

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

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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 wishes 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.

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