

Yes to peace and to an Ireland that is neither Orange nor Green

Ireland, Sinn Fein and the peace talks

Andrew Flood

1994

Contents

What's new?	3
What's going on?	4
Sell out, sense or inevitable?	4
A republican surrender?	5
Gaza Mark II	6

DESPITE ALL THE talk of peace the war continues. The media has as usual focused on the acts of the republicans, particularly around the Heathrow attack in March. However as the following extracts show the British state is also continuing its war effort and continuing to defend its usual mixture of lies and torture while doing so. They are all taken from An Phoblacht/Republican News (Sinn Féin paper) in the closing weeks of March, mostly stories the media did not consider to be worth covering.

“Yet again, an RIR soldier has walked free from a Diplock court even though he admitted supplying the names and addresses of republicans to loyalist gangs. David Murdock was one of three people who appeared before Belfast Crown Court on Tuesday, 15 March. The court was told that Murdock supplied information to 28-year-old loyalist Brian Appleton from Windsor Avenue, yet Appleton was not convicted of any offence arising from this.”

“The RUC has kept up its policy of harassment against nationalists in the County Tyrone town of Cookstown, with a series of dawn raids carried out on Monday last, 21 March, on the Greenvale Estate. The RUC rampaged through 12 houses using sledgehammers to gain entry to several houses at 5.45am. They arrested one man who was released the following day without any charges being preferred.”

“A ruling by the Court of Appeal in Belfast on Monday, 7 March, has sanctioned physical abuse of women prisoners in Six-County jails. It stated that the practices and procedures involved in the forced strip-searching of women prisoners is legal and so entitles the prison’s governor “to order a prisoner to be strip-searched whenever he sees fit.”

“The inquest into the killings of six people in RUC shoot-to-kill operations in Armagh in 1982 have been adjourned yet again, for two months... This latest adjournment was requested by the crown lawyers to allow the British government time to prepare a Public Interest Immune Certificate (PIIC).” The PIIC will prevent the questioning of those who carried out the shooting.

What’s new?

Not an especially exciting collection, in fact pretty typical of the ongoing war of the British state, but one you just don’t hear about in the mainstream press. Indeed in the aftermath of the Heathrow attack the mainstream centred on Gerry Adams threat of more IRA spectaculars to come. Except of course Adams it transpired had said no such thing. His words had been changed through the application of what it politely know now-a-days as spin. As usual however the original (false) remarks got front page headlines, the correction received no coverage or a couple of cm’s on inside pages.

The point of all this is that despite the formal lifting of Section 31 its business as usual for the media. The stories we are fed continue to be selective and designed to create a false impression from events, in this case that republicans are not serious about peace while the British government are. To a certain extent a reaction of ‘so what else is new’ is legitimate to all this. But the important point that all this black propaganda on one side, and endless calls for clarification on the other is hiding the real nature of the peace talks.

What's going on?

The peace talks represent the ditching of Sinn Féin's left gloss and a return to good old nationalist politics, pure and simple. They started with the Hume — Adams dialogue, a still secret document but one which clearly set out to demonstrate that the northern nationalists could be trusted (by both Dublin and London) to 'behave' in the event of British withdrawal. Once Sinn Féin might have talked of nationalising foreign sections of the economy, now according to their recent pamphlet on The economics of Irish unification they expect that the British government will continue to pump around 1 billion pounds a year into Northern Ireland.

Gerry Adams gave a special St. Patrick's day address as part of the process of spelling this out. In it he said

“Irish history has been scarred and mutilated by the support which the British government gives to unionism and the consequent inability of unionists to come to a democratic accommodation with the rest of the Irish people. The British government's role as persuaders is key. That is obvious.” AP/RN March 24, 1994

What all this means is transparent. In the past Tories have feared that British withdrawal would lead to a “Cuba off the British Coast”, that a Sinn Féin victory would lead to widespread nationalisation and social upheaval. But Sinn Féin is no longer talking at all of that kind of victory. To expect Britain to give 1 billion a year after withdrawal clearly sees withdrawal not in the context of a defeat for imperialism but as a different way for imperialism to manage Ireland. The unionists are the problem, Britain as a persuader we are told is the potential solution.

Adams Ard Fheis speech was laced with such a perspective, rather than appealing to Protestant workers he said “It is also time that the Protestant people heard the voice of reason and sanity from their leaders. They need a De Klerk to lead them and us into the next century.”

The left in Sinn Féin would once have talked of the spirit of James Connolly, I'm sure nobody needs the difference between Connolly and De Klerk spelt out for them.

Adams Ard Fheis speech was quite clear about what Sinn Féin are offering and how they are looking to the ruling class of Britain and Ireland rather than the workers as the way forward. “Our party paper, Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland, clearly places the onus on the two governments to secure change. It especially calls on the British government to “join the persuaders” and on the Dublin government to persuade the British that partition is a failure...”

He also clearly put forward the idea of Hume-Adams as a pan-nationalist alliance saying “credit must given also to Albert Reynolds...the first Taoiseach to have taken the steps he has taken to address the core issues of a negotiated settlement” and again “we need particularly to consider how we can appeal to the national sentiment that is strong particularly at the grassroots of Fianna Fáil...”

Sell out, sense or inevitable?

Now is all this a sell out? Well no, despite the twists and turns of republican politics from the “Year of Victory” militarism of the 1970's, to the community politics “ballot box and armalite” of the 1980's this is what has always been the core of nationalist politics. It is no more a sell out than Fianna Fáil's attacks on healthcare or Thatcher's attacks on the trade unions.

The purpose of Irish republicanism is and was to see Ireland as Robert Emmet put it “take its place among the nations of the world”. A place which includes those key features of all the other nation states, alienation, cops and the rule of a minority. Not just in Ireland but everywhere in this century it has been a fault of the left to accept the populist rhetoric of nationalist movements, from Nicaragua to Cuba as socialist.

Sinn Féin wants the same sort of settlement that the ANC and PLO have ‘won’. Where the post boxes get a lick of green paint, and the harp replaces the crown on the caps of the police. Where the existing state (and yesterdays enemies) control what were their puppets (be it loyalist death squads or Inkatha) in return for a guarantee of stability from the ‘anti-imperialists’. We recognise these things as a step forward, the ending of legal apartheid or the sectarian state in the North would not be trivial things and just as we would fight against their introduction, we support their ending. But they offer only crumbs to the working class.

Unification under capitalism throws up a huge number of problems for the ruling class. First amongst these is Protestant privilege. The northern Protestant workers may have the second worst living standards in comparison with any group in Britain but they are ahead of the worst group, northern Catholic workers. What’s more, in an economy where they too have a high percentage of unemployment about 30,000 Protestants are dependant on the ‘security forces’ for a job. If all that is on offer is unity under capitalism then given the past record of loyalism it could be foolish to expect them not to fight.

A republican surrender?

On the other hand any settlement that did not rectify the imbalances would offer nothing to Catholic workers. War weariness might cause it to be accepted but in the longer term resistance to injustice would be sure to reappear and without any left alternative would probably repeat the events of the end of the 60’s and start of the 70’s. Sections of the far-left have supported just such a republican ‘surrender’ in the impression that this would give them room to grow. In the south however many people consider the border irrelevant to their day to day lives. Here too the far left has failed to break out of isolation, suggesting there’s more than the border in the way in the north.

So what are the two possibilities? With the end of the cold war and the collapse of the northern economy Britain’s long term interests in staying have declined. A significant section of the ruling class would seem to want out if they could leave stability behind. Let us not get too excited by this however, another section wants to stay under any circumstances. The debate may be leaning towards the first section at the moment but the wind could easily change. The question is are they willing to pay the price of stability?

That price comprises maintaining the current living standards of Protestant workers, including finding 20,000 or so new jobs for those currently working in security. (Lets assume they keep 10,000 to police this ‘new’ Ireland. It means offering a substantial enough bribe to the local ruling class to pull them (and the unionist parties) behind such a solution. It also means pulling up the standard of living of Catholics to a level where the deal appears to offer something and creating a mechanism to achieve equality of opportunity and access over a period of time. It would appear from their calls for a Protestant De Klerk, Britain to ‘convince’ the unionists and continued investment from Britain that this is what Sinn Féin hopes for.

The bill would be billions of pounds, the problem being that capitalism in recession would have severe difficulties finding this money. Is the British and Southern Irish ruling class prepared to pay such a price? It would seem unlikely with the exception of the bombings of the City of London (and they are important exceptions) the ruling class has managed to isolate the problem to the 6 counties and keep costs down. Thatcher once boasted that there had been more British troops killed in driving accidents in West Germany than in northern Ireland. The British ruling class is not going to support withdrawal unless it can be guaranteed un-interrupted exploitation and that it would be cheaper to leave than to stay.

Gaza Mark II

The second option would be of the type worked out by Israel and the PLO. Token improvements could be made that would redistribute poverty, the local ruling class bought off and any opposition destroyed by massive repression from the relevant side. Perhaps Britain would withdraw politically but possibly retain troops on the ground in a peace 'enforcement' capacity, through the EC or UN. Perhaps they would be U.S. troops. The new regime could then try and create a new stability through force.

Is this a possibility? Its one fraught with difficulties for the ruling class. Britain's policy of Ulsterisation introduced under Labour and stepped up under Thatcher meant replacing British troops with local police and UDR (RIR) where possible, and arming loyalist death squads to do the dirty work. But these official and unofficial forces retain some loyalty to the community from which they come, the Protestant working class. Britain has been testing this loyalty in recent years with its partial (very) clampdown on the UDA. In turn the republicans would have similar problems in getting its forces to police its side of such a deal. Such an option would be far from straight forward for the ruling class (and needless to say disastrous for us).

Whatever the possibilities and some of them are very unattractive all Sinn Féin is promising at best is a stability which will include mass unemployment, low wages and all the other features that make Ireland an attractive investment for imperialism, otherwise how can they expect £1 billion annually from Britain. That is why we have always said that only socialism can rid Ireland north and south of poverty and reaction. That's what we will continue to fight for, peace deal or otherwise; the class war goes on.

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Andrew Flood
Yes to peace and to an Ireland that is neither Orange nor Green
Ireland, Sinn Fein and the peace talks
1994

Retrieved on 18th November 2021 from struggle.ws
From *Workers Solidarity* No. 42 – Summer 1994.

theanarchistlibrary.org