

A socialist symposium

Ireland: is there a solution?

A hidden history of class politics

Henry Patterson

THE end of the ceasefire was brought about by a shift in the balance of forces inside the Republican movement against the Adams leadership. That change has been coming during the past few months because of the lack of progress towards all-party talks.

There was always a section of the Republican movement who were not keen on the new direction in which Adams is leading them, and who do not really believe that their objectives can be won in this way.

Nevertheless the opponents of Adams's policy shift had to accept that by the end of the 1980s their strategy had run up against a brick wall. The IRA had not been defeated, but neither had the British, nor were there any signs that the British could be forced to leave.

Sinn Féin had become a relatively successful political force in the North, but there they were not dominant, and they had not made inroads in the South.

The Republican movement had reached the limits of its strategy.

So inside the movement the Adams group managed to persuade people to try a new policy: shelving the military campaign in return for political support from Dublin and Washington. Those who were sceptical were at least persuaded to tolerate it. For example, I do not think that Martin McGuinness has ever really believed that the Adams strategy would work, but he was prepared to see it tested.

One of the problems has been that Adams oversold what could be expected from the British. His group encouraged the belief that all-party talks would be arranged quickly. But I do not believe that there actu-



Hope and joy at the time of the ceasefire

ally ever was a deal with the British to get into talks within three months, which is the period Adams has mentioned.

And the British government have not helped. There were areas that the British could have moved on relatively easily — for example, on the question of the prisoners. But they did not.

On other issues the British government were always going to have difficulties. The fundamental constitutional reforms the Republicans want are going to be very hard to arrange.

It is also going to be hard for the British to fix all-party talks. I do not know if Adams ever really believed that the British would act in this way. But he at least hoped they would, and led others to expect they would.

I think that Adams had become persuaded that the Anglo-Irish Agreement indicated that some sort of accommodation might be reached with a section of the British political elite for a gradual process of extrication. In other words Adams now accepts that the British are not going to say that they will leave in five or ten years. However he believes that it is pos-

sible to create "interim structures" which will amount in effect to joint British-Southern authority over the North leading up to British withdrawal in — perhaps — two decades time.

That was the new strategy. It is a move away from the idea that the British can be forced out, and it represents a recognition by Adams's group that Britain has no real interest in being in Northern Ireland. That is why the parts of the Downing Street Declaration and the Framework Document which say that Britain has no selfish economic or strategic interests in the North were so important for the Republican movement.

One of the ideas behind the Anglo-Irish Agreement was that the conflict could best be "managed" at an inter-governmental level, rather than trying to get the local politicians to agree. However the present process — if it has not totally fallen apart — does involve giving a bigger role to internal political forces. The Framework Document envisaged quite developed political structures in Northern Ireland. The idea here is to make agreement easier for the main Unionist parties.

Adams believes that the Protestants can not be forced into a united Ireland. On the other hand both he and John Hume are looking to the British to pressurise and educate the Protestants.

At the core of Adams's strategy is the idea that the British must take up this active role. And this itself is a major problem with the Adams strategy.

It is possible to imagine a bourgeois interim-solution: some sort of regional

Glossary

DUP: Democratic Unionist Party, led by Ian Paisley.

Framework Document: joint document published by governments of Britain and Irish Republic in February 1995. Proposes new Belfast government, linked with Dublin government in a common structure to mediate Ireland's connections with the European Union and a "standing intergovernmental conference" of both governments to oversee Northern Ireland.

Paisley: Ian Paisley, leader of the Democratic Unionist Party.

PUP: Progressive Unionist Party. Splinter Unionist party, linked to the paramilitary Ulster Volunteer Force.

SDLP: Social Democratic and Labour Party, led

by John Hume. Constitutional nationalist, it commands about two-thirds of the Catholic vote in Northern Ireland. Formed in 1970 by middle-class civil-rights activists and "Republican Labour" people, it swallowed up the old Nationalist party.

Shankill Road: a Protestant working-class area in west Belfast.

Six Counties: Northern Ireland.

Twenty-six Counties: the Irish Republic.

Trimble: David Trimble, leader of the Ulster Unionist Party (also called "Official Unionists").

UDP: Ulster Democratic Party. Splinter Unionist party, linked to the paramilitary Ulster Defence Association.

Workers' Party: descendant (with Stalinistic, anti-nationalist politics) of the Official IRA, from which the Provisional IRA split in 1969-70.

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government in Northern Ireland based on power-sharing; North-South institutions as envisaged in the Framework Document. I would not have a problem with this if it could actually be made to work. However, my basic doubt about the feasibility of such an arrangement is that it is difficult to see the Unionists accepting any solution with a strong North-South dimension.

Over the past decade the rift between communities has actually deepened. This makes the internal basis for this type of agreement very difficult to construct.

There is a hidden history of class politics in the north of Ireland manifested in both communities. It was embodied in the Northern Irish Labour Party (NILP) during the post-war period up until the early 1960s. That tradition was essentially destroyed by the Troubles.

Organisations like the PUP and the DUP look back to that type of politics, but they are different in important respects. In theory, if not in practice, the NILP tried to transcend the sectarian divide. But the PUP and DUP should really be seen as a reflection of class politics within the Protestant bloc. They do not really look to go beyond their community. They are strongly influenced by community politics, which almost necessarily in Northern Ireland means communal politics.

Nevertheless these organisations do at least talk a language of compromise and may be, for some people, a step away from sectarianism.

The emergence of the PUP comes — to some degree — from the crisis of the Workers' Party. After the demise of the NILP the Workers' Party represented the re-birth of social democratic politics, albeit on a largely Catholic basis. Since the Workers' Party split across Ireland the Party in the North has lost influence and retreated into its traditional, most-easily mobilised, Catholic, old-Official heartlands.

The other half of the split, the Democratic Left, continues to have considerable support in the Irish Republic, but has failed to take off significantly in Northern Ireland.

So the non-sectarian alternatives in the North are currently weak — outside some very small socialist groups.

● Henry Patterson is a professor of politics at the University of Ulster.

Contradictory reasons for the ceasefires

Eamonn McCann

THERE was always a fragility about the ceasefire. The breaking point came with the Canary Wharf bombing. As everyone knows John Major's seeming rejection of the Mitchell Report's main recommendations and adoption of what is perceived to be the Official Unionist Party's policy of

elections to a negotiating body, triggered the bombing. That may have been the final straw. But behind that the contradictions had begun to sharpen.

The ceasefire was sold to the Republican rank and file on what some of us recognised at the time as an unrealistic basis: that the pan-nationalist alliance with the SDLP, Dublin and the Irish-American lobby would provide speedier progress towards a united Ireland than the armed struggle.

Of course the Protestant ceasefire was sold to the paramilitaries on the basis that the Union was safe. So the reasons for the two sides' ceasefires were obviously contradictory.

Add to this the fact that over the last 18 months there has been footdragging and bad faith on the British side.

Major — right up until the ceasefire began — had refused to believe Albert Reynolds' assurances that there would actually be a ceasefire. And when it took place he regarded it as a sign of weakness.

So, there were a series of misunderstandings and contradictions underlying the ceasefire.

Northern Irish politics are constructed around communal identity. But from my point of view, as a socialist, this is something I fight against. I deny, absolutely, that this is the only way of understanding Northern Irish politics. The peace process was always inherently sectarian. It is based on the assumption that the only possible way that people can identify themselves is by reference to the religious community that they were born into. That is precisely the type of politics that socialists should be concerned to fight against.

To be specific: one of the suggestions in the Framework Document is that an all-Ireland body might begin to run the health service north and south of the border. The peace process argument is that this will signify some sort of move towards a united Ireland.

However left entirely out of the account

is that the nurses in the South voted overwhelmingly last week for strike action — for the first time in their history. There has been a wave of strike action in the Southern health service and massive popular resistance to the closure of hospital units.

Simultaneously, the television news in Northern Ireland is reporting the great anger that has followed the announcement of hospital cuts. This reporting has overshadowed the peace process.

The argument about whether the health service should be run on an all-Ireland or partition basis is meaningless from a working-class point of view, unless the content of the health care is discussed.

It is just not true that everyone sees themselves as either Protestant or Catholic. The political history of Ireland shows this is not true. The Unionist party was not the main party for many years in Belfast. A lot of people who discuss the issues now seem to believe that the fringe parties like the PUP are a new phenomenon. Anything but. The Shankill Road has never, ever, been a stronghold of official, mainstream Unionism. The people there voted — in the 1930s for instance — for people who, by contemporary standards, could be considered radical or left wing. So there are not just two traditions in Northern Ireland.

Nevertheless, if parties like the PUP are serious about fighting for workers' interests, even just Protestant workers' interests — and I have yet to be convinced that they are — they must break away from the all-class Orange political bloc which has dominated the Protestant workers for 100 years. And they can not do that if they collude with Trimble and Paisley in denying their Catholic neighbours the right to express their identity.

It is true there are differences between the people. But we must recognise the rights of the nationalist people. The people who must be the arbiters about what is an adequate representation of the nationalist identity are the nationalist people them-

"The Troubles"

1968-72: Catholic revolt for civil rights in the North. Northern Ireland state lurches towards civil war. British troops go on the streets (August 1969). Provisional IRA emerges and starts military campaign (1970-71); Ulster Defence Association formed, as a mass-based Protestant paramilitary group (1971-2). Britain abolishes Northern Ireland's "Home Rule" parliament at Stormont (March 1972), introducing "direct rule" from London. **1972-6:** Britain seeks a solution through reform (Sunningdale Agreement, December 1973), but is beaten back by Protestant militancy (Ulster General Strike, May 1974). Further British efforts at reform (1975-6) get nowhere.

1976-82: Britain tries to hold the ring and "sweat out" the Catholic revolt. Britain found guilty of "inhuman and degrading treatment" of prisoners by

European Commission for Human Rights (1977). Ten Republican hunger strikers die (1981).

1981-83: Sinn Féin makes a "political" turn.

1984: "New Ireland Forum" of southern Irish political parties proposes options for a solution.

1985, November: Anglo-Irish Agreement signed, institutionalising London-Dublin co-operation over Northern Ireland. Major Protestant revolt follows in 1986, but dwindles thereafter as it fails to break the Agreement.

1993: Hume/Adams initiative seeks all-party all-Ireland talks with a British commitment to back the results, and indicates that Provisional IRA will then call ceasefire and seek Protestant consent for Irish unity.

1994, August: Provisionals call ceasefire.



Men of arms. Provisional IRA funeral procession

selves. Therefore, there must be a united Ireland.

● **Eamonn McCann, a journalist, is a long-time socialist activist. He is affiliated with the Socialist Workers' Movement, sister group of the British SWP.**

Labour can build common ground

Jim Kemmy

THE ceasefire broke down because of a combination of factors. The IRA felt that they were getting nowhere with peaceful dialogue and they had to take up arms again, or in this case set off bombs. They felt that the Unionist parties had gone back into their bunkers, adopted a siege mentality of delaying and procrastinating, and also that the British government had not been as forthcoming as it should have been in entering talks with Sinn Féin. The background factor is that John Major was on a knife-edge in terms of his majority in the Commons, and he was trying to hold as much Unionist support as possible.

I don't think setting off bombs in London, killing innocent men and women, is ever justified. It's a form of intimidation. In a democracy you must accept frustrations. The labour and socialist movement has had to accept frustrations over decades, indeed over centuries, and time and again has had to come back after defeats and build up the movement again. The IRA doesn't understand that democracy has drawbacks and frustrations as well as positive aspects.

We have to be optimistic and hopeful. There is enough room on the island of Ireland for the Unionist community and the nationalist community to live together. The answer to the problems in Northern Ireland will not be found in a triumph of one community over the other. It will be found in compromise — not in extreme Unionism or extreme nationalism, but in a middle way based on democracy and justice for the ordinary people, both Catholic and Protestant.

It will not be found in a military victory of one community over the other and the

subjugation of one community over the other — that went on for too long. It would be a mistake to think that the bomb and the gun is the only way forward. In fact, a step back into sectarian civil war would be a disaster for all parts of Ireland and for Britain too.

At present we have too many inflexible attitudes on all sides. The Unionists must come forward out of their bunkers, into dialogue; they must get rid of the siege mentality. The British government must do all it can to encourage dialogue and communication between the two communities, and encourage compromise and agreement.

And we must let go as well. We must understand the Unionist position. They have been in Northern Ireland for 400 years, as long as the white man has been in America and twice as long as the white man has been in Australia. Whatever faults they have had in the past, whatever undemocratic attitudes they took up to the Catholics, we must go forward. We can learn from the past; we can't live in the past. It is important for us to hold out the hand of friendship to the Unionists.

The Labour Party here is a non-sectarian party. It has an open approach to the Unionists in Northern Ireland. We have got to put forward a broad socialist, democratic position.

The trade union movement in Northern Ireland has been on the whole a good influence against sectarianism and violence. It hasn't succeeding in eliminating it from the society up there, but there are strands in the labour movement in Northern Ireland which are progressive.

Unfortunately, when it comes to election times, too many workers, Unionist and nationalist, retreat into entrenched positions, voting extreme Unionist or extreme nationalist. That's no good. What you have got to do is build a common ground, and the labour movement is ideally suited to do that. We haven't done so in the past, but we must keep trying. Our movement is based on hope.

● **Jim Kemmy is a Limerick TD and Chair of the Irish Labour Party.**

The working class has been cannon fodder

Davey Adams

THE Protestant community, I think, was very angry about the breaking of the ceasefire. It must be said that people in the Nationalist community are angry too. Even the letters page of *An Phoblacht* [Sinn Féin's weekly paper] is full of criticism of the IRA's decision to end the ceasefire. The weight of opinion within their community

Who's for peace? The view from Northern Ireland and the Republic

Which of these possible solutions would you prefer for Northern Ireland?

	Northern Ireland		Republic
	Protestant	Catholic	
It should remain part of UK	81	18	11
Become part of a United Ireland	2	27	30
Linked both to UK and Irish Republic	11	42	29
Become an independent country	4	8	22

How important do you think the border is between Northern Ireland and the Republic?

	Northern Ireland		Republic
	Protestant	Catholic	
The border matters and people should be prepared to fight for it if necessary	26	5	7
The border matters, but is not worth risking any lives for	46	35	47
The border does not matter and is not worth arguing about	26	57	42

Source: *Guardian*, 28 February 1996

and the opinion that they have always cared about internationally will push them in the direction of the resumption of the ceasefire.

The IRA seemingly broke the ceasefire because there was no substantial movement within the peace process towards all-party negotiations. Whether that was the actual reason remains to be seen. I have a notion that there might have been a combination of factors involved.

I believe John Major made a mistake in the House of Commons but not for the reason that the IRA would give — ignoring the Mitchell report's main recommendations. Even though Sinn Féin had given some sort of nod of approval towards the Mitchell report, I believe the Republicans would have found Mitchell very hard to accept. But John Major let them off the hook, by giving them an excuse to concentrate on attacking the proposals for elections.

The UDP was never enamoured of the proposal to hold elections and made that quite plain and public. We don't feel that they are necessary at this stage in the process of conflict resolution. I can give you reasons.

- One, they run the risk of excluding key players from the process.
- Secondly there is the time factor.
- Thirdly we are concerned that they may be used as a stalling device.

But having said this, we are realistic and pragmatic enough to realise that everyone else seems to be on board, and we'll have to live with it.

What the two Prime Ministers produced the other day was a collection of proposals which they had extracted from all the different parties. It was an amalgam of different parties' ideas about the best way forward.

At times, we were as frustrated and as angry as anyone about the slow progress of the whole peace process. We had always said, let's get into all-party negotiations straight away, and deal with the issues.

The role of the working class in Northern Ireland is vital. We have provided, for both sections of the community, almost without exception, the cannon fodder in this conflict for the past twenty-five years and longer.

We want to get towards class-based parties. That has to be our objective. All class politics here has been overwhelmed, swamped for years, by the constitutional issues. If we can reach a position where there is some form of consensus on the constitutional issue then we can concentrate on the bread and butter issues that effect everyone, everyday of their lives.

I hope we will reach an agreed settlement, of whatever description, so that real politics will break out in Northern Ireland. There will then be a realignment towards left, right and centre politics as happens in all other normal societies.

"The principle of consent has been accepted almost universally. It is possible that we can move to a position where compromise rooted in realities dictates the form of a settlement."

There have been subtle changes taking place within the broad, Unionist, bloc these last few years. And also within the broad, Republican and Nationalist bloc. Nationalism now fully admits that any sort of imposed united Ireland just wouldn't work; Unionism and Loyalism admit privately —

and in many cases publicly — that there has to be a recognition of the nationalist aspirations of the people that share Northern Ireland with us. Somewhere in the middle there is common ground where agreement can be reached. The principle of consent has been accepted almost universally. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that we can all move to a position where compromise rooted in realities dictates the form of a settlement — as opposed to everyone's extreme idea of how they would like things to be. We all have to deal with what is possible as opposed to what is desirable.

To some extent the peace process is taking place over the heads of the people in Northern Ireland. We have to reach a position where people are comfortable with the fact that there cannot be a change in the constitutional position of Northern Ireland without the consent of the majority. There has to be recognition that not only are we neighbours with the Irish Republic, but we also have links through the EC. We can be at least as friendly towards each other as other neighbouring countries are within the EC.

● Davey Adams is a Senior Officer of the UDP.

The solution has to come from within Ireland

Christine Kinealy

THE ceasefire broke down because people on the Republican side are impatient. Nothing had happened. They were frustrated.

I hope there will be another ceasefire and genuine all-party talks, and I hope the British government expedites matters — by actually listening to the recommendations when they bring in people like Mitchell to make recommendations, and by talking to all parties.

It appears that Gerry Adams is having a very hard time to keep the various groups together in the Republican movement. The British government must realise that, and they must help him. I think Adams was sincere in what he was doing with the ceasefire.

I don't know that there is any one way out from the impasse in Northern Ireland. I find it very hard to see one. I think it has to be a solution that comes from within Ireland, and from the communities in Ireland, but that's not easy.

From having lived in Dublin and Belfast, I see there is such a strong class element to it, and if people could recognise that dimension to it, and build on that, on common interests, that could help.

But the situation is very polarised. Trimble is a hard-liner. Paisley is a hard-liner. People on the nationalist side have never really tried to understand the Protestants' situation. The British, too, if you look right

From Famine to De Valera

1845-9: Famine in Ireland. Millions die or flee for their lives. Decades of revolt follow.

1870: Liberal Government in London passes first of a series of Land Acts which, by the 1920s, will transfer the land from Anglo-Irish Protestant landlords to small farmers.

1886: Liberals come out for Home Rule for Ireland. The Tories, linked to the Anglo-Irish landlord class, oppose Home Rule.

1890s on: rise of a new militant nationalism, and of Irish socialism and trade unionism.

1912-14: Third Home Rule Bill has majority in Parliament. Protestant Ulster organises for violent resistance to Home Rule, encouraged by British Tories and on officers' revolt in British Army. The Home Rule Act is passed in 1914, but suspended on pretext of outbreak of World War 1.

1916: The "Easter Rising" in Dublin is crushed.

1918: UK General Election. Sinn Féin win 73 out of 105 seats in Ireland. Sinn Féin MPs set up an independent Irish parliament, Dail Eireann. War follows; Irish nationalists and Britain fight for control of southern Ireland.

1921 July: Truce.

December: Anglo-Irish Treaty. Ireland is partitioned into two "Home Rule" states. Northern Ireland becomes a Protestant sectarian state, entrapping a one-third Catholic minority.

1922-23: Civil war in south between supporters and opponents of the Treaty.

1926: De Valera founds Fianna Fail, brings anti-Treaty IRA into Irish parliamentary politics. Fianna Fail wins power in 1932; embarks on nationalist economic policy. 1937 constitution is "a Republic in all but name" — and Catholic.

back to Gladstone, have always underestimated the Protestants.

A federal framework? It does make sense. If you look within the wider context of Europe, it makes perfect sense. But, once again, the solution has to come from within Ireland.

● **Christine Kinealy is author of a study of the Irish Famine of the 1840s, *This Great Calamity* [Gill and Macmillan]. It was reviewed in *Workers' Liberty*, October 1995.**

Forget about the border

Paddy Devlin

WE now have enormous support for the reinstatement of the ceasefire.

Although it is a hard thing for me to say, it is the truth that John Major has worked hard for the ceasefire and to get the IRA to stop their campaign. Major and the southern Taoiseach, John Bruton, have actually done quite well.

Bruton has used the right language and has managed to get a dialogue with the Provos.

The Provos are difficult people to deal with. Although they have only 10% of the votes here they continued their counter-productive military campaign for a long time.

However I firmly believe that politics must not be conducted in this way. People must be persuaded to change their ideas. It is utterly wrong — as well as being impossible and counterproductive — to try to change people's ideas by threatening them with guns and by planting bombs. We must operate through the parliamentary system.

The Protestant people are beginning to turn towards the working class movement. And some of the Catholic people are becoming a little better off. It is only in the ghettos that the Sinn Feiners have any real support.

The changes that were fought for years ago have gone through and a lot of the anti-British feelings have gone.

The majority of people in both communities want to stay in the North. They are looking for a solution *within* Northern Ireland, not outside that framework. Of those who vote, 80% vote for an internal solution to our problems.

It is now the case that many Catholics and Nationalists are thinking of voting for Unionists; certainly those on higher incomes are. It is a big change and it has come very quickly.

People can see what economic life is like in the South and they do not like the look of it. There is not the same standard of living in the south and most people in Northern Ireland would not exchange a drop in their quality of life for a united Ireland.

In fact a lot of the barriers to the South

have already gone down and we are united through Europe.

We must forget about the question of the border and accept that Northern Ireland is here to stay. We must concentrate on class questions not the border.

● **Paddy Devlin was a founder of the SDLP and later attempted to set up a new Labour Party in Northern Ireland. He was a Minister in the power-sharing Northern Irish government (January-May 1974)**

Deal with the remnants of imperialism

Matt Merrigan

THERE were undertakings given before the IRA ceasefire took effect that there would be all-party talks within three months of an ending of the military campaign. After the ceasefire took effect the British government began to raise all sorts of questions that they had not previously mentioned. Is the ceasefire "permanent"? Well, how permanent is permanent?

Then they demanded the decommissioning of weapons. But there had been no mention of such a demand in the Downing Street declaration or the Framework Document. It was made quite clear by Adams that the IRA were not going to deliver before there was a movement towards all-party talks or a settlement in the offing.

So the ceasefire broke down because of an act of bad faith by the British government.

Now they are punishing Sinn Fein for their association with the IRA. Sinn Fein has been excluded from all talks prior to 10 June. This is no way to solve the problem. Sinn Fein represent about 40% of the nationalist population of the North. That is not an insignificant mandate.

We should not view Sinn Fein and the IRA as one organisation. The IRA have the same republican objectives as Sinn Fein, but they have a predilection to use the gun rather than negotiations.

The big bomb in London has completely changed the attitude of the British government towards dealing with Sinn Fein/IRA. And how has this miraculous change of heart and date for all-party talks been brought about? By the bombing in London. The British government does not care about bombs going off in Ireland, but it certainly does care about bombs going off in London. Is this not always the way? The British have been stampeded again by violence: they were like that over the fall of Stormont [1972], and they responded in the same way to the violence of the guerrilla war of the IRA.

Northern Ireland was always a political slum. The Nationalist community always faced political inequality: constituencies were gerrymandered on the basis of sectarian headcounting; they were repressed. The degree of discrimination and repression was such that it was impossible to make political progress in a constitutional way.

The IRA are engaged in a revolutionary nationalist struggle. It is impossible to separate the liberation of the Irish working class from the task of dealing with the remnants of imperialism.

It seems as if some of the fringe unionist parties have some roots in the working class — but for all that they are still unionists. They are still prepared to defend the union with Britain.

What is the way forward? Well, joint sovereignty of Britain and Ireland over Northern Ireland is not an ideal solution but it would — immediately — help to guarantee the rights of the nationalist community. The germ of this concept is in the Anglo-Irish Agreement, where it was stated that the Irish government could become the guarantor of the rights of the Northern minority.

The left in the North is all but extirpated. I do not see any other choice than to back the SDLP-Sinn Fein-Irish government ♦

North and South

IN 1911 the contrast was stark between the industrialised north-east and the underdeveloped, mostly rural, south. Ulster had 48% of all Ireland's industrial workers and Belfast alone, 21%. Only 14% of the workforce in the 26 counties was in industry or commerce.

By 1961 40% of the 26 Counties workforce was in industry and commerce, and 25% in industry alone. The South had become a predominantly urban, industrial economy. Since the 1960s manufacturing for export has increased sharply in the South. The 26 Counties are now more

industrial than the Six Counties: 37% of value added in the South comes from industry, as against only 27% in the North. And the South's industries are generally more advanced.

In 1960 Northern Ireland had 10,000 more manufacturing jobs than the South. It now has half as many. Since Protestants had more jobs to start with they have been worse hit, but still male unemployment is 2.6 times as high for Catholics as for Protestants and overall unemployment, male and female, twice as high.

35 years ago living standards in the South were on average scarcely half those in the North: now EU figures reckon the purchasing-power of income per head in the South at only 8% less than in the North.

moves to secure some movement. There is no other practical alternative.

Immediately we need to demand space for the Nationalist community. That means release of prisoners, and end to discrimination and the removal of armed RUC and British soldiers from the streets in the North.

The problem is that the working class is divided. There are large sections which do not support basic socialist concepts. The most central feature of socialism is that there must be the democratic right to decide for yourself what to do. On this basis the population of the whole of Ireland should decide the political status of the North. However the unionists would not allow an all-Ireland plebiscite to determine whether or not they should leave the union.

● **Matt Merrigan was for many years a Dublin official of the AT&GWU. In the '40s he was a member of the Irish section of the Fourth International, finally backing the current of post-Trotsky Trotskyism identified with the name of Max Shachtman.**

A united Ireland is a united people

Joe Hendron

THE blame for the breakdown of the ceasefire lies, firstly, with the Provisional IRA. There can be no equivocation of any kind on that question: they carried out the Canary Wharf bombing and killed two totally innocent people.

Having said that I also believe that the British government have grossly mishandled the situation over the past few months. We had 17 months of peace. To maintain that peace, the government should have convened all-party talks long ago.

In addition the Prime Minister presented an unbalanced view of the Mitchell Report's recommendations to parliament. Senator Mitchell's main stress was on decommissioning of weapons *alongside* all-party talks. There was vague mention of elections in the Report, but this was the point that John Major chose to stress. Although the bombing had been under preparation for some time, this speech seemed to trigger the Provos into action.

John Major has had an eye on the voting arithmetic in parliament, he has been under pressure from the Tory right and the peace process has, consequently, been allowed to drift. So I am pleased that John Major and John Bruton have announced a date for all-party negotiations: 10 June. Major has said this date is sacrosanct and will not be moved for anyone.

Proximity talks are now starting at Stormont. The SDLP is willing to talk to anyone in the search for peace.

The details of the forthcoming elections will have to be sorted out. Perhaps the parties will be able to come to an agreement

acceptable to the government. If not the government will have to decide the form of the elections. But, in any event, there will be elections before 10 June.

The question therefore is: where do we go after 10 June?

My party is a nationalist party, but we are much more concerned about the question of peace than that of a united Ireland. We do not talk of a united Ireland, what interests us right now is reconciliation between two peoples divided by history.

Such a reconciliation can only come about by agreement and respect for the different traditions.

Perhaps, one day, there will be a united Ireland — but if so it will be brought about by consent. By a united Ireland we mean a united people, and people can not be united by guns and bombs.

There are three areas we need to examine: the relations between the two communities in the North; the relations between North and South; the relations between Britain and Ireland.

There could be a local administration in the North, but only with the other two sets of relationships agreed and in place at the same time. There is no question of having a power-sharing administration in the North and then, *after that* is in place, allowing such a body to deal with North-South relations. That is not on. Nationalists would not accept this. All such relations must be agreed as part of one package.

● **Joe Hendron is SDLP MP for West Belfast.**

There is no capitalist solution

Peter Hadden

CLEARLY the IRA were responsible for the physical breakdown of the ceasefire. But the underlying reason for the collapse of the peace process was the intransigence of the British government — their refusal to move on the question of talks while continually shifting the goal posts.

The on-going sectarian obstinacy of local politicians also continued unabated.

This led to genuine frustrations within the Republican movement. Republicans felt the talks were being deliberately stalled and that the process was going nowhere. However, these frustrations in no way justified the IRA's resumption of the military campaign. The bombings can achieve nothing positive for working-class people.

John Major's mission has been to string things out for as long as possible. He wanted to let the paramilitary activity recede as far as possible into the past, to create a different atmosphere for discussions. He felt that in this way he could get more of his own way in the talks. So he has been playing for time. However, the policy of continually pushing the Republican movement to the wire came apart when they pushed them too far.

Traditionally the only two choices which are presented to the people are: either the status quo — which is unacceptable to a large section of the working-class of the Catholic minority — *or* the idea of a Catholic united Ireland, which is unacceptable to Protestants.

There is no long-term, lasting capitalist solution to the conflict in Ireland.

I think it is possible that the various political groupings might reach an agreement. But such a deal would not resolve the underlying problems of poverty and the built-in injustices of the six county state.

I think that the problem the Republican movement faced was that they were in a dead end with their military strategy — it simply could not deliver a united Ireland, or progress towards it. So in the place of the military campaign they took up the strategy of Adams: of linking up with the right-wing political establishment in the South, with the US administration and with the SDLP in Northern Ireland. This is also a dead end because it doesn't offer anything to Catholic working-class people of the North. The common interests of Catholic and Protestant workers must be put to the forefront in a common struggle for socialism.

The Protestant people are not a distinct nationality separate from Catholics. The day-to-day living conditions of Protestants and working-class Catholic people are very largely the same. These people have much more in common than they have to divide them. On the basis of putting the struggle for a decent, socialist society to the forefront, it will be possible to achieve unity and agreement on a solution to the national question. Militant Labour advocates a socialist Ireland. Our preference would be for a single state, but the precise relationships could be discussed within the working class; we believe any disagreements could be resolved amicably.

We argue for a united, socialist Ireland within a socialist federation of Britain and Ireland. We have never advocated a federal solution in Ireland. But in order to overcome the doubts and reservations of Protestant workers we have to guarantee that there would be no coercion. If they maintain their opposition to one Irish state, we must make it clear that we respect their wishes. At this moment in time we think that it is better from all points of view to maintain our position and argue for a single state, not a federation.

In fact a federation would not mean a federation of northern Ireland and southern Ireland — the Catholics wouldn't accept

● The Northern Ireland conflict caused some 3,100 deaths and 34,000 injuries between 1969 and 1994.

● **Jobs in externally owned plants in Northern Ireland declined by 53% (46,000 jobs) in 1973-90, compared with a 27% increase in the Republic.**

● The Northern Ireland economy depends heavily on the British subsidy, now £3 billion a year.



Orange men on the march

that. It would mean the re-partition of Ireland. While this could be accomplished on the basis of socialism, on a capitalist basis it would mean bloodbath.

During the last two weeks of February, the breakdown of the IRA ceasefire in the face of British government intransigence has stimulated one of the biggest mass movements in our history. People have come out onto the streets in opposition to the resumption of violence. They have stopped the IRA in their tracks. The lesson for socialists is that the future doesn't lie with the traditional politicians or the government. The future lies with building on the mass movement of working-class people, and out of this creating a new politics based on class, not religion.

● Peter Hadden is a leading member of the Northern Ireland "Militant Labour" group.

Create the right atmosphere for talks

Joe Austin

EIGHTEEN months Sinn Féin were able to go with others to the IRA with a package which we believed was an agreement for a ceasefire, and would create conditions whereby the British government would enter into full and meaningful negotiations, which they promised would be held within three months. They broke that promise, and went on to break a series of promises, and I think the resulting frustration, the sense of getting nowhere, were factors that contributed to the breakdown of the ceasefire.

We remain committed to a peace process, however difficult that is going to be. We have been attempting to encourage the British government to come on board this process, to enter into all-party negoti-

ations, to end all preconditions. I must say that to date that we have had very limited success.

There are only two ways that wars end. Either one side has victory over the other, or negotiations break out. What we have offered very clearly, and what the IRA offered throughout the last seventeen and a half months, was negotiations. The British government's current policy — or renewal of its old policy — of excluding Sinn Féin does not move the process forward.

By all effective barometers, a majority of working-class people on the island of Ireland, and indeed in Britain, wish to see all-party talks. That pressure has got to be brought to bear on those who prevent those talks, whether it is the Conservative Party government in Britain or the Unionist parties here. That message has to be brought home.

The only way forward is through negotiations, and those negotiations should already have happened, but let's all work for them to take place.

Negotiations could produce a number of things which would be of mutual benefit to all sections of our community. We need demilitarisation. We need an end to legislation which is politically repressive. We need the question of prisoners to be addressed; we need the question of policing to be addressed.

These are things which are perhaps limited, but at least there is some common ground. They can create an atmosphere where the more complicated and the more difficult questions can begin to be looked at. Everything should be on the table — both the Sinn Féin position, and that of the British Government, and others. We still, of course, believe that unification is the most effective long-term solution to the conflict, but we need to create an environment where people who are not Republicans and not nationalists can feel that they can at least have some allegiance to the structures that can be formed. That's more difficult, but it has to be addressed.

● Joe Austin is a spokesperson for Sinn Féin in Belfast.

Call a congress of Republicans and socialists

Rayner Lysaght

THERE was always a probability that the ceasefire would break down. The British went too far and the Irish government could not provide sufficient reassurances for the IRA. It is understandable that the British want to keep the Unionists on side.

The statement clarified matters but the ceasefire will be hard to restore.

The resumption of the military campaign won the restoration of talks. Generally it is not going to work. My position is much the same as Bernadette McAliskey's, who has called for a ceasefire, and a congress of Republicans, socialists and anti-imperialists to work out what to do next.

I do not think that many people in the Republican movement really believe that they can bomb their way to an united Ireland. Right now they are trying to bomb their way to the negotiating table. What happens at the negotiating table is an open question. I think there is a very large element among the Republicans — I don't know if it includes the leaders, Adams or McGuinness — who would be prepared to see a settlement leaving the six counties intact but with guarantees of Catholic equality, in short a genuine settlement such as was negotiated in 1973 at Sunningdale, a proper Bill of Rights, a situation where the field in Northern Ireland was level. That would allow discussion about the pros and cons of a united Ireland without the interests being balanced on the other side.

If the British pulled out, they would probably leave plenty of arms in the hands of the Protestants. Whether the Protestants would use them is an interesting question — whether they want to be British more than they want to have ascendancy. Up to now, since the union with Britain, the two have gone hand in hand and intermingled.

There are two sides to this. There is the British withdrawal and there is the issue of a united Ireland. At the moment the one thing that is clear is that the Southern bourgeoisie do not want the north. They are the people who will decide — not Sinn Féin, or the SDLP.

A united Ireland is not really part of the perspective of the southern national bourgeoisie. It's something that they would like. In the same way, in the dusty corners of Whitehall there are aging people who would like to restore the full parliamentary union with Ireland. The bourgeoisie in the south is not strong. The only way it sees uniting Ireland is through Europe. But it is more interested in Europe than in a united Ireland.

The left in Ireland is arguing that there has to be discussions between the left and the Republicans in a congress. The pressure of years has forced the dichotomy — the

separation of Republicanism and socialism — to develop, even more so than in Connolly's time. I'm not immediately optimistic that we can re-establish a revolutionary perspective. If there is an outbreak of industrial militancy in the Republic maybe it will be different.

The industrial militancy will create circumstances in which people will look suspiciously at the state. At the moment, unfortunately, the main force holding to a critique of both states in Ireland is the Republican movement.

We have spoken with the real leaders of conscious Protestant workers in the north — we don't mean Billy Hutchinson either, but various groups that have come out of the Northern Ireland Labour Party. There are people who have an idea that you can still have a fully democratic society within Northern Ireland framework. I don't agree with them, but they are socialists.

A way to relate to the Protestants? Well, the Bolsheviks weren't very keen on federalism in Ireland. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics wasn't conceived as a federation, except of nations. The question is, are the Protestants a nation? They've always identified themselves as a pressure group for Britain. And Britain has been subsidising, defending and keeping the place going. It's possible if Britain went away there could be — as a number of socialists think — an independent Six County state. That would imply there was a national characteristic to the Protestants. But we don't know. One-off mobilisations — against for instance the Anglo-Irish deal — are not

proof of Protestant-Unionist national identity.

● **Rayner Lysaght, author of *The Republic of Ireland* and other works, is a Welsh socialist long domiciled in Dublin, and a supporter of the Mandelbrite "Fourth International."**

Not peace, but an imperialist offensive

John McNulty

ANY impartial assessment of the 18-month IRA ceasefire in Ireland would register not surprise that it has ended, but wonderment that it lasted so long. Initial British concessions — withdrawal of the troops from the urban areas, the opening of border roads, withdrawal of the radio and TV ban on Sinn Féin — gave place to the "spoiling" demands that IRA weapons be "decommissioned" before the promised all-party talks could begin. This had little military significance. The IRA could have lied about its weaponry and easily replaced "decommissioned" weapons with new supplies. The Canary Wharf bomb was made from widely available fertiliser. Decommissioning was essentially a political demand for the unconditional surrender of the republican forces.

Demand for surrender was accompanied

by a series of provocations. The only step taken towards the release of prisoners was the restoration of remission rates that the British had earlier removed. Only a few republican prisoners were returned from England, and for those that remained, conditions were made harsher and more punitive. Private Lee Clegg of the parachute regiment, convicted of the murder of a Belfast teenager, was released in circumstances which essentially endorsed the right of members of the state forces to kill with impunity.

Sectarian Orange marches were forced through Catholic areas by state forces while republicans were batoned off the streets. Even the much heralded economic "peace dividend" faded away in a welter of "investment conferences", while cuts were made in funding for community projects.

The peace process was founded on a gigantic illusion — the illusion that Britain was leaving Ireland. In the run-up to the ceasefire British ministers repeatedly said that they had no selfish, strategic or economic interest in Ireland. The British were lying. Britain remains an imperial power with major economic and strategic interests in her oldest colony.

The formula of British disinterest was supposed to be contained in the Downing Street Declaration, jointly signed by London and Dublin just before the ceasefire. In the Declaration, for the first time ever, Britain used the term self-determination in relation to Ireland. But the term was immediately negated by enshrining a veto for the Unionist minority in the occupied area to continue the partition of the country.

Following the ceasefire, London and Dublin negotiated the February 1995 "Framework" document as the concrete expression of the Downing Street declaration. This made it clear that partition would remain, but by advocating a few cross-border talking shops it allowed the illusion

The British left

IN the last twenty years of stalemate in Northern Ireland, the British left has given less and less attention to analysing Irish reality, and fallen back more and more on varying combinations of two stock general ideas: support Ireland against Britain; unite the workers.

Socialist Worker's four-page feature on the breakdown of the Northern Ireland ceasefire (17 February), for example, combined crude Irish-nationalist "packaging" with ultra-economistic "workers' unity" content, without any attempt to make the two fit together.

It explained the roots of the Troubles as follows: "In 1918, in the last general election to take place across the whole of Ireland, Sinn Féin won almost 80 per cent of the vote for independence for Britain". In fact:

- Sinn Féin won 48% of the vote in the 1918 election, not "almost 80%".
- Even then there was a compact majority against Irish independence among the Irish-minority (Protestant) workers of the north-east.
- The nearest direct continuation today of 1918's Sinn Féin is... the Fine Gael party of Dublin prime minister John Bruton!
- Today's Sinn Féin has the electoral support of maybe five or six per cent of the people of Ireland.

The main theme of Socialist Worker's coverage was "The Blame Lies With The Tories" and that the Unionists are "completely sectarian". Yet Socialist Worker did

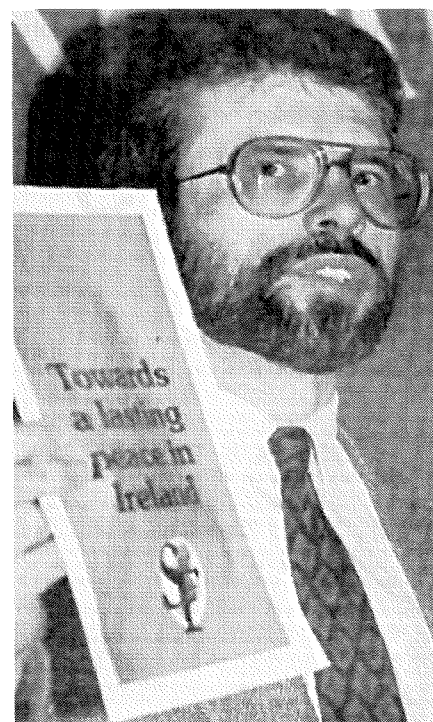
not conclude by calling for British troops out or an immediate united Ireland.

Socialist Worker's conclusion was that the workers, Catholic and Protestant, should unite on bread-and-butter issues and round socialist ideas — in other words, they should do exactly what workers should do wherever no national question figures in politics. And the national-communal-conflict question? Every time it comes into your head, try to think about strikes instead... This is not politically serious.

Socialist Outlook (17 February) argued, in contrast "There will be only one channel through which the course of Irish peace will flow. That is by the occupying colonial power leaving and a process of Irish reunification in train".

In train? In what train? With what engine and what driver? Outlook suggests that "a 32 county political campaign... on... democratic questions — such as the release of political prisoners", or "a strategy based on mass mobilisation of the nationalist community" [emphasis added] is the necessary engine, and the Provos the driver.

But how can any mass mobilisation of the Northern Catholics, ten per cent of Ireland's people, unify Ireland? How can any campaign, aimed narrowly at "the nationalist community" unify the people, or the workers, of Ireland? Outlook's editors write as if the Protestants do not exist and Britain is a classic colonial power in Northern Ireland.



that the proposals were a stepping-stone to a united Ireland. Tellingly, the British accompanied the publication of these woolly proposals in the occupied North with very detailed and specific proposals on the creation of a new Belfast local assembly. Just how seriously the British took the Framework document, essentially the maximum programme for bourgeois nationalism, was shown when, a week after publication, Political Development Minister Michael Ancram announced that the British would welcome fresh ideas to solve the crisis!

An insight into British strategy was given by a throwaway remark by foreign secretary Douglas Hurd after the signing of the Downing Street declaration. Asked if he thought that the republicans would buy the ceasefire he replied: "I hardly think it matters."

The reality for the British was that their "peace process" was in fact a major imperialist offensive designed to forge a new capitalist stability and roll back all the gains of the anti-imperialist struggle. They had won from Dublin agreement in principle to support the establishment of a reinvigorated partition and, in addition, to rescind the historic aspiration of the majority of the Irish working class for unity by removing all claims to a united national territory from the constitution.

In addition they had greatly constrained the effects of the republican armed campaign. The IRA's difficulty in attacking state forces had led to broadening the number of "soft targets" considered legitimate and a new concentration on military adventurism in England. The main effect was to demoralise republican supporters.

Further, the British had built up the Loyalist death squads, and these were able to strike at will in nationalist areas, carrying out a number of sectarian atrocities. The IRA had no credible defensive strategy, and when they attempted to carry the fight into loyalist areas the result was civilian casualties which further weakened their support.

The British were willing to make minor concessions that would help the republican leadership come in from the cold — but the price would be republican surrender. That was the only measure that would allow the imperialist offensive to roll on.

As the peace process ground to a halt, the Clinton administration stepped in. A visit by the President helped reinforce the British line and served as a platform for the "Mitchell Commission." Its report in February was linked to a "target date" for all-party talks.

In the event the commission's report was overshadowed by the British decision to sideline the report, scrap the target date, and propose elections which would have the effect of fixing in stone the outcome of the process — the return of a modified local assembly with a built-in sectarian majority.

In fact its proposals simply moved the date for an IRA surrender from before the talks to during the talks. The proposals, if put into effect, would have forced the disbandment of the IRA. It dismissed utterly



The American connection

any attempt to bring state weaponry into the equation, despite the many atrocities by these forces, and their associations with the right-wing death squads. Above all the report ignores all the issues in the all-Ireland dimension. It too makes clear that a revamped partition is what is on offer.

So the ceasefire ended with two proposals on the table — one from the Mitchell commission and one from the British government. Both demanded the surrender of the IRA and both signposted a return to a modified Stormont — the old regime that ruled a web of sectarian discrimination and privilege.

The whole sorry process was helped by

"The republican leadership had to close its eyes to the role of the US as the main force for the suppression of democratic rights on a world stage and its constant invasion and manipulation of small countries."

a sharp move to the right by the Republican leadership. They wanted out of the cul-de-sac of the militarist strategy, but their new political strategy rested on a whole series of illusions.

The first illusion was in British imperialism itself. It is quite clear that the republicans believed that Britain was preparing to withdraw from Ireland. After all, the British themselves said that they had no "selfish or strategic" interest in Ireland! Yet Sinn Féin found itself unable to

sign up to any of the proposals on which the "peace process" was based.

Alongside the illusions in British imperialism ran more general illusions in the US and the EC. In internal documents it was consistently argued that these forces would support a democratic solution in Ireland and force Britain to toe the line. In order to believe this, the republic leadership had to close its eyes to the role of the US as the main force for the suppression of democratic rights on a world stage, its constant invasion and manipulation of small countries and the key role that Britain has always played as American imperialism's most dependable ally.

An even more worrying indication of the republic leadership's political evolution has been their tendency to praise and look to as a model the "Peace Process" in the middle East and the role of Yasser Arafat. This praise was being repeated by Martin McGuinness only days before the ceasefire broke down.

The fact that the republicans held on as long as they did is a tribute to the greatest illusion of all — the illusion of the "nationalist family." Both publicly and in internal documents the Adams leadership put forward an alliance with bourgeois nationalism as representing an alternative weapon to the traditional militarist strategy. Unfortunately republican illusions in the Irish bourgeoisie are just as traditional and just as incorrect as their faith in militarism, with the disadvantage that this alliance immediately puts them on the same side of the barricades as the direct oppressors of the majority of the Irish working class. In fact the whole peace process was a process of watching the "nationalist family" crumble to dust. As the ceasefire drew to an end the bourgeois parties were all entering negotiations with the British proposals for a Unionist assembly at the top of the agenda. The formal expression of the family — a forum meeting in Dublin over the past 18 months — produced a final report which trashed the demand for self-determination

and left Sinn Fein out in the cold, unable to sign up.

Even now the leadership cling to the Irish bourgeoisie. Their latest analysis indicates that the family would have survived if it had continued to be led by the populist Fianna Fail party rather than the slightly more openly pro-imperialist Fine Gael party!

The end of the ceasefire in now way resolves the problems for republicans or ends the confusions and illusions. The bombing campaign is itself based on the assumption that Britain is willing to leave Ireland. If it is in Britain's interest as an imperialist power to stay then lost trade and tourism and bills of £150 million for bomb damage will make no difference.

At the same time the Sinn Fein leadership peddle the foolish idea that the difficulties they face are due to a British Tory government with a tiny majority being dependent on Unionist support. They don't explain why the Labour Party and the British establishment as a whole would support such irresponsible behaviour or why the Unionist party would vote against the government in a crucial vote. In fact, leading establishment figures warned Prime Minister Major not to play party politics with the Irish question. They have remained silent since, indicating that the government's stance is essentially based on the interests of British imperialism. Sinn Fein continue to make their main call for all-party talks. Again, if Britain is leaving then Sinn Fein can fight their corner within all-party talks as a minor party. If they are not then the talks will achieve nothing.

Even more worrying is the question mark over the military campaign itself. As Ruairi O'Bradaigh of the breakaway Republican Sinn Fein has indicated, the statement ending the ceasefire makes no mention of the traditional troops out demand and instead calls for negotiations.

All the recent remarks by the republican leadership indicate that the link between military and political action is the demand for talks. Now London and Dublin have provided a fixed date for all-party talks on 10 June — in the context of a partitionist election, with the "nationalist family" lined up with the British and Unionists in ruling out any democratic solution and with the Mitchell proposals at hand to turn the screw on the republicans at every turn.

In a familiar tactic, Gerry Adams has welcomed the talk dates while looking for "clarity." For many militants the outcome of the "peace process" has become all too clear. So also is the symbolism of the leader of Sinn Fein sitting with John Hume, the northern representative of bourgeois nationalism, across the table from the IRA and calling for a ceasefire.

Veteran campaigner Bernadette McAliskey has called for a Republican congress to map a new way forward. This would be an important step forward but could only be supported by the present republican leadership if they withdrew from alliances with bourgeois nationalism. Without such a U-turn Sinn Fein's position will continue to weaken — applying two

contradictory and failed strategies in the face of the most determined offensive by imperialism since the outbreak of the present troubles.

There is yet much to play for. There have been massive peace demonstrations but many have lacked the harsh pro-imperialist edge of the past. Opinion polls indicate that a majority of the population in both Ireland and Britain blame the British government for the breakdown of the ceasefire. Opposition to the return of a Stormont regime or direct Dublin support

*"There have been
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for partition is not confined to the ranks of Sinn Fein. Even to secure the reactionary settlement they propose now the British would need to force the Unionists to make some concessions to the Catholic middle class. At the moment the Unionists are essentially demanding the return of "a Protestant Parliament for a Protestant people" and there is little sign of any real British pressure to amend this.

Marxists should continue to stand as irreconcilable opponents to the imperialist offensive, while calling for the self-organisation of the working class as the one immutable barrier to that offensive.

● **John McNulty is a member of the Irish Committee for a Marxist Programme, and a long-time leader of the People's Democracy.**

Conservatives confront conservatives

Robin Wilson

STANDING back from the conflict: one of the most Conservative governments in Europe is facing one of the most conservative opposition moments. There is a strong degree of fundamentalism in the Republican movement which is utterly detached from modern left wing thinking and re-thinking.

The issue really, given these poles, is how can the left inject some different thinking into the situation? The question is: what should the left advocate?

The problem is similar, in a way, to the

problem faced in the British Labour Party: either side with Traditionalists who seem to exist in a time warp and fail to relate to the modern world, or side with the Modernisers who appear to have lost all their connections with the left. It seems to me that we need a radical modernisation of politics which avoids these two alternatives. That applies to politics in Ireland too.

There has been some modernisation in the Republic during the last twenty — and particularly the last ten — years. The changed attitude towards the North we now find on the left in the South is support for a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic society. People are arguing for the maximum effort to develop links between the two parts of Ireland and an island-wide economy. Such an entity would be highly autonomous from Britain.

Of course, as I readily accept, the problem is that there is no significant political force arguing for this solution in the North, where impacted conditions have tended to stunt political debate. There is no forum here where people can get together and discuss.

The left must talk a language of democracy and human rights that has some sort of universal basis. On this ground it can hope to appeal to a wide range of people.

● **Robin Wilson is a member of the editorial board of the Belfast magazine *Fortnight*, and works for the "Democratic Dialogue" group.**

Build links, leave long-term politics open

Paul Bew

THE basic reason that the ceasefire broke down was Republican disappointment with the pace and results of the peace process.

The question however was precisely why they were disappointed.

I do not think that the Sinn Fein leadership were as shocked as they claimed to be that the issue of disarmament of the IRA has proved to be such a stumbling block. If we examine Mr Adams's interview in the Irish News of 8 January 1994, or at his speech to Sinn Fein in February of that year, it is clear that he knew that this was going to be a big issue.

I think they knew that there would be no easy, automatic admission into inter-party talks. So although a lot of ordinary nationalists regard the lack of all-party talks as a defeat, I do not think that the Republican elite were surprised that it has proved so difficult to arrange.

The basic problem was this: when the international commission on arms was set up it was clear that whatever it decided it was not going to rule in favour of the Republican movement, whose view was

that arms would only be handed over at the end of satisfactory negotiations. So I believe that the ceasefire was doomed from the moment that this commission was in place.

All the signs are that long before Major's speech on the Mitchell report the decision had been made to end the ceasefire. Every indication points to that.

Clearly the Republican leadership had no hope of getting a united Ireland. I believe they have been looking for something like an imposed joint British-Southern authority over Northern Ireland. Some of the more realistic people thought that the Framework Document — which falls short of joint authority — contained enough all-Ireland institutions in order to be presented as something which is transitional to a united Ireland. So the leaders were looking for either joint authority or a particular version of the Framework Document which could definitely be regarded as progress towards a united Ireland.

The leaders knew this. Ordinary people on the ground generally believed something entirely different. And that is one of the big tensions at the moment inside the Republican movement.

It is a bit hard to calculate, but I think it is probably true that Adams believed that he was swimming with the flow.

He believed the British had imposed the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985 and perhaps they would impose a deal again on the Protestants. However, broadly speaking, the British government's view is that the lesson of 1985 is that it is much better to have a settlement for which there is genuine consent. So the British have been very reluctant to act as enforcers against the Protestants. And they would have been reluctant even if the parliamentary balance of forces had not favoured the Unionists.

From one point of view the British government defeated the Protestant mobilisations against the Anglo-Irish Agreement. They calculated correctly.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement was a big success internationally for Britain. But it remains the case that many of the effects inside Northern Ireland are negative. It actually made a long-term accommodation between Catholics and Protestants much harder. And the British government are aware of this.

The whole thinking behind the Framework Document [February 1995] is that consent is essential — from *both* communities. This is quite different from an imposed settlement.

There may be lots of things that Unionists don't like about the Framework proposals: they think that they are being asked to go more than half-way to meet a minority (and they are actually right — it is also the case that there is no choice, they must go more than half way). However the principle is that agreement should be reached which is based on consent — of agreement of the parties followed by a referendum.

Many Nationalists in Ireland believed that there is some intention of imposing



SDLP leader John Hume

institutions on the Protestants. Some even interpret Article 47 of the Framework Document in this way. But Article 47 only commits the British government to maintaining cross-border institutions if, after all-party agreement, ratified by a referendum, one side welsches on the agreement. That is totally different from *imposing* cross-border institutions before that process has occurred.

One of the tragedies is that one of the reasons why the Republicans re-started the military campaign is that some of them believe that continuation of the campaign will lead to imposition of Article 47. They just do not understand this clause or, indeed, the general thinking behind the Framework Document.

It is Irish governmental strategy to work for a resolution within Europe. They would have liked the European Section, which is quite significant in the Framework Document, to have been even more extensive. However, the broad view of Europe now found in many European countries is not really the view of the current British government.

My own view is that cross-border institutions could be brought into existence which were simply designed to bring about better relations between North and South, together with some economic and social advantages, while leaving long-term political meanings open. I think that some people on the British side view the Framework Document in this way; perhaps others share the Irish government's view.

The British government's policy is the big question. 85% of the play lies with them.

The fundamental policy of the British is to calm the situation. They do not think they can make progress without the co-

operation of the Unionists. They are, therefore, not as keen as the Irish government to try to push the Unionists around.

So, because the Unionists have to be taken into account, the Framework Document is not necessarily a model for a united Ireland. In fact with the commitment to consent, the stress, more than ever, is a two state solution.

But we are now looking at a much more unified economic and social culture in Ireland. Only the Unionists can actually deliver that. The British can not act as surrogates to bring Belfast and Dublin closer together.

I am very pleased that we now have a date for talks. The most important thing that everybody should be calling for is *peace*, and a commitment of all parties to democratic and peaceful means. That is the first priority.

If we get peace, the history of Northern Ireland shows that the conflict between Nationalism and Unionism can then be lessened. One example is from the 1960's. In the Stormont elections in 1962, in 15 Belfast seats, the Northern Irish Labour Party (NILP) got just under 60,000 votes, the Unionists 70,000.

At that time the Unionist government's record was so poor on welfare measures that there was a lot of Protestant working-class protest. The possibility for Catholics and Protestants coming together in the NILP and really achieving something was created. I think that kind of politics can re-emerge if we can switch off the main antagonism.

Of course that occurred partly because the Republicans were in disarray because of the collapse of their military campaign [1952-62] on the Border. But the history of the early '60s still does indicate what may be possible.

If these talks are successful we will see a re-negotiation of basis of the union and of fusing a new relationship with Dublin into it. If this process has the effect of switching off the conflict, it will open up possibilities for working-class politics to develop.

There is no question that there are progressive voices in Northern Ireland and they will be heard more once the conflict dies down. There is no guarantee that such politics will become a hegemonic force. I can offer no guarantee that they will win the day. But I am sure that they could win substantial support around Belfast.

Is this the best that can be hoped for? At various points I have preferred other options. Other solutions would have been easier and cleaner.

But now the choice is either the status quo or some settlement based on: a) local power sharing; b) a revised Anglo-Irish Agreement; c) new North-South bodies; d) the dropping of the Irish territorial claim. I think that this model is clearly preferable to the current situation. Right now this is the only possible, available alternative.

● Paul Bew is a professor of politics at Queen's University, Belfast.