

Ireland: the Sinn Fein/Provisional IRA position

# John Major must be a partner for peace

By Gerry Adams

SINCE the collapse of the peace process I and others in the Sinn Fein leadership have been working, at times on a daily basis, to create the conditions in which that process can be restored. Despite all the difficulties I am totally committed to this task. All political leaders have to play a full role in creating the conditions which will maximise the possibility of securing a democratic and negotiated peace settlement.

There are great difficulties in this, not least because of the history of the conflict itself and particularly the experiences of the last two or three years. [The difficulties] arise mainly from the British government's refusal so far to engage in a good faith way and to respond meaningfully to the opportunities presented to it. The Taoiseach's [Irish prime minister's] stewardship of the process has also caused some difficulties, but it is worth noting that the focus of the Dublin government has been a more positive one in recent times.

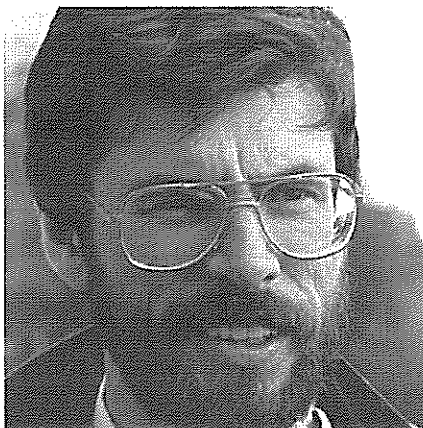
The refusal of the unionist leaderships to be part of the process, the attitude of the loyalists and the resumption of the IRA campaign are all factors which have to be dealt with. As part of our endeavours to do just this my colleagues and I have remained in contact with a wide range of political opinion. This includes the Irish government, the US administration, John Hume and a range of other individuals on both sides of the Atlantic.

All... have a common interest in making sure that the talks scheduled to begin on 10 June are real talks. A democratic peace settlement of the conflict in Ireland demands honest dialogue to resolved the causes of the conflict.

A lot of the focus from the media is on whether the IRA will call a cessation. There is not, however, the same focus on the other factors even though all of these are interrelated. There is also a concerted effort to reduce all of these difficulties to one. That is, to the question of an IRA cessation. The media is filled with the politics of Sinn Fein being "pressurised" to bring about an IRA ceasefire.

This does not help the effort to restore the peace process. Indeed it is not meant to. It is meant to cause confusion and to unsettle republicans and more importantly because republicans are confident in our own sense of what we have to do, insofar as British government sources are involved, it is meant to off-load their responsibility for creating real talks.

Clearly there is a need for the British government to play a full role. Unless John Major becomes a partner in the peace process a settlement is impossible. There is a need too for the Dublin government to fulfil its responsibilities and there is a role of the international community, particularly the US, to continue its even-handed approach. A future strategy must also seek to create political condition for



a negotiated settlement which involves the unionists in an inclusive search for a lasting peace.

Obviously the creation of such a way forward is beyond the gift of Sinn Fein alone even though it is our firm intention.

What then of the British government's role? Mr Major must move in a decisive way. In saying this, I am mindful of Mr Major's difficulties, but notwithstanding these difficulties, he is the British prime minister and he must fulfil his responsibilities in a flexible manner.

The purpose of real negotiations must be to bring about substantive and significant change in the following areas:

- a. Constitutional and political
- b. Demilitarisation
- c. Democratic rights

All issues must be on the agenda.

Sinn Fein spokespersons have advised that if the peace process is to be re-established the British government must give clear, specific and unambiguous public assurances that these negotiations will be inclusive, with no item on the agenda allowed to become an insurmountable obstacle to progress and all negotiations to be conducted within an agreed time frame. The British government and the Unionist leadership have made the issue of decommissioning a blockage. This must be removed. Obviously the issue has to be resolved to everyone's satisfaction but it cannot become a precondition.

It is within John Major's ability to create a rhetoric which points up the possibility of movement without the substance which such movement requires. This would be entirely counterproductive and I would advise strongly against it because in so doing he would merely be seeking to pressurise the IRA and while this may seem legitimate from the British point of view a different psychology is required. This needs to see beyond the short term because even if the result was a renewed IRA cessation, and it is doubtful whether the IRA can be pressurised in this way. If this led only to a repeat of the experience of the last cessation, or to inconclusive talks, then we would all face the worst of all possible scenarios.

Without clear and firm guidance at government level there is no prospect of

resolving these problems and a proper structure and process of negotiations must be created and used in the most constructive manner. Nothing can be agreed until everything is agreed and all relevant issues must be addressed in full and comprehensive fashion so that there is at least the possibility that change will be the outcome of these deliberations. For example, there can be no exclusively internal or partitionist settlement. There must be substantial and significant change on constitutional and political matters and while this presents huge difficulties for the Unionists there must be a serious effort to reach agreement on this matter.

Parity of esteem and equality of treatment will have to be dealt with; the imbalance in the unemployment ratio; equality in economic development; greater and more equally shared prosperity; empowerment and inclusion of deprived and marginalised communities. These should be pursued inside and outside negotiations.

Parity of esteem for the Irish language and culture is required.

The whole issue of demilitarisation needs to be resolved. This includes prisoners, disarmament, policing and the administration of justice and an end to repressive legislation.

The negotiating process must endeavour to reach a new agreement which can earn the allegiance of all the Irish people by accommodating diversity and providing for national reconciliation. For this to be achieved everyone involved must be committed to reaching agreement.

It is essential, therefore, that both governments shape the negotiating process in such a way as to ensure that all parties are treated on an equal basis and that no party has an undemocratic advantage.

These must be no preconditions. And there can be no attempt to predetermine the outcome, nor to preclude any outcome to the negotiations.

[We need to ensure] that the talks beginning on 10 June:

- a. Contain no preconditions;
- b. Contain no actual or potential stalls;
- c. Are time limited.

The two governments have stated that Sinn Fein cannot be involved in the talks scheduled to begin on 10 June unless the IRA renews its cessation. Whatever the IRA does Sinn Fein has the right to be at the talks table. We have an electoral mandate. We are fighting a British-imposed election to renew that mandate. We do not accept any preconditions on negotiations. Nor do we impose any preconditions. Sinn Fein is not the IRA. Sinn Fein campaigns openly and peacefully in pursuit of our political aims. At the same time we accept our responsibility to try and create the proper climate and to help to bring about an end to all armed actions so that talks have a prospect of success. ■

● Slightly abridged from *An Phoblacht*, 16 May 1996