employ revolutionary violence without being able to illustrate that we have no recourse to any other means.”* If this were true then it would tend in the direction of meeting some of our left criticisms. But the record of the IRA does not substantiate such a claim. The fact that overall authority within the republican movement is unambiguously trusted to the Army Council, also tends to prove that the use of arms is more than tactical, it is claimed as an abstract right. If it was otherwise with the IRA there would now exist a record of open political debates charting the changing political contexts and the relevance of the use of arms. The record shows something quite different; for a long period the armed struggle was carried out without democratic political debate and almost automatically. The most recent ending of the IRA ceasefire came like a proverbial bolt from the blue, even catching most Sinn Fein members by surprise. Its subsequent reinstatement reflects a further collapse of the traditional republican programme in favour of more open reformism. For socialists armed struggle is a purely tactical intervention, by contrast republicans have declared it to be either a right or the very substance of revolutionary

strategy. When in the past it has been dropped it has meant the effective end of the particular organisation as republican in any sense. It has proved impossible for republicans to abandon or modify their armed activity without ceasing to be republicans. In short no armed struggle, no republicanism.

For socialists the key point about making the armed wing subordinate to the political party is that this is the only relationship that allows for a constant assessment of the political context and for an honest and realistic appraisal of the political usefulness of armed activity. The party is the mechanism for preserving that mass democratic spirit that is of the essence of any revolutionary movement. The party needs to be in control so as to ensure that the armed wing functions as an organic part of the democratic mass movement. The supremacy and faith republicans invest in the Army Council is a comment on the non identification of republicanism with the working class and at the same time a pointer to the real class identification of the movement; the petty bourgeoisie. The IRA claims to be above classes through representing the whole nation or oppressed community but what it actually does do is refuse to challenge the power of capitalism. This inevitably means ignoring the struggles of the working class while having to make accommodation to the powerful in society. This is why socialists characterise the republican movement as politically petty bourgeois or middle class. Not because sociologically its membership is middle class, in the north especially they come from the poorest communities, but because its political programme fails to identify with that of the working class. Its organisation is not linked in any organic way to Ireland's labour and trade union movement. In fact the emotional sympathies of the majority of leading Irish republicans have always been expressed as support for the small independent Irish property owners and politically for the biggest capitalist party, Fianna Fail. Those more famous republicans who in the past discovered an interest in socialist ideas usually ended up having to leave the republican movement.

The type of armed struggle organised by the IRA has never been a mere instrument, something without class affiliation "*The IRA which came into being in the bullet swept streets of Dublin in 1916 is the same IRA, fighting in the same cause, as that which confronts British rule in arms today.*" The IRA green book stresses the "*direct lineal succession with the Provisional Government of 1916, the first Dail of 1919 and the second*

Dail of 1921." In other words it honours the men and women who attempted to bring about Ireland's capitalist revolution. Of course a fundamental problem republicans refuse to face up to is that all of the political parties of the Irish bourgeoisie detest the IRA.

Contrary to present day republican claims that today's IRA is the same as that of 1916 and the Tan War, in one extremely significant respect it is not. A big difference between the IRA of the 1920's and now is that today's IRA specifically outlaws armed activity against the forces of the southern state. After the defeat in the civil war it was precisely the main objective of the anti-treaty IRA to prepare for a 'second round' against the Free State. Today the idea of the IRA taking on the southern state establishment seems absurd but this simply shows the change. Of course socialists do not advocate that the IRA engage in armed attacks on the southern state although for us it is an exploitative, repressive capitalist state like any other. We are for its destruction as we are for the destruction of the northern state. The point is that for a movement that believed that only armed struggle could deliver change the abandonment of such action meant the abandonment of change to the southern state. In other words the outlawing of armed action against the southern state and now the elevation by republicans of the southern establishment to leadership of the nationalist family demonstrates that not only can republicans not claim to be socialist but that they have half accepted the partition settlement of 1920, the part the IRA of the 1920's thought had to be tackled first. A movement that treats the southern establishment as an ally when from the start it has been a political enemy, that cannot even properly identify its real enemies, is engaged in a struggle it will never win.

The circumstances of the birth of the Provisional IRA meant that this key lesson was not understood. The Provisionals emerged out of a context of revolt and community defence but quickly went on to the offensive. This offensive was bound to make little headway because nationalist ideology blinded its followers to those class interests that over the long-run determine all political choices. The IRA launched their offensive believing that their struggle would be backed by all class support in the twenty-six counties and that the British rulers had little interest in putting up much of a fight to keep the six counties as part of a dying colonial empire.

In order to rectify the drastic failure that emerged in 1969 when the IRA was caught unprepared for the crisis, the Provisionals began a frenzied search for arms. The first place they looked was just across the border. For a time it appeared that influential figures within the Irish ruling class were prepared to provide the armed rebellion in the north with material assistance although this was done to minimise the radicalisation in the north and confine it to there. The Provisionals took encouragement from gestures of support from the south and hastily deduced that a successful armed campaign could be orchestrated from the south. It was decided that the 1958-62 border campaign had failed not because of lack of working class support or because of repression from the Free State but mainly to a lack of enthusiastic fresh recruits. Many republicans actually believed in 1970 that the Free State would turn a blind eye to the IRA organising an armed campaign against British rule in the north.

A great deal of Irish history had to be forgotten by those who thought that the Irish capitalist class was ever going to back a republican led armed rebellion in the north. The Irish state was founded with the express purpose of smashing what remained of the republican movement. The early Provisional movement quickly lost any effective support from the ruling class in the Free State. The Provisionals did not judge the lack of political support in the Free State as a cause for reflection, they carried on regardless, winning mass political support in the south was not regarded as a key political task to be overcome. They decided that they were getting all the recruits they needed to take on and beat the British forces in the north. In concentrating almost exclusively on a military struggle the Provisional movement neglected the key political tasks of building a mass movement, a political party and raising the political consciousness of what limited support they had in the north. What was created then was not a peoples liberation movement but a stunted version of one.

Military strategy and Political illusions

We argue that before appraising the actual logistics of the IRA armed struggle it is important for socialists to arrive at a proper political characterisation of the type of struggle being fought. For us the republican movement has been fighting a war for national liberation but one which is deformed, deformed by the social reality that it has

never enjoyed majority working class support. Such a handicap does not automatically degrade the IRA to the status of 'individual terrorists.' Individual terrorists are small groups of armed conspirators without any social roots connecting them to a layer of oppressed people. The IRA draw their support from and are sustained by the most oppressed section of the Irish working class. The IRA campaign has certainly been politically deformed due to the fact that active support has been confined to a minority of the Irish working class but for the most part it has not degenerated into individual terrorism. This is not to say that some of its tactics have not been totally removed from the support it does enjoy. This is true of its campaigns in England which enjoy zero support from British workers and are totally alien to British workers own class struggle or to the task of winning them to support the demand for Irish self-determination. It is our opinion that those socialists who have been utilising the language of individual terrorism to describe republican violence have in effect covered up the real cause of conflict in Ireland - British imperialism. They do this while they refuse to support the democratic demand for self determination.

The IRA 1970-1977

It is possible to observe at least two distinct tactical developments within the range of IRA military strategy. One stretches from 1970 until about 1977 and the other from then until the advent of the peace strategy in 1989. By the mid seventies the IRA had effectively ended their military offensive and were into a headlong retreat. The so called peace talks that occurred during that period contribute good evidence suggesting such a precipitous political and military retreat. In 1972 and in 1975 the leadership of the IRA met with the British government to press for three demands. For a British declaration acknowledging the right of the Irish people to self-determination, a commitment to withdraw from Ireland by a specific date and a general amnesty for all political prisoners in Britain and Ireland. The IRA entered both sets of talks with exaggerated expectations and ended them in a state of disarray. The military after-effect of the 1972 and 1974 talks was that the IRA continued to fight but more to offer resistance than to win.

It has been noted before that the republican military strategy has been constructed not with interim objectives setting out the clear steps by which victory was to be achieved but simply a series of adaptations that

allowed it to continue. Not being beaten became the substitute for a strategy for winning. This is why republicans are fond of quoting the aphorism that it is not those who can inflict the most but those who can endure the most who will ultimately succeed. The strategy of resistance simply reflects the weakness of an armed struggle based on a small minority of the Irish working class. Having to endure the most has now led to exhaustion and disillusionment with the IRA campaign and to the popularity of the idea of an end to struggle. Not only can imperialism inflict the most militarily it can endure the most as well and with no clear road to victory no wonder support for armed struggle remained confined to a small minority in the north.

All this was not immediately apparent to the republican leadership. Pausing today to scrutinise a typical IRA publication dating from the nineteen seventies is to return to a world of tragic delusions. The IRA declared 1972 to be the year of victory. In 1974 victory was just one step away and in 1977 the IRA said :*"We are now confident of victory as we face the final phase of the war with England,"* the republican press was replete with similar pronouncements in the seventies. The strategic republican political analysis for most of the period is best indicated by an article from 'Republican News' in June 1973 *"The Brits are beaten....and final victory is within our grasp...Britain is the sick man of Europe. Her economy is virtually bankrupt, her Tory Prime Minister tries to encourage his unfortunate citizens not to see themselves as the fifth rate power they are....Britain cannot afford the money, the humiliation and the public shame she is perpetrating here...she can get out now on our terms and that means unconditional surrender on her part because she cannot maintain this police state forever...Britain is a paper tiger ."* As for the IRA *"The world recognises that the Provisionals are the greatest guerrilla fighters the world has ever seen...The people have the strongest, most admired and most respected guerrilla force in Europe."*

In June 1972 the IRA began the ceasefire in confident mood. On 7 July William Whitelaw the secretary of State met with a republican delegation that included Seamus Twomey, Sean MacStiofain, Daithi O'Connell, Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness. The republican delegation went to the talks labouring under the misapprehension that the British wished to talk about withdrawal. The suspension of Stormont three months earlier had induced a false sense of perspective within the minds of the republicans. It was thought that because the British were prepared to talk to the IRA this could be taken as indication enough to

suggest a willingness to acquiesce to republican political demands. The republican supposition that the British were ready to discuss withdrawal proved to be utterly mistaken. The British were in fact half-seriously hoping to persuade the Provisionals to ditch talk of a Republic and give their backing to a reformed six county state.

By the summer of 1972 the British were also planning a military crackdown against the no-go areas. The talks in fact were used to lull all those living in the no-go areas into a state of political docility before a hard military crackdown was initiated. The talks occurred despite republican promises to others that no talks would take place with the British whilst internment lasted. They therefore left the door open for the SDLP to manoeuvre their way back into attempts to make a deal with the British. British ministers at the time were also wise to the need for some political encouragement to the SDLP and Irish government so that they were prepared to meet the expected expressions of regret after any the bout of military repression. The sop was constructed around the rhetoric of how the British government only took to a stronger military offensive after they had bent over backwards to bring "*the men of violence into the political process.*" All the participants at the Whitelaw talks now concur that he offered the IRA little, other than the promise to pass the demands of the IRA up the political tree to the cabinet for further discussion.

On July 31st 1972 the largest British military operation since Suez, Operation Motorman was let loose against the no-go districts. In a massive show of strength (4,000 extra troops were drafted in bringing the total to 21,000) tanks and troops smashed down the barricades. The destruction of the barricades was a strong signal that the political tide was about to turn against the insurgent population. In one instance the political authority of the sectarian state received a massive boost. Behind diplomatic closed doors the British toasted Motorman as a massive political victory. One pro-British military analyst later made the assessment that: "*Motorman represented a decisive blow against the PIRA. Not only did the Provisionals lose the propaganda value of the no-go areas which often took on the appearance of PIRA mini-states, but, more importantly, the movement's operational capacity was severely reduced. These areas were a considerable military asset. They provided the provisionals with safe havens from where they could mount operations and remain effectively immune from the security forces. The no-go districts were also the crucible of a great deal of low level violence; which*

did much to keep the city areas in turmoil. Motorman also broke up the hard core of the PIRA operatives in Belfast and Derry, most of whom were dispersed into the countryside or over the border. The attacks fell sharply. In comparison with the three week periods before and after Motorman, the statistics show a decline in explosions from 180 to 73, shooting incidents declined from 2,595 to 380 and the number of soldiers killed fell from 18 to 11. Thereafter the rate of violence continued to decline in absolute terms slowly over the next few years.” (M. Smith-‘Fighting for Ireland’)

The loss of the no-go areas came as a hammer blow to destroy the political prestige of the six county revolt. Having a patchwork of working class districts out of bounds to British law and order was of much more political importance to the mass movement than it was to the military minded IRA. It gave the movement self confidence and international prestige. The British needed to convince the rest of the Irish and British people and the international community that the struggle in Ireland was not political, that it was the British sword of justice against a terrorist few or even better a criminal conspiracy. The no-go areas were a living, breathing political statement refuting the British lies. The no-go areas helped the revolt in other ways too. Behind the barricades people could become accustomed to ruling themselves, they could learn political skills and experiment with new ideas. The no-go areas also made it difficult for the Catholic church and the SDLP to exert authority as most of the normal middle class notables were on the other side of the barricades. The barricades were also the best solution for undermining the morale of the RUC and for thwarting the loyalist death squads.

The no-go areas were not what socialists refer to as dual power. They were opt-outs from the state, in so far as this was possible, rather than a direct challenge and potential replacement. The centralised functioning of the state was not going to be overthrown by the no-go areas nor was there any ambition or ability to take control of the economy. Advancing beyond the no-go areas was therefore not a question of their territorial extension but of igniting a genuine revolutionary process in the rest of Ireland. For all that they were extremely important, they highlighted an example of genuine working class self organisation.

Unfortunately the IRA did not identify the no-go areas as being first

rank political assets. When the attack was mounted against the no-go areas only nominal resistance was mobilised within the areas. In his memoirs Whitelaw mentions how "*we succeeded beyond our wildest dreams*". The sort of resistance Whitelaw feared most came not from the guns of the IRA, rather it was the threat of mass street opposition. He recalls sitting with his advisers late into the night in a state of high anxiety, concerned "*that the population as a whole would be instructed to obstruct the entry of troops by mass demonstrations and even by actually lying down in the streets in front of armoured vehicles.*"

In reality the British military did not have to face down any mass demonstrations. In part this was due to the fact that there was no political leadership ready to set about organising it. It goes without saying that the Catholic Church and the SDLP were fiercely opposed to the existence of the no-go areas. The republicans had little time for organising political opposition, they believed they held the only effective instrument. On 21st July (Bloody Friday) the IRA exploded 22 bombs in Belfast city centre, killing nine people and injuring scores of others. The bombing provided the political cover the British needed to trigger the planned operation against the no-go areas. It also had a politically disarming effect on any potential mass resistance to the occupation of the areas. Many people concluded that the no-go areas were being kept going for no clear political purpose. They were merely serving as launching pads for IRA bombing raids which sometimes resulted in atrocities. In truth the bombs of the IRA helped make Motorman into a roaring British political and military success.

It seems that the IRA did not view the twin setbacks of 1972 (talks and Motorman) as decisive, for how else can the events of 1974 and 1975 be explained? The IRA still believed that the balance of force was still very much in their favour. In May 1974 'Republican News' ran a front page exclaiming "*English withdrawal date 31 December 1974.*" The paper talked up the prospects for an early British withdrawal "*As England totters towards economic collapse and bankruptcy she must cut every conceivable cost. The last outposts of empire are to be abandoned and with Cyprus, Malta and Singapore, Ireland is also to be evacuated.*" The IRA had somehow convinced itself that the backlash from its bombing campaign in England and the recession in the British economy had combined to create a momentum toward British withdrawal. A month into the truce the Easter message declared "*Our military action had the desired effect. The British government*

indicated a willingness to give serious consideration to the three basic demands of the republican movement.”

On February 9th 1975 the IRA inaugurated an indefinite truce to facilitate secret political negotiations with British officials. If we are to trust to the account of republican leaders the British made verbal agreements with them promising withdrawal. However by November 1975 the IRA was back at war again, the “*Brits never kept their word.*” Gerry Adams proffered an opinion that “*The British government used bilateral truces with the IRA to gain the upper hand, to cause confusion in Republican ranks and to introduce new strategies. It has never engaged in a truce with the serious intention of considering or conceding the Republican demands. In particular, the lengthy truce of 1974-75 was used to push ahead with the Ulsterisation - criminalisation policy.*”

A lengthy period of IRA military inactivity and political confusion in 1975 afforded the British precious time to plan an intensification of the offensive they had started in July 1972. During the period of truce, the British came up with the offensive programme as outlined in the Bourne and Gardiner Reports. One departure was that the sectarian RUC was returned to the front line war against the resistance. This proved to be an astute tactical ploy by the British because it greatly reduced the number of politically sensitive British army casualties, from 58 in 1973 to 28 in 1974 and 14 in 1975. By 1992 and 1993 it was 3 and 4 respectively. Fewer army casualties inevitably led to more concentrated IRA attacks on the locally recruited RUC. The British and Unionists weren't slow to make maximum political capital out of IRA attacks on the RUC, portraying them as sectarian and anti-Protestant. Accelerating police primacy left the IRA fighting a provincial war that lent credence to the political propaganda that the conflict in Ireland was primarily an internal civil or ethnic one, with Britain acting as the peace-keepers.

The long-term political import of the Gardiner report was a British attempt to cover up the democratic injustices propelling the conflict in Ireland. Ironically it was the introduction of the criminalisation policy that belatedly pushed the republican movement into some serious political thought and activity. They discovered that countering criminalisation could not get very far by simply killing prison guards and judges. Some serious thought had to be given to political campaigning and organisation.

The 1975 truce brought with it an erosion in the normal IRA security routines. The breakdown in IRA routines was used by British intelligence to gather information and collect evidence to take to the courts. In just five months 400 people were charged with IRA related offences. The truce, combined with the new policies of Ulsterisation and criminalisation led the IRA to the brink of extinction. Mason's later boast, that by the end of 1975 he had the IRA by the throat was later admitted by some senior republicans to have been not very far from the mark. By 1976 a fresher republican leadership recruited initially from the six counties, was accusing the standing leadership of gross political negligence and military failure.

The rising northern leadership established their claim to lead by steering the IRA back from the brink. They realised that the Dublin leadership had lost touch with both political and military reality. They also identified one immediate cause of what was dragging the IRA down as its inadequate internal security. It was believed that British intelligence had used the truce to recruit informers and that informers were a terrible rot destroying the IRA. It was also believed that the traditional army structure based as it was on large open battalions left the army vulnerable to police penetration. If one volunteer was turned then he or she had the knowledge to implicate dozens of others belonging to the same battalion, one arrest easily set off more arrests like a domino effect. The first moves to stop the rot began with the creation of a northern command in late 1976 to centralise control. At least one GHQ staff report was produced recommending that the army should move to a cell structure and slim its numbers to a much smaller organisation. It is generally recognised that the reorganised IRA that came out of the late seventies rethink prevented outright decay. There is evidence to show that the number of arrests declined and the proportion of successful missions went up.

The most important message concerning the change-over to a cell structure was not comprehended. The reorganisation had been forced on the IRA because the struggle was in retreat. The partial success of the reorganisation was questionable because it only prevented an outright defeat. A much smaller IRA presented the incoming leadership with an exacerbated political problem. How could a stripped down force of some three hundred volunteers take political control at the point of a gun? The strategic advantage of maintaining a large guerrilla army is

that it allows for an escalation of struggle, if the IRA was ever to force terms on the British the volunteer army needed to get bigger not smaller. From here onwards IRA numbers were going in the wrong direction. The new leadership was therefore faced with the awkward task of redefining the political goal of its armed struggle. The IRA was too small to envisage military pressure leading to British political capitulation. The IRA's limited firepower could in no way make good its central political demands.

1977-1988: The Long War

The new more political driven leadership of the IRA were faced with the problem of making the military campaign run alongside and cohere with a turn towards politics. Yet the new leadership came to prominence promising that the military campaign would continue to be the "*cutting edge*." However the objective political reality was that the armed struggle had already proved to be inadequate during a period when it had been prosecuted with greater intensity. In the period after the military reorganisation the numbers of IRA related killings, shootings, and bombings all declined markedly. To rationalise the changing circumstances the idea of the long war was devised. "*We are committed to and more importantly geared to a long war.*" The schema of long war kept the military campaign central to republican strategy whilst at the same time acknowledging that the armed struggle in itself could not get the British to accede to core republican political demands. The long war made room for politics and an expanded role for Sinn Fein without jeopardising the myth of the power of the IRA. The Army Council would also continue as the ultimate decision making body.

It took a few years for a formal political definition of the role of armed struggle to emerge from the pens of the new leadership. It was summed up by Gerry Adams: "*The tactic of armed struggle is of primary importance because it provides a vital cutting edge. Without it, the issue of Ireland would not even be an issue. So, in effect, the armed struggle becomes armed propaganda. There has not been, at least not yet, a classic development from guerrilla action to mass military action registering territorial gains, instead armed struggle has become an agent of bringing about change.*"

No longer was armed struggle the unstoppable machine that sent the "Brits" packing, it was armed propaganda, kept Ireland as an issue, set the agenda, and was an agent of change. The use of arms for propaganda, putting across the republican message, assumes that the propaganda is helpful in the political arena. Unfortunately all too often it has been disastrous. The litany of military mistakes (La Mon, Enniskillen and the Shankill bombing to name but a few) more than outweighed any positive political propaganda effect of the IRA engaging in armed combat with the British army. The ever widening list of legitimate targets provided propaganda for imperialism, not for those who wished to identify imperialism and its state as the chief cause of the conflict. The agenda set by the IRA's campaign became surrounded by Britain's, then Dublin's 'anti-terrorist' security agenda, one of repression, which allowed the British to more and more portray the legitimate struggle against their rule as an armed campaign devoid of political principle. We are therefore left with the argument that armed struggle was an agent of change.

But an agent of change must at least be change for the better. It must be an agent of progressive change. The task of defining and assessing progressive change fell to the leadership of Sinn Fein. Understanding the content of progressive change was simple enough before, it was built around self-determination and British withdrawal. In a different period, when it had already been recognised by the republican movement that the armed campaign lacked the potency to turn their formal political demands into concrete reality, the task of rationalising the primacy of armed struggle became all the more difficult.

A key political test for the republican movement arrived with the Anglo-Irish agreement of 1985. One reaction to the Anglo-Irish agreement was to claim that: "*The catalyst for the Hillsborough Treaty was undoubtedly a combination of the Brighton bomb and the electoral rise of Sinn Fein.*" So the Brighton bombing and the electoral rise of Sinn Fein were responsible for the Hillsborough agreement. The agreement " *is an attempt to isolate and draw popular support away from the republican struggle while putting a diplomatic veneer on British rule, injecting a credibility into establishment nationalism and insulating the British from international criticism of their involvement in Irish affairs.*" So the agreement was in fact reactionary, a shift to the political right. A pertinent question that could have been discussed at that moment but wasn't, was, if the armed struggle helps imperialism get away with a

shift to the right not just in Britain but more urgently in the Free State, what progressive change was it engendering? It was not a problem the republican movement hung around to discuss, the myth of the cutting edge could not be undermined. Instead after a period of reflection the Hillsborough agreement was reinterpreted as a major British concession. Yet again the primacy of armed struggle had been vindicated, it had delivered progressive political change. To most republicans the Hillsborough agreement proved that the IRA was still the vanguard of the national struggle.

From starting-out as a reactionary attack on the republican struggle, in a few years the Hillsborough agreement was transformed into something progressive, it was “*educating the unionists to the all Ireland framework.*” Just three years after Hillsborough Sinn Fein was involved in talks with the SDLP about a possible united front to push forward with the supposed all Ireland dimension of the agreement. The thing that initially prevented the immediate creation of a nationalist front in 1988 was not Sinn Fein’s opposition to the Anglo-Irish agreement but the SDLP’s continued opposition to the armed struggle and Sinn Fein’s adherence to it. A Peoples Democracy publication at the time referred to the republican movements search for a nationalist front with the SDLP as inflexibility on tactics (armed struggle) but flexibility on most points of political principle.

More recently the republicans viewed the ending of the IRA August 1994 ceasefire as the cause of the starting of the real talks process at Stormont, talks they had been unsuccessfully demanding entry into. Yet, far from armed action prompting progressive change the talks process aims at creating a new partition grounded settlement and the election of a new Stormont type forum; an anti-democratic advance for imperialism.

1988- Ceasefire or Surrender?

The political spin John Hume put on the Anglo-Irish process was potentially a very captivating one to Irish republicans. According to Hume the Anglo-Irish process implied that “*Britain had no interest of her own in remaining in Ireland, that she has no military or economic interests and that if Irish people reached agreement among themselves on, for example Irish unity, that Britain would facilitate it, legislate for it*

and leave the Irish to govern themselves.” Hume foretold a sunny future for northern nationalists : “The consequences for the Unionist community are that they have to consider the choice, either they continue to live apart, only now they are not being underpinned by a British government and they no longer have a veto on policy in Northern Ireland, or they decide to live together with us .” Hume took his conceits to the republican leadership arguing that they could get a good deal of what they had previously fought for by embracing the Anglo-Irish process, all they had to do to get at some of the goodies was declare a ceasefire. After an initial attack of scepticism, from 1988 onwards the republican movement gradually accommodated itself to Hume’s rhetoric. When the IRA finally declared a ceasefire in August 1994 it was prepared to gamble that the British ruling class had no selfish interests to protect in Ireland and even began to believe that their day had truly arrived: “We dared to believe that he would be the first secretary of state who would begin the healing process between all the Irish people and ultimately between Ireland and Britain by starting the disengagement process.”

The only problem is that the Anglo-Irish process formalised by treaty in 1984 is not what Hume and his acolytes say it is. Rather it is political and military schema to open up a major imperialist offensive. Unlike the IRA British imperialism has always given as much thought to its political strategy in Ireland as to its military strategy. The Anglo- Irish process is a chief political weapon in the armoury of an imperialist offensive aimed at making Ireland a more stable place for multinational capitalism.

Until the Hillsborough agreement, countering the IRA on the security front had been the most successful part of British strategy in Ireland. The British security apparatus had succeeded well in dealing with the military threat posed by the IRA, reducing its activity to an ‘*acceptable level of violence.*’ It is not true that the IRA and the British had fought each other to a standstill or that the Hillsborough agreement was a political concession forced upon the British government by the success of the armed struggle. The point of our analysis is to illustrate how the British at every juncture managed militarily to get the better of the IRA. From the perspective of the British the peace process is not about giving away political concessions to the IRA. It came as no surprise that as soon as the first ceasefire was announced the British put decommissioning near the top of the agenda. The confident mentality

of the British 'anti terrorist' community was summarised by a recent publication: *"The security forces have been able to cut the number of deaths in Northern Ireland from over 500 in 1972 to 94 in 1991 and 84 in 1992. The number of deaths due to terrorism in NI since 1977 has on average been less than the toll of an average week on the UK roads. ('The origins of the present troubles' C.K. Pipe)*

If the IRA are so ineffective why have the British been pressing so firmly on the decommissioning peddle? Surely the hard line on decommissioning (only recently softened) is evidence that the British still fear the IRA? The answer is that the British are not expecting or really interested in getting the bulk of the IRA's weapons. What they most want is a political surrender from the collective republican movement and decommissioning is just one of the tests set up to examine the movement's political direction. So what is at stake today is political. The British stand on decommissioning is a way of testing out the suitability of Sinn Fein for inclusion and partnership in Britain's wider political strategy. If Sinn Fein capitulates then the potential for a mass movement in opposition to Britain is significantly weakened unless a political movement to Sinn Fein's left is created. It is entirely possible that the republicans could trade political concessions for reciprocal concessions from the British on guns. At the very least the squeeze on the IRA could be used to engineer a split. This would most likely lead one part of the movement on the road to a faster incorporation into the state, like the SDLP or a Fianna Fail mark II, and a militarist part determined to repeat the mistakes and failed strategy of the past.

The Alternative

It is our analysis of the dynamic of the peace process that determines our present opposition to the ceasefire and decommissioning. We have no illusions in the arms of the IRA. We have been arguing for years that the IRA strategy is self defeating and counter-productive. Is there a need for force and arms to achieve fundamental change? Socialists say yes, but whereas for republicans the matter ends there, for us it is only just the beginning. As we argued above the armed struggle question is not a debate about abstract right or principle it is about making a concrete political judgement about objectives and a particular set of circumstances in which they are to be achieved.

The objective we seek is a society free from oppression and exploitation so that the wealth of society is under the control, and is distributed for the benefit of those who created it, the working class. This requires a socialist revolution enacted by the working class itself which in turn necessitates a struggle against imperialism and the sectarian northern state. It means supporting the principle of democracy enshrined in the demand for self-determination for the Irish people. The grim discrimination experienced by a minority section of the working class under the northern state sparked a revolt which the British and its Irish unionist supporters tried to put down through coercion. The right of self-defence is automatic, however to really put the defeat of imperialism on the agenda means winning the majority of the working class in the south of the country to a struggle against imperialism. The nationalist working class is in a minority in the north and can never hope to defeat imperialism on its own. A process which entails mobilising the majority of the Irish working class, including many Protestant workers, to oppose imperialism means putting socialism, not just ending partition, as the key objective. Socialist Democracy has argued that workers in the south can only be persuaded to fight imperialism if this can be shown to be part of their own struggles against the exploitation defended by their own state, struggles which socialists must join and attempt to give leadership to. This could never be done if ending partition meant simply a 32 county version of the present 26 county state. (See our book: 'Ireland: The Promise of Socialism', Socialist Democracy, 1996).

The strategy of those in revolt in the north must be directed to this central objective of winning the support of the southern working class. At the very minimum it means identifying the enemies of these workers, the Fianna Fáils and their backers, as our enemies too. It means raising socialist demands and adopting socialist methods of struggle to which these workers can relate. In short it means rejecting any notion of a nationalist family.

All this is not contrary to the problem of defence which particularly confronts the Catholic working class. The main force which prevents the British from carrying out enough repression to force the resistance to their rule off the streets is the fear of the political reaction in the rest of Ireland. The greater the mobilisations in the rest of the country the more constrained the British are in their use of repression. It is patently

obvious that no armed group in the north by itself could provide any real counter against the British state if that state chose to use the maximum force at its disposal. The question of defence is not just theoretically, but immediately, a political question.

The no-go areas were the most effective form of defence aside from their other political plus-points. They were not created by guns but by mass political participation. They could be created again by comparable political mobilisations. These could expel the British army and RUC from nationalist working class areas but only when the attempts by these forces to demonstrate that their writ runs over the areas become the opportunities for massive popular protest. In such circumstances foot and vehicle patrols become not a means of asserting British rule but opportunities to attack and undermine it. In such a situation the expulsion of British forces can be put on the agenda. Where the British army and RUC does not operate neither does the loyalist death squads.

Putting forward the need for the creation of mass popular defence and their organisation by democratic defence committees does not solve all the problems of their actual creation. However knowing what is required is one giant step forward to achieving it. It does not mean that nothing can be achieved until the barricades go up. Political pressure on the British government through placing demands on their Irish collaborators, the SDLP and the Dublin government, can constrain their activity and also force them to rein in the loyalist death squads to some extent. An example of this approach was to demand the withdrawal of the SDLP and Dublin government from the talks process while sectarian marches are allowed through disputed areas. Thus if the British insist on pushing these marches through they have to pay a political price in terms of forcing their collaborators out of their plans or at the very least seeing these collaborators lose support.

The present outbreak of what is euphemistically called the 'troubles' is usually dated from the loyalist pogroms of 1969. Events after Drumcree in 1996 brought some of these nightmares back. In such circumstances armed defence is an absolute necessity. This means vulnerable communities must mount a political campaign demanding the right to bear small calibre weapons under the control of local defence committees, democratically elected by the population. The British state has already admitted in 1996 and 1997 that it cannot uphold 'law and order' nor defend working class nationalist areas. In reply to the argument that the guns will fall into the wrong hands we reply that guns are already in the wrong hands, the hands of the British army, RUC, RIR and loyalist gangs, not to mention the 150,000 plus legal guns held by

unionists. In such circumstances the role of the IRA would be confined to training, supply and other logistical matters. Their guns should be at the disposal of the democratically elected defence committees.

For socialists the sectarianism that exists in the north and calls forth the need for defence is not a problem caused by the inherent bigotry of working class Protestants and Catholics. Its virulence, prevalence and power derives from the incorporation of sectarianism into the state itself through the RUC, the RIR, the rest of the state apparatus and the links with the bigoted middle class loyal orders, and the death squads. At the popular level it is maintained through the political parties, Orange Order and the other sectarian organisations which have official recognition as one of the legitimate 'two traditions.' The problem of sectarianism is therefore overwhelmingly one of loyalist sectarian privilege and the support this receives from the state. By comparison nationalist sectarianism is much less potent, though no less objectionable. It too is strengthened by the 'two traditions' analysis and its policy implications which inevitably exclude the only real alternative to sectarianism which is an identity defined by common membership of the Irish working class. This means that socialists oppose the phoney peace campaigns of the trade unions which are vocal and organised against republican violence but usually fall silent when faced with annual assertions of loyalist supremacy and their attendant re-stoking of sectarian hatred. Defence of the working class means socialists and real trade unionists beginning to challenge this spineless behaviour in the trade union movement both north and south.

It is not possible to give detailed blueprints in answer to all the problems posed by attacks on the working class but it is possible to outline a general approach. Whether it is state or loyalist violence the answer does not lie in a small underground army. The last, almost 30 years, shows that the IRA cannot fulfil this role and that real defence has only been possible when a mass political movement claimed control of the streets. When it can claim control of society the problem will be truly solved.

Conclusion

Despite the generalised enthusiasm for an end to politically motivated violence there is little prospect of this happening. The main reason there is so little prospect of a lasting peace has everything to do with the unwillingness of the British ruling class to set about dismantling the ramparts of the sectarian state. There will never be peace for so long

as the British decide it is in their interests to doggedly shore up the unionist state. A typical example of the type of sectarian recalcitrance that British pounds subsidies was uttered by the elected chairman of the union of police officers in June 1997. He told the new Labour secretary of state in full view of the press, that the RUC had “*zero tolerance towards police reform.*” No journalist was even modestly surprised when he was loudly applauded by the serried ranks of the police rank and file. How a more peaceful society can be created on the back of such a repressive machine goodness only knows. All of the documents thrown up by the peace process, Downing Street, Frameworks, Mitchell, indicate that the anxious members of the police federation have little to worry about, no radical plans to reform the sectarian repressive state apparatus make an appearance in any of them.

For as long as the state remains largely unreformed there will continue to be a very good prospect of violence breaking out. For as long as the RUC remains in control of policing then conflict and violence are inevitable. Much of the reaction to state violence will be motivated by justified anger and a desire for revenge. It is spurred by the weakness of the nationalist working class and their apparent lack of an alternative way of hitting back. Armed attacks seem hard and immediate. However as we have seen they are ultimately ineffective. Anger and the desire for revenge in this context are not in themselves bad motivations but it is not revenge against individuals that matters but revenge by the whole working class against the entire oppressive system. It is precisely the role of political leadership to turn justified anger into an organised, creative force disciplined by a political analysis and programme.

Chapter 5

The Alternative

Experience of the sectarian and repressive character of the northern state convinced many, correctly, that freedom and justice could only be achieved by destroying the state itself. This belief was formed on the basis of experiencing the state's violent response to the attempt to reform it in the late 1960's. Essentially the republican movement now claims that this is no longer the case. The peace process will either bring about a united Ireland with the agreement of the British and unionists or it will come about by some transitional arrangement that will achieve the same result in a more or less rapid time frame. In the latter scenario fundamental reform agreed to by the British and unionists will undermine the very basis of the state's existence.

Our analysis has made it abundantly clear that neither of these is going to happen. The British have strong interests in remaining in Ireland and, given this, will not destroy their mass base in unionism, which in turn therefore has no reason to surrender its fundamental sectarian privileges. The interests of the Dublin establishment are in a stable partition and such an imperialist settlement will have the full backing

of the US and the European Union. The talks process can have only one outcome, a reinforced partition and sectarian unionist state. A republican movement signed up to the Mitchell principle of accepting any deal agreed will have to buy it or admit that its whole strategy has been a disaster.

In true Thatcherite fashion supporters of this strategy have claimed that there is no alternative. Such confidence is based on the fact that most people think that there is an alternative but one too unpalatable to even consider. A renewed armed campaign by a weakened and more desperate IRA, or worse still, by the INLA or Continuity Army Council is seen by many, and promoted by supporters of the peace process, as the only alternative. Rather than weakening the process, presenting this as the alternative actually strengthens it. As we too have shown the military strategy has been an unmitigated disaster. The popularity of the process is in no small part due to the unpopularity of republicanism's strategy for the previous twenty odd years.

What this shows is that we are witnessing, not some personal failings on the part of individual republican leaders, but the collapse of a whole political programme, that of Irish republicanism. The republican movement possessed a politics and strategy that it pursued for over twenty years with determination and courage. It failed. Recent electoral successes may make this hard for some to see but these successes are not a reflection of the growth of traditional republicanism but are in proportion to the abandonment of the movements traditional policies.

Republican Sinn Fein and the IRSP do not understand this and can explain the collapse of the movement only on the basis of personal failings on the part of the republican leadership. The actual results of the armed struggle strategy they propose to continue are ignored. The fight put up by the republican movement has been waged with far more resources than either could conceivably hope to muster. The super-republican alternative can be dismissed because it promises a return to a past strategy that failed. That is why we have the peace process in the first place. How many cycles of militarism leading to capitulation leading to militarism do we need before it is acknowledged that republicanism is not an adequate political movement or philosophy to achieve the goals set by itself?

A real alternative to the peace process must be capable of explaining

past failures, learning from these failures and be credible. We have explained the failures of past and present strategy and can use our analysis to map out a new way forward. We can clearly spell out what our alternative is. The creation of a mass political movement in the whole of the country capable of removing partition and British rule by destroying both reactionary states on the island. Such a mass movement would win international solidarity and would put on the agenda a new socialist society free from the sectarianism, repression, poverty and exploitation characteristic of both Irish states.

How credible is such an alternative? We believe it is credible for three reasons. Firstly because we have seen the early development of such a movement before, and not that long ago. In the late 1960's and early 1970's a mass struggle was created in the north which put British imperialism on the defensive and could have provided a vital component for an all-Ireland struggle against British rule and the southern capitalist class.

It is credible because, as Connolly said, the only incorruptible inheritor of the cause of Irish freedom is the Irish working class, not the John Humes, Albert Reynolds or Irish-American millionaires. Only the Irish working class and oppressed, as the vast majority of Irish society, have both the potential power and interest in overthrowing partition.

Finally it is credible because imperialism has demonstrated over 30 years that it has no easily enforced settlement which can promise stable political rule. Time and time again we have seen examples of resistance to this rule. On numerous occasions there have been opportunities to mobilise resistance to Britain's plans. The peace process rests not only on illusions in a bankrupt strategy but on hopes and expectations of real change, on a population in no way reconciled to continued sectarian oppression in a spruced up sectarian state.

Mass Movement

The early mass movement that put imperialism in the dock and forced it to retreat has some key lessons to teach us in developing an alternative way forward. Its primary focus was on people's own activity and organisation on the streets and in the communities. A focus that witnessed mass demonstrations of opposition to British rule north and south of the border involving the creation of no-go areas in the north

and of a general strike and burning of the British embassy in the South after Bloody Sunday. Today the peace process specialises in secret diplomacy behind the backs of the people with those once regarded as enemies, the Dublin establishment and its northern supporters. The republican movement now and then has called for the "*sound of angry voices and marching feet*" but this is no more than a call to support the secret diplomacy to which it is utterly subordinated. The call by Gerry Adams for the process to be the ownership of as many people as possible sits uneasily with the secret negotiations with the British and the equally secret Hume-Adams agreement, not to mention the two ceasefires that were beyond the influence of even many members of the republican movement.

The mass movement in the early seventies was the site of debate and discussion between many political tendencies, all active in the struggle. This openness created a hunger for political debate and ideas that is necessary for any successful political movement. Again this is in stark contrast to today when debate is carefully stage managed and controlled. One small example will illustrate the difference. After the impromptu march in West Belfast in response to Drumcree III Gerry Adams called a public meeting for the following night to discuss the way forward. When socialist Democracy attended the meeting it was made clear that our presence was not welcome. Above all there was to be no debate on politics or strategy. Naturally enough the meeting was reduced to discussing stink bombs in Marks and Spencer and Catholic '*resistance*' masses. Inevitably no action resulted from the meeting. The republican leadership had decided that the peace process and their alliances with the SDLP and Dublin required a definite balancing act between diplomacy and controlled protest. Democratic debate and self-organisation are by definition not amenable to such control. Fake '*consultations*' on the other hand give an impression of popular participation in deciding policy while leaving effective decision making in the same few hands as before.

The militant leadership of the early mass movement made clear its opposition to all the plans of imperialism and the unionists to frustrate its objectives. In particular those who sought to prop up the institutions of the unionist state were forced to abandon their plans, the SDLP were forced out of Stormont fearing total loss of support if they stayed in. The mass movement was clear that compromising in its demands for civil rights or accommodation with bigotry were not on the agenda. It did not

seek consent for civil rights from the British or unionists but sought to force the granting of such rights whether they liked it or not.

Today the republican movement collaborates with those who seek to join the institutions of the sectarian state as junior partners. The movement itself has spent the best part of three years attempting to buy into the latest attempt to stabilise imperialist rule. Where it should have demanded that Dublin and the SDLP get out of the talks it has sought its own inclusion. This while the talks themselves have often been reduced to farce and clearly based on hypocritical principles of non-violence which ignores or covers up unionist violence at Drumcree or continued loyalist attacks during a so-called ceasefire.

Finally the early mass movement looked to international movements of the oppressed including the civil rights movement in America and student movement in France. Today the focus is on an alliance with the international establishment including corporate America, the very enemy of the US civil rights campaign. Inspiration is sought from reactionary peace settlements in Palestine and South Africa. In the former a corrupt Palestinian Authority on the model of the Bantustan states created by Apartheid South Africa has betrayed the Palestinian peoples right to self-determination. From South Africa, republicans have identified the need for a De Klerk type figure to arise, sometimes from unionism and sometimes from the British. This presumably so that such a person can negotiate a deal that leaves unionist privilege virtually unaffected just as white privilege is essentially untouched in South Africa today.

The early mass movement that grew out of the civil rights campaign provides a clear example for those searching for an alternative to the peace process. It was primarily this movement that forced the most important gain of the last 30 years, the downfall of Stormont. It is precisely a new Stormont type assembly that the peace process threatens to put back in place.

Of course there are important negative lessons to be learnt from this mass movement. After all it was unable to stop imperialism regaining the initiative by establishing the Sunningdale Executive that, had it not been brought down by loyalists, may have been able to stabilise British rule while leaving the sectarian fundamentals of the state intact. Part of this failure was the devotion of many of the most talented and

courageous militants to a military campaign that promised victory but utterly failed to deliver. This fed a depoliticisation that contributed to the key weakness of the movement - its lack of a fully developed political programme.

Political Programme

Lack of such a programme not only allowed illusions in armed struggle to take hold but also allowed the SDLP and Dublin establishment to re-enter into closer and open collaboration with Britain. The downfall of Stormont left a struggle unable to see how it could realistically make the ending of partition a practical prospect. Such a task could only be achieved by going beyond the confines of the north and turning the struggle into a 32 county one. Spontaneous solidarity action, especially after Bloody Sunday, showed the potential that existed but converting this into an ongoing political movement was a giant step beyond a campaign that had not decisively broken from the political concepts of nationalism and republicanism.

Because the southern working class did not, and does not, face the sectarianism and repression of the British state every day it does not have to build organisations capable of defending itself against it. Because it does face the exploitation of its own capitalist class, multinationals and the southern state that defends their exploiters, it has created organisations to defend itself against these forces. These organisations, primarily the trade unions, may be treacherous and inadequate but this then becomes the most pressing problem facing working class militants and activists in the south, not the northern predicament. Inevitably political action around the national question is sporadic and seen as a question of solidarity. Expecting southern workers to take on the British state through the struggle in the North simply spilling over to the rest of the country is essentially the farthest republicans have ever got in thinking about how an all-Ireland struggle might develop.

This will not happen, not just because southern workers primary concerns are, and have been, their own predicament and their attempts to change it, but also because this scenario cannot demonstrate that the result of such a struggle would not just be a 32 county Free State, leaving southern workers no better off. The most discontented and militant workers who want to see radical change and who must be the

constituency on which any potential struggle is built will be utterly unconvinced or, at best, confused by a republican movement that cheers on the most discredited politicians in Fianna Fail. The same politicians they are, and should be, trying to get rid of. Why should militant workers in the south have any sympathy with a movement that promises and delivers support to Fianna Fail? Right away forging any sort of link between the struggle against the northern state and those fighting the southern one is broken.

This link is not one of simply saying that ending partition will be good for southern workers. Of course it will fulfil the nationalist aspirations that the majority have, but election after election has confirmed that partition is not the issue around which the southern working class revolves. Its own trade union movement to which hundreds of thousands belong, the periodic illusions followed by disillusion in the Irish Labour Party for some, reliance on the populism and clientelism of Fianna Fail for others, or the rise and fall of many independents, these are the organisations which dominate southern working class politics. The problems of unemployment, wages, welfare provision, emigration, taxes and democratic rights; these are the issues that most directly concern the majority of southern workers. Supporting Fianna Fail because they are '*good for the peace process*' relegates the struggles and concerns of the majority of the Irish working class to a secondary position, at best. At the same time it reinforces illusions in Fianna Fail amongst those that have them and alienates the potential support of those who do not.

The claim that simply ending partition can create a new dynamic and democratic all-Ireland economy is simply hogwash if reliance on the existing economic policy of pandering to multinationals is continued. Unfortunately this is exactly what the supporters of the peace process, from Hume to Adams, all affirm. This too only bolsters the reactionary climate faced by workers who are told that their fate is not in their own hands but is dependent on the goodwill of outside multinational investment. Multinationals which will only invest if wages are sufficiently low, taxes and therefore welfare provision is at a minimum, working conditions are subject to the need to be '*competitive*' and industrial relations are good, that is the workers put up with all this without complaining or trying to do anything about it. The real link to be drawn between the North and South is between the struggle against imperialism

in the North and these issues. To be credible an alternative to the peace process has to understand what this link is and how it can be made.

This link is that in both the North and in the South imperialism seeks to exploit Irish workers in order to make a profit, the life blood that makes the whole capitalist system work. Partition and the creation of two reactionary states, the unionist one based on open sectarianism, is the political mechanism by which capitalism maintains the legitimacy of its rule and defends itself against any potential threat by bitterly dividing the Irish working class. This is not a wholly conscious process although the degree of political calculation should not be underestimated. Rather it is the result of a history of class conflict overridden, and therefore appearing obscured, by national conflict. The capitalist classes of Britain, Ireland and internationally through their various political parties and representatives therefore have a vested interest in maintaining partition.

Opposing partition consistently necessitates opposing capitalism. Those in the north who wish to confine their struggle to the purely democratic demands of self-determination and 'Brits' out are therefore faced with the problem that the Irish capitalist class is no longer interested in fighting Britain or ending partition. The majority of southern workers will only do so if they can also be persuaded and organised to destroy the reactionary partitionist state that they live in. Because the capitalist class in Ireland is very much weaker than it's British counterpart (otherwise there would already be a 32 county state), British imperialism is the key obstacle to all Irish workers achieving democratic freedom and social liberation. Southern workers will therefore have to fight not just their own state on their road to social liberation but also Britain, the regional imperialist power. In the last analysis the tasks of both northern and southern sections of the working class are the same but the fact that over the last 30 years they have combined only episodically and in a purely solidarity manner shows that we are a long way from turning strategy into practice. Yet this is precisely what is required.

Making the link that will lead to such a united struggle requires a revolutionary mass movement in both states which, while starting from the immediate concerns and organisations of each section of the class, will lead to a common struggle aimed at destroying both partitionist states and the creation of Connolly's Workers Republic. While this will involve building a mass movement in the North and a movement in

solidarity with it in the South, the key task relates to the majority of the Irish working class in the South and the organisation of their alienation from present society in a party, one capable of leading a revolutionary overthrow of the Irish capitalist state.

Traditional republicans may object to what they see as the importation of foreign concerns about class struggle into what they would consider a purely national conflict. They forget that republicanism itself was also a foreign import into Ireland, from France and America. More importantly they ignore the real divisions in society at their peril. Republican refusal to subscribe to Marxist notions about class conflict will not make classes disappear. It has often been remarked that while the working class is only episodically aware of its class interests the capitalist class is much more class conscious. Class conflict is not what socialism is about, it is what capitalism is about. Republican refusal to ground their politics in class terms has led to a peace process where they seek allies where there are only enemies and adopt a strategy that appears more and more successful only as it results in the abandonment of their traditional political programme. Attempts by Republican Sinn Fein to maintain the traditional programme of republicanism appear as a time warp that steadfastly fails to acknowledge republicanism's failure in the past or to explain how it could possibly succeed in the future.

Democracy

It is not the job of socialists to speculate on the precise way in which the struggles in both states will combine into one, but we need to know that such a combination is both necessary and possible. This latter aspect breaks down into two strategic tasks. On the one hand, on what basis a struggle in the North can be built and a movement in solidarity with it in the South constructed, and on the other how a revolutionary movement may be developed in the South.

The northern anti-imperialist struggle must be based on the twin demands which republicanism has increasingly obscured as a prelude to dumping altogether - self-determination for the Irish people and '*Brits out now!*' Although the republican movement still pays lip service to the former they also speak in terms that effectively neuter it. Thus they talk of the consent of the unionists being required. They try to distinguish this from the familiar unionist veto by speaking of only

requiring positive consent to change as opposed to a negative veto. Of course unionists are correct to say that consent means not only the right to say yes but also the right to say no. We all know which of the two words unionists like most. The republican commitment to negotiations means that unionist consent is required, in other words the veto remains. By definition self-determination is not negotiable. "*Renegotiating the union*" means acceptance of the unionist veto. At the time of writing the republican leadership is just not honest enough to admit it.

The SDLP and Dublin government, despite republican claims, have set the ideological agenda on the nationalist side. It is not the SDLP who are sounding more and more like republicans but republicans more and more repeating the mantras of John Hume. The ideological justification for the capitulation to the unionist veto has been what Hume has described as the need to unify the Irish people and not territory. In other words the border does not matter, it is the division between nationalist and unionist that must be overcome through a process of reconciliation. Our alternative can be illustrated through showing what is wrong with this analysis.

Firstly the problem is defined in terms of reconciling two traditions. As we have said this immediately confines all Protestant workers to a sectarian orange tradition and Catholic workers to the leadership of right wing nationalism. Excluded is the possibility of overcoming sectarianism through a third tradition coming to the fore, one grounded on common membership of the Irish working class. Secondly such a reconciliation is not possible, Irish nationalism is not compatible with unionism. Such a reconciliation could only occur through surrendering what democratic content remains in nationalism. What reconciliation between nationalism and unionism really means is the continuation of partition and the unionist state. Within this state sectarian competition would remain except that the SDLP would try to ensure that the Catholic middle class got a bigger slice of the cake. This leads to our third criticism; uniting people can only be achieved by giving them something in common and destroying that which divides them. What Protestant and Catholic workers have in common is their class interests that are expressed in the ideas of socialism. The mechanism that divides them is imperialism and its unionist state, including the many sectarian organisations that thrive within it.

The idea that the border is only a line on a map is laughable. This line determines the state structures under which workers live and the fabric of every aspect of their lives. It has determined the life chances of workers and determined that accident of birth has turned Catholic workers into second class citizens. The analysis ignores the debilitating effect of the border in effecting the division of Irish workers. The separation of the majority of the Irish working class in the south from northern workers has weakened both and held back the potential for unity that alone can win Protestant workers from unionism. For Dublin and the SDLP self-determination is quite compatible with, and can be exercised during, occupation of part of the country by the British Army and its loyalist paramilitary forces - the RIR and RUC. The threat of a loyalist led bloodbath, to which only British guns and money lends credibility, has long been held over the rest of the Irish people. For us there can only be real self-determination when the British are removed and their threat is minimised. Self-determination is therefore not reducible to separate referenda north and south but is only meaningful when the Irish people are free of external threat and compulsion. That is why there is no such thing as self-determination without 'Brits out.' Acceptance of any other definition of self-determination opens the door to massive confusion, demoralisation and defeat.

Self-determination for the whole of the Irish people is the only democratic solution to British inspired oppression and division. The unionist state exists on the basis of a sectarian head-count. It's justification has been, and can only be, the necessity of Irish Protestants to have their own state because Irish Catholics cannot be allowed to form a majority. On this Catholic second class status is established and on such premises there is no possibility of a non-sectarian northern state where equality is assured. Self-determination on the other hand asserts equality between the British and Irish peoples and the possibility of both Protestant and Catholic living together and jointly determining their own state.

The unionist veto must therefore be rejected whether dressed up as consent or not. The Protestant population have never claimed a right to self-determination as a separate nation. What they have consistently claimed are sectarian rights because of their Protestantism, to be upheld by the British state. When this could no longer be achieved in an all-Ireland context as Irish unionists they simply redefined themselves as Ulster unionists (minus three counties of Ulster). Despite the

creation of a separate northern Ireland state with wide local powers and seventy years to forge a national identity no such national identity has been created. The Protestants of Ireland are not a separate nation. Unable to unambiguously define themselves as British, Irish, northern Irish or as an 'Ulster' nationality they are certain of their identity as Protestants. Defining themselves in negative terms to differentiate themselves from the rest of the Irish people they can identify themselves only in a sectarian manner because only sectarianism has given them a separate and superior economic and political power in relation to the rest of the Irish nation. Self-determination for Protestants means identification of nationality in purely sectarian terms and condemns Catholics within the Protestant '*nation*' to second class citizenship. There are no arguments which can give it democratic validity. No democratic solution is possible unless this whole reactionary philosophy is defeated. There can be no fudging the issue of the unionist veto.

More sophisticated opponents of self-determination say that nations are an outdated and non-definable entity that can only have real meaning if there is a united view of how the nation is to be expressed politically. Self-determination of peoples is held up as a more progressive demand. In this view the Protestants of Ireland are a '*people*' with as much right to determine their political status as the Catholics. Creating a '*Catholic*' majority is therefore just sectarianism in reverse.

What is wrong with this? First it escapes none of the criticisms we have just made. If it is not now nations that are being defined in purely sectarian terms it is '*peoples*.' While sometimes claiming to be a separate people unionists at other times claim to be British. That is, part of another people. As we have said this confused identity robs them of any clear national consciousness but provides the basis for their sectarian consciousness which, because it is motivated to distinguish themselves from the rest of the Irish people, is necessarily supremacist and reactionary. Even if loyalists could settle on one of these identities, and history has shown it cannot, that would not be the end of its problems. For each there exists a whole series of contradictions.

If they want to be seen as a separate people they have no automatic right to unity with Britain. Opinion polls show that a majority of British people have no interest in unity with the six counties of north east Ireland. They would in any case have no right to coerce a nationalist minority into a sectarian state and '*solutions*' based on redrawing the

border are invitations to Bosnian style ethnic cleansing. In fact this is the logical conclusion of solutions based on '*identities*'.

In effect, despite claims to abandoning nationality from the analysis, defending the Protestants of Ireland as a separate people with the right to form a state of their own is just the same as giving them nationhood. The dishonest aspect of the argument is that in this way you do not have to go through the impossible task of demonstrating that they are a separate nation.

If the apologists for loyalist sectarianism want to claim that Irish Protestants are part of the British nation they similarly have some problems to overcome. For a start there is no British nation. Being British is a function of being English, Scottish or Welsh. This can be overcome by claiming to be '*Ulster-Scots*', yet another '*identity*,' but this would only confer rights as a national minority within Ireland. It is not even clear whether being '*Ulster-Scots*' means being an extension, that is part, of the Scottish nation (something most Scots would not accept) or must be seen as a separate nation that should be seen as part of the group of nations which makes up Britain. Then unionists would have to explain why they rejected the British majority for Home rule and threatened that majority with violence.

The claims for democratic credentials because a majority favour partition when it was partition that created this majority in the first place shows that this majority is utterly artificial and the creation of imperialism. It is well known the boundaries of the state conform to no historic entity save the largest area that could safely provide a loyalist majority. Even now unionists will make it clear that partition can only be removed when a majority of Protestants want it. Despite all the spurious arguments over nations, peoples and identities it comes down to this. Partition can only be defended on the grounds that Protestants have to have their own state because Catholics are unfit to be a majority. The justification for partition always has been and always will be sectarian.

Opponents of self-determination for the Irish people have one last argument. That such a demand will only produce a confessional, catholic dominated state just like, or even worse than, the present 26 county state. Certainly the traditional nationalist response, that having suffered sectarian oppression Catholics will not wish to inflict it, is not

altogether convincing. The horrors of the Holocaust did not make many Jews sensitive to the rights of the Palestinian people.

Socialists have five responses to this argument. Firstly we can point to the indisputable evidence that it is partition that has justified and hardened sectarianism both in the North and, to a lesser extent, in the South. Partition by denying self-determination, prevented any democratic resolution to the sectarian problems which existed and continue to exist in Ireland. Getting rid of partition will decisively weaken reactionary and sectarian forces within Irish society. Most of all it will see the defeat of the real cause of sectarianism, from its bloody origins to its current basis of support, that is British imperialism.

Opposition to partition and the sectarianism it engenders is the only possible basis on which unity of the Irish working class can be advanced. A movement that destroyed partition would have succeeded in destroying the key political mechanism used to divide the Irish working class. A united working class would, by definition, be the most implacable opponent of any sectarian oppression.

Finally we can say as socialists that we seek no alliances with the sectarian forces within Irish nationalism, the Catholic church and southern state. We give no political support to Irish nationalism. We support the fight of Irish nationalists only in so far as they fight imperialism and uphold the demand for self-determination. We explicitly do not say that achievement of a separate Irish state is the solution to the problems faced by the working class. We say that the fight for and achievement of democracy is a giant step on the way to the solution. That solution is socialism. The route to socialism involves a simultaneous fight against catholic reaction as well as against imperialism and unionism.

As our analysis of Britain's interests in Ireland has made clear the principle of the unionist veto is upheld by the British and made the cornerstone of their stated strategy not because of any commitment to democracy. If such a commitment existed they would not be in Ireland in the first place. The 'consent' principle is upheld because it provides the cover for Britain's own interests in Ireland and their own desire to secure these through occupation of part of the country. The British would dump the tiresome unionists tomorrow if circumstances dictated this was in their best interests. Ultimately, therefore, the unionist veto

has little to do with unionist rights and everything to do with Britain's rights. That imperialism has tied itself to such a reactionary movement that will never compromise or accede to the democratic rights of the Irish people as a whole only shows the commitment of Britain to remaining in Ireland and the strength of the interests it judges it has to defend. The unionist state exists because of British guns and money.

This does not remove the necessity of winning over Protestant workers to a struggle against imperialism and for socialism but it does mean a realisation that part of such a struggle is complete and utter opposition to unionism. A large section of the Protestant working class will never be won to socialism if any validity or legitimacy is given to unionism. They will never be won unless unionism is simultaneously defeated and such a defeat is only possible if the majority of the working class in the South is involved in fighting against imperialism. This in turn can come about if it is asserted that southern workers have the right to determine the political future of the country and this right is what the demand for self-determination asserts.

This strategy is concretised in the demands for immediate withdrawal of the British Army, disbanding of the RUC and RIR and the creation of an all-Ireland Constituent Assembly that determines its own powers and jurisdiction. This is the only democratic alternative to a talks charade and 6 county Forum in Belfast utterly subordinated to British power. Only such an Assembly representing the freely expressed will of the Irish people free from foreign occupation and threat could really lead to a new Ireland. Where the present talks process can only promise the freezing of present division such an Assembly could promise the eradication of it. To Protestant workers it could promise that the new Ireland would not be the reactionary, priest-ridden one held up to scare them by orange bigots. To southern workers it could promise that a 32 county Ireland would not have to be a mere extension of the existing 26 county state. For Catholic workers in the north it would immediately end the sectarianism and repression of the unionist state.

While self-determination can promise this, the history of the last 200 years shows that Irish nationalism cannot deliver it. While Irish nationalism has never simply been the slave of Catholic reaction as its opponents have claimed, it has clearly failed to unite the Irish people against British rule. The Irish capitalist class gave up trying to build an independent capitalist economy in the 1950's, satisfying itself trying to

It is obvious that there is no possibility of winning rank and file trade unionists to an alternative leadership unless this leadership addresses the issues that the trade union movement was set up for in the first place. This means a leadership that has a set of policies to defend worker's rights and lead the fight for a new society. A society that places need over profit and co-operation over the competitive rat race. Once again the only programme that offers this is socialism. The republican dismissal of socialism therefore leads away from seeking support in the working class movement and to, at best irrelevant, or at worst reactionary positions on the wider economic and political conflicts that divide Irish society. If you do not have a programme that addresses the needs of the majority of the Irish working class you inevitably either step aside, make irrelevant noises on the margins of the labour movement or seek support from the existing rotten leadership. This is what republicans have done by supporting Fianna Fail. Unable to conceive of the mass of Irish workers rejecting their traditional political and industrial leaderships, despite ample evidence in industrial action and electoral volatility that a significant minority is already seeking an alternative, the republican movement understands broadening the struggle only in terms of seeking alliances with existing leaders. Lack of a socialist programme for the majority of the working class makes such a capitulation inevitable in the long term. The sectarianism and repression of the unionist state and republican militants courage and determination postponed this political reality for twenty years but successful rebellion is not a matter of simple political will. Sooner or later the fundamental weakness of republicanism would be exposed.

Internationalism

Creation of a mass movement, a revolutionary party and a militant workers movement are not tasks that can either be understood or accomplished on a purely national basis. Just as the Irish peace process owes a debt to similar reactionary developments around the world so the socialist alternative requires its own exemplar and solidarity. For Ireland the most important solidarity must come from Britain. British workers will prove vital in restraining the violence to which the British state is capable and willing to use to maintain its Irish possession. The British working class is not the slightest bit interested in its state ruling any part of Ireland and the 6 counties is not regarded as an integral part of Britain. Opinion poll after opinion poll testifies to this fact. At the moment this is often expressed in reactionary terms

such as "*letting the Paddies fight it out themselves*". However in the past large solidarity movements have been built in Britain and a socialist alternative in Ireland gives good reason to believe such a movement could be created again. With a socialist alternative there would be no place for a military campaign that quite openly targets civilians, that is British workers, and socialism will have an international appeal which Irish nationalism could not possibly have. There remains important links between British and Irish workers through the trade union movement not just in the north but also in the south. A mass democratic movement would find it much easier to elicit sympathy and support than an armed campaign that descends into terrorism when it is applied in Britain itself.

The British working class movement, in common with workers across the world, has suffered reverses and defeats but remains a powerful force with the potential to go on to the offensive to reverse the attacks of the last twenty years. The false identification of socialism with Stalinism and the degeneration and collapse of the latter has been portrayed as the absolute end of the former. That Stalinism was the strangulation of socialism will be proved. Once again the true nature and strength of a political programme will assert itself. The massive state power commanded by the Soviet Union was unable to prevent the collapse of Stalinism around the world, confirming the predictions of socialists such as ourselves. The socialist programme based on the existence of the working class and its inevitable conflict with capitalism will also be confirmed. The socialist analysis that capitalism is intrinsically unable to achieve long term stability and has nowhere near solved its current problems is confirmed again and again.

The plans of Europe's bosses to create a European capitalism over the rights of Europe's workers through European Monetary Union (EMU) have created splits within right wing parties and opposition from the working class. If it takes place on time it may not be on the terms sought by Europe's bosses and if it is postponed it will be an admission of at least partial defeat. The underlying problem is the inability of capitalism to make the working class pay the necessary price for the whole exercise. Big strikes in France in 1995, in Germany in 1996 and France again in 1997 have been able to force back implementation of the attacks on the working class that the criteria for entry into EMU dictates must be in place. The world wide reactionary climate personified by Reagan and Thatcher no longer commands the unqualified hegemony

it was once was able to claim. The desirability and possibility of an alternative is weakly expressed in the election of Blair in Britain and the Socialist Party in France; more strongly in the workers actions we have noted. In Ireland it is reflected in the Fine Gael led coalition being ousted at the election despite the existence of unprecedented economic growth by the so-called '*celtic tiger*' economy. Irish workers are still not mollified and at every election for the past two decades have booted out the existing government. While it is recognised that the socialist alternative is ambitious, it needs to be, and at the international level is regaining the credibility that it once had, slowly of course, but perhaps more surely.

Mass Organisation

All too often the last 30 years is portrayed as a series of atrocities, or mainly armed conflict. This has suited the British in their attempts to portray the problem as one of terrorist violence while it has suited republicans to emphasise the role of the IRA as the main mover of events. Neither is correct. What has always been decisive is the activity of the people themselves.

It was the mass civil rights struggle which left the British no alternative but to remove Stormont. The H-Block campaign, despite defeat, which restored legitimacy to the struggle against imperialism. Even the mere act of voting, inadequate though it is, has done more to demonstrate the opposition to British rule and the lack of legitimacy of the northern state than any armed activity. On the other hand downturns in mass participation in the struggle have always heralded advances by Britain, the steps forward to criminalise the struggle in the late 1970's and the increasing collaboration with Dublin in the 1980's are but two examples. In the last couple of years it has been popular protest which has halted sectarian orange marches. It was the threat of mass activity that forced the Orange Order to back down on some of its most provocative marches on 12th July 1997, certainly not the wild threats of sectarian civil war issued by the INLA.

The socialist strategy is therefore based not only on first principles and a knowledge of lessons gained of various struggles across the world. It is firmly rooted in the experience of the last 30 years. For many young militants this experience is unknown. They can only understand what

has happened in terms of the IRA versus the 'Brits.' For many older people the lessons were never learnt, have been forgotten or have fallen from currency because of disillusion in the struggle which during periods of mass activity had appeared to promise an early victory. For many reasons the lessons of the last 30 years have been lost or obscured.

It is the role of organisations like Socialist Democracy to preserve these lessons and apply them to current conditions. It is a cliché, but nonetheless true, that failure to learn the lessons of the past leads to making the same mistakes again and again. An appreciation of recent history strengthens the persuasiveness of the socialist alternative.

The H-Block campaign made the important gain of stirring into activity tens of thousands of people right across Ireland and internationally. None of the achievements of the H-Block campaign could ever have come from the armed action of the IRA or any other armed group. Again the mass campaign was far from perfect. Only a limited degree of democracy and openness was tolerated by the republican leadership. Alongside large conferences of all those active in the campaign designed to discuss and decide strategy the republican movement prioritised secret negotiations with the Catholic church, Fianna Fail and the British. The campaign never united in an orientation to the worker's movement to win support.

Given the short time allowed it was always going to be difficult. The previous five years had been wasted by the republican movement demanding unqualified support for the armed struggle before anyone could support the demands of the prisoners. In the end ten prisoners died and while conditions in the jails improved political status was not conceded by the British.

The H-Block campaign was a test of the republican and socialist strategies. Ultimately the republican movement looked on popular protest as simply a tool to pressure the church and capitalist politicians who in turn were supposed to put pressure on the British. It was clear to everyone that they refused and opposed the campaign for political status. They were as much the enemies of the political status demand of the hunger strikers as the British. Today these same people are held up by Sinn Fein as the leaders of the 'nationalist family.'

The left attempted to mobilise workers through trade union sub-committees of the main campaign and some impressive demonstrations and strikes were organised. Unfortunately the left was too numerically weak to succeed. It was necessary to fight the existing leadership of the trade union movement and have a potential new leadership to replace it. As we have said any alternative leadership would require a rounded programme for all the questions which face workers, leadership built on a history of intimate involvement in workers struggles. This was not fully appreciated and again the pressure of time was a constraint not only on what was possible but also on the whole horizon of those in the middle of the campaign. The campaign as a whole was never won to this strategy and it remained loyal to the leadership of a republican movement that was more interested in making friends with the likes of Charlie Haughey than threatening their overthrow at the front of a militant worker's movement.

Much of the potential that was released by the H-Block campaign was lost. Prisoner candidates stood in elections in the North and the South and MP's and TD's were elected. Their effect was severely limited not only by an abstentionist policy but more importantly by the lack of an all-round programme that we have argued is indispensable. The prisoners stood for the five demands of the campaign which were all about prison conditions. It was made explicit that no political challenge was being directed at the southern state. The republican movement declared that it was simply borrowing votes. The opportunity to argue for, and win over people to a radical or revolutionary alternative was lost. No link could therefore be established with militant workers active in the south. The need for such a link was lost on both these workers and the supporters of the campaign. It would therefore have been necessary to be active and involved in both movements with a programme for both. In failing to make this alliance the republican leadership reflected the consciousness of its support. However leadership consists of developing politics that point the way forward and can direct political struggles. After years of experience it can confidently be said that the republican movement cannot develop into a socialist organisation capable of learning and applying the lessons of the last thirty years of struggle.

The lessons that were learnt by the republican leadership were of the most limited kind. Sinn Fein learnt to stand in elections and build itself as an open political party. Standing in elections became '*electoralism*' where the point of standing was not to promote and agitate for mass political activity but simply to garner as many votes as possible.

'*Electoralism*' and the creation of a nationalist political party became the means to form an alliance with the SDLP and Dublin establishment. Alliances were formed at council level where previous notions of undermining and destroying the state became transformed into '*responsibility*' and an effort to make these particular institutions of the state work for the benefit of '*our own people*.' The cover was that republicans were out to '*screw the system*.' This in many ways is the very essence of reformism; belief that the institutions of the state can somehow be captured and used to advance the state's own eventual destruction.

With the best will in the world it would have been difficult to maintain mass activity after the end of the hunger strike. At worst however a socialist strategy could have maintained a movement of committees across the country that would have attempted to intervene in workers struggles across the 32 counties. It would have been able to intervene in the explosive radicalism around women's rights dramatically illustrated by the demonstrations around the 'X' case, where a young rape victim was prevented from going to Britain for an abortion. It could have united a campaign against social partnership deals in the trade union movement and formed the necessary solidarity network for the many workers who have taken strike action in defence of their rights. It could have provided a real alternative to working class people angry at corruption, inequality and hypocrisy at the heart of southern society. This alienation has been expressed at election after election and has been captured alternately by independents, Greens or the Irish Labour Party; none of which can provide a genuine alternative because all are wedded to the economic system that is at the root of the problem.

In the North a socialist movement would have opposed all attempts by the British and SDLP to agree a new framework for partition. It would have built a constituency committed to the revolutionary overthrow of the state, also the best way to wrest reforms from the British. Sinn Fein on the other hand has built an electoral base more and more dependent on republican good behaviour, as defined by its enemies, and at least one third of which is committed to illusions in, and an alliance with, the SDLP and Dublin. Sinn Fein with 13.5 per cent of the vote in 1983 spread fear into London and Dublin establishments because the demand then was for self-determination. Sinn Fein with 15.5 per cent in 1996 and a peace process strategy causes no such alarm. Its attitude to its supporters and to mass struggle in general was demonstrated at

the start of the present stage of the peace process when it organised demonstrations in favour of the Hume-Adams agreement. Thousands were called upon to demonstrate support for something that was to be kept hidden from them and which they knew nothing about!

Peace Process

The unfolding of the peace process over the last few years has confirmed the socialist analysis and by doing so has presented opportunities to mobilise opposition to this latest attempt by imperialism to achieve a settlement. The real record of the peace process is one which republican leaders have studiously ignored:

The Downing Street Declaration signed by the Irish government which guaranteed partition.

A Framework Document which promised the removal of articles 2 and 3 of the Southern constitution.

The Peace and Reconciliation Forum in Dublin in which all the so-called nationalist parties united against Sinn Fein to support the unionist veto.

The establishing of an embryo Stormont Forum that quickly surpassed its predecessor in sectarian vitriol.

Official approval and blessing of the representatives of loyalist death squads even as they continued attacks on Catholics, attacks which Britain gave tacit approval of by pretending were not happening.

The imprisonment and inhuman treatment of Roisin McAliskey and other republican prisoners.

British refusal to admit to premeditated murder at Bloody Sunday despite the disclosure of more and more evidence of an official cover-up sanctioned at the highest level.

The release of Lee Clegg and several of the notorious Shankill butchers.

The role of baroness Denton blatantly flouting the very equality legislation she was supposed to be in charge of implementing.

Finally we have witnessed the annual display of RUC bigotry as it forces the sectarian and triumphalist Orange march through the Garvagh Road in Portadown.

What Drumcree does is spell out in letters a mile high what the peace process is all about. Republican support of the peace process has meant they have not only failed to mount an effective opposition to these attacks but in some aspects have gone along with them. Thus the republican leadership found a green tinge to the Framework Documents and heaped praise on the nationalist family before and after it confirmed its support for the unionist veto. It provides excuses for the British. First it was the dependency of the Tories on the unionists for a majority at Westminster that explained British '*bad faith*.' Then when New Labour was shown to have cynically misled the residents of Garvagh Road in a massive con trick the Sinn Fein leaders insisted Mo Mowlam was just badly advised by unionist civil servants! Each time the real nature of the peace process shines through and opportunities to push it back and defeat it are presented they are wasted by the republican leadership that can only support a process which delivers one slap in the face after another. Let us look at just two examples from the list above.

The British prepared the ground for the release of Lee Clegg for some time. This gave the opportunity to build a real opposition to it. Unfortunately because Sinn Fein believed the peace process would mean that Clegg's release would make the release of republican prisoners more likely their opposition to it was swamped by the cry of '*Clegg Out, All Out*'. Socialist Democracy made clear that Clegg's release made release of republican prisoners less likely. What it would do would be to sanction British murder of Irish civilians, making it more likely to happen again. '*Clegg Out, All Out*' effectively became '*Clegg Out, full stop*'.

The huge anger which Clegg's release unleashed had no place in Sinn Fein's peace process and it was wasted in three days of pointless rioting. The republican leadership was unwilling to organise and consolidate the anger into a political movement. The rioting dissipated and disorganised people's anger. It's only possible political target was the British, their wider plans for a settlement and their Irish collaborators. Unfortunately Sinn Fein were bent on a strategy which saw Britain as neutral, possible persuaders of Irish unity or simply under duress from

the unionists. They wanted to be part of the settlement process and they wanted to join the rest of the family of collaborators. Just to rub it in the British left the remains of the rioting lying about for much longer than usual causing inconvenience to the local population.

Drumcree, on a much larger scale, is a repeat of this story. Enormous anger has been generated by British support for Orange bigots. Not since the hunger strikes, if not before, has the whole violent and sectarian nature of the northern state been so blatantly laid bare. Rarely has the irreformable nature of the northern state been so clearly exposed - just at the time when republicanism was seeking to reform that very state.

As we have said, at Drumcree two in 1996 the Sinn Fein leadership deliberately held back from organising and mobilising popular anger. At Drumcree three in 1997 it only momentarily abandoned this strategy. The potential for the creation of a mass movement that would outlast the anger of the summer was demonstrated at the 25th Bloody Sunday commemoration march at which the 'Irish News' estimated 40,000 took part. A socialist strategy would have put organising this and giving it a political programme at the top of the agenda. For Sinn Fein the top of the agenda was getting into talks. In effect it was not a mass movement that was to demand and force reforms as part of an ongoing process aimed at destroying the state but Sinn Fein which was to deliver change from negotiations, change which needed the agreement of the British and unionists. Once again the only conceivable political message to give the 40,000 was the real lessons of Bloody Sunday. That Britain will use any force it can get away with to maintain its rule and will not reveal the cover up because it went to the very top of the British state. Britain must be forced from Ireland and building upon mobilisations such as the commemoration march is the way to start doing it.

Such episodes confirm the socialist analysis and prove that opportunities to organise resistance do not lie only in the past. Opposition to sectarian marches remains even if weakened by their localised and communal nature and hamstrung by the ideology of the '*two traditions*' and consent. Sectarian marches are sectarian whether through Catholic areas or Protestant ones and there should be no question of consent to any sectarian marches. If the British succeed in cobbling some deal together from the talks they will need to put it to the vote. There will also

be an attempt to remove Articles two and three of the Southern state's constitution. Weak and qualified expressions of democratic sentiment as they are, they should be defended. In every sense the socialist analysis is cogent and compelling. Its strategy is both realistic and credible.

If there is a weakness it is in the numbers who presently accept its arguments and are therefore ready to commit themselves to its implementation. In one sense this is vital because without a strong socialist party spontaneous anger against oppression will always fail, but in another sense it is irrelevant. It is not the responsibility of socialists to make a revolution. Only the organised working class can do that. It is the responsibility of socialists to prepare for that revolution by strengthening the socialist alternative.

This is where books like the present one come into their own, by convincing militants to join our ranks. The present stage of constructing the socialist alternative is primarily, but not only, one of a battle of ideas. Ideas communicated through books like this one. Through meetings, debates, leaflets, demonstrations and argument. Ideas advanced not simply for political clarity but as the indispensable basis for motivating people into action. This motivation can draw on the lessons of the past thirty years, of the last three years and of the socialist analysis that alone can explain present political developments.

We have every reason to believe that more and more working class people will come to agree with our analysis. Many hope that the peace process will deliver peace and justice. It will become clearer that it will deliver neither. Because they have not reconciled themselves to injustice they will begin to fight back. In fact they have already begun to do so, on many occasions, but with illusions in the process. These illusions will become less and less compelling. When action becomes combined with an absence of illusions the potential for the socialist alternative will grow.

The future is not yet decided. It is open. Democracy and freedom through socialism or another British settlement guaranteeing a continuation of the sectarianism and repression imperialism has always relied on, and always will.

the 1990s, the number of people in the population aged 65 and over has increased by 20% (Eurostat 2000). In 2000, 17% of the population was aged 65 and over, and this is expected to rise to 23% by 2020. The increase in the number of people aged 65 and over is expected to be particularly marked in the 2000s, with the number of people aged 65 and over increasing by 20% in the period 2000–2005, and by 25% in the period 2005–2010 (Eurostat 2000).

As a result of the increase in the number of people aged 65 and over, the number of people aged 65 and over who are dependent on others has also increased. In 2000, 1.2 million people aged 65 and over were dependent on others, and this is expected to rise to 1.5 million by 2020. The increase in the number of people aged 65 and over who are dependent on others is expected to be particularly marked in the 2000s, with the number of people aged 65 and over who are dependent on others increasing by 20% in the period 2000–2005, and by 25% in the period 2005–2010 (Eurostat 2000).

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