

“Unionism in turmoil, republicans vindicated”

Gerry Adams
interviewed

IN Washington last week John Bruton indicated some optimism that a new IRA cessation was on the cards. Do you feel that his optimism is justified?

I think that his comments were probably over-hyped by a few journalists, but nevertheless they certainly came as a surprise to me.

The IRA has, of course, stated its willingness to enhance a democratic peace process. No one, in the other political parties, or the two governments, believes that the Stormont talks are a democratic peace process. So it follows that the best prospect for a renewed IRA cessation lies in creating such a democratic peace process. I have already described how I believe this can best be done. Mr Bruton knows as well as I do that this is where we should be directing our energies and our public comments.

Speculation [about a new IRA ceasefire] is without foundation.

Its purpose is to cause confusion and division within republican ranks. I am quite sure that republicans will not fall for this nonsense. In fact we should probably be prepared for much more British-intelligence inspired stories, leaks and spins.

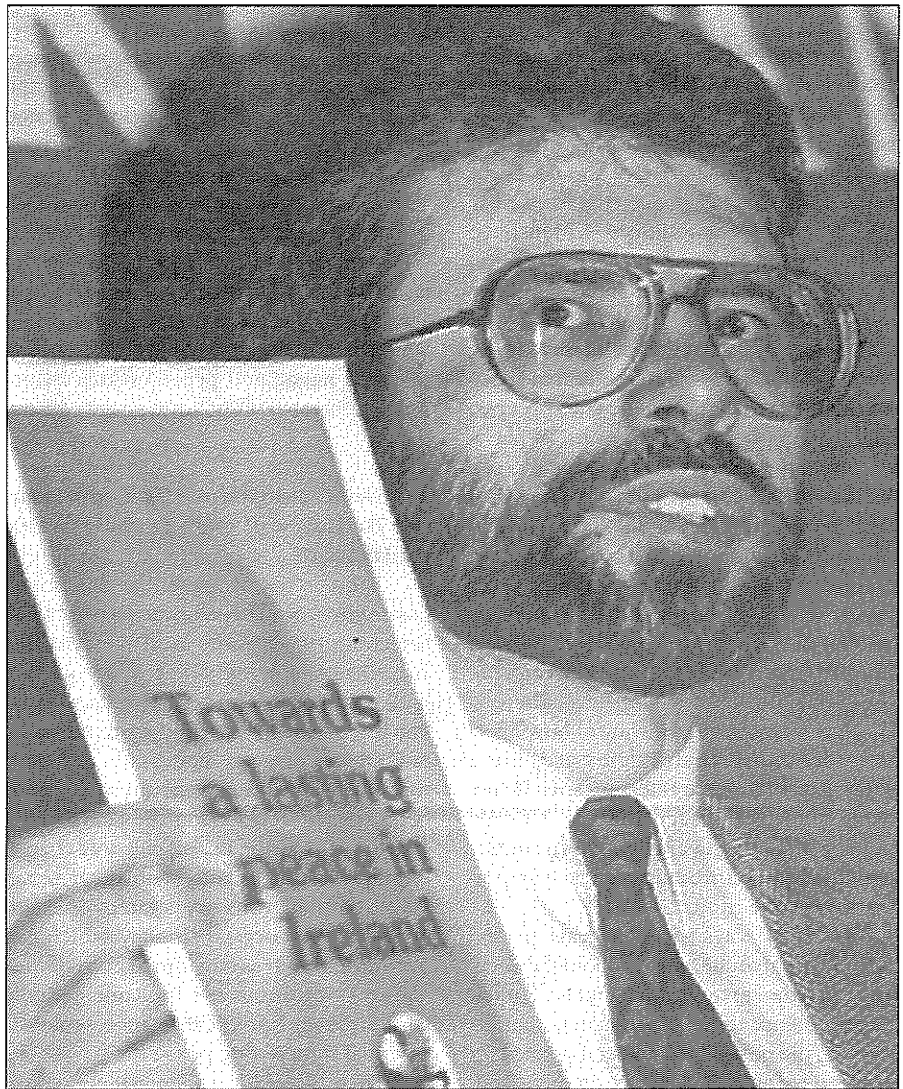
I believe that we can reconstruct the peace process if all sides play their part, particularly the British government which has primary responsibility in this situation. Sinn Fein continues to engage with a wide range of opinions in our efforts to rebuild the peace process.

In any negotiations we will be guided by our objective. We are Irish republicans, after all, and we want an end to British rule in our country: that position will guide our negotiations.

Ultimately, whatever comes out of a negotiated settlement has to be the product of collective agreement of all the people involved.

Turning to the events of the summer, how have they affected the political climate?

The events of the summer, both at Drumcree and Derry, and the marches else-



where, hold out many lessons for the present and the future. The British government's surrender to the use of violence and the threat of greater violence by unionists; the murder of Michael McGoldrick by loyalists and the campaign of mass intimidation against Catholics; the sectarian behaviour of the RUC and the British army and the killing of Dermot McShane, and the many injuries which resulted; and the absence of any sense of equality for all citizens; all collectively exposed the real nature, the irreformable nature, of the northern state.

Born in violence 75 years ago, in the absence of consent and lacking any demo-

cratic foundation, it has been sustained since then by force. British governments have always known this and have refused to act on it. Drumcree and subsequent events exposed the British government as duplicitous and the unionist leaderships as intransigent and backward looking.

But one big difference between now and other times is that nationalists did not acquiesce to this behaviour. On the contrary Drumcree had the opposite effect. Many nationalist communities reject the triumphalist coat-trailing marches which they had reluctantly and begrudgingly tolerated for generations. In the face of severe sectarian provocation and abuse many of

these isolated communities declared "enough is enough" and demanded treatment as equals. Their message is simple — there is no going back to the bad old days.

One result of this was that suddenly the word "consent" became unpalatable for the unionist leaders.

Is there significance then in the continued presence of the fringe loyalist parties at the Stormont talks despite the obvious breaking of their cease-fires?

It is clear that agreement can only be achieved through a truly inclusive process of negotiations. This means that all parties with a democratic mandate must be involved in the talks. There should be no preconditions to dialogue. But it is clear also that the preconditions which have been created by the British are applied selectively to Sinn Fein to keep our party out of the talks.

It would be easy for Sinn Fein to play games with this issue, to argue that these parties be excluded from the talks process. But where would that leave us? What is required if we are to move towards an agreed peace settlement is inclusive talks, the removal of all preconditions to dialogue and a time-frame to create and maintain momentum within the negotiations.

Is there now a renewed debate about Sinn Fein's peace strategy?

Certainly at leadership level there is an almost perpetual reviewing of how effective our political strategies are. But I suppose that you are referring specifically to the Sinn Fein peace strategy. I firmly believe that the events of this summer underline how correct and crucially important our peace project is.

In many ways the upheavals around the Orange marches were unionism's negative response to our peace strategy. For the first time since the Anglo-Irish negotiations in 1921, the possibility had been opened up of an agreed and lasting peace on this island. The leaderships of unionism feel threatened by this and the prospect of a negotiated settlement. They realise that a negotiated settlement means change, means an end to their sectarian state, to the politics of inequality, domination and exclusion. They know that change cannot strengthen the union, only weaken it.

Garvagh Road demonstrated the irreformability of this statelet, the intransigence and belligerence of unionism and the hypocrisy of the unionist parties' declared commitment to democratic methods. It provided the most compelling argument for fundamental change since the loyalist pogroms of 1969. The victory of unionism in walking down the Garvagh

Road could not have been more temporary or illusory. It has left unionism in turmoil and the republican analysis of this state completely vindicated.

At a wider level the Sinn Fein peace strategy has also achieved a measure of success. It has demonstrated clearly our commitment to peace and a negotiated peace settlement. It also exposed the unionist parties and the British government as the intransigent parties in this conflict, it has led to the involvement of the international community in building a process of conflict resolution — something which never happened before and which the British and the unionists vehemently opposed — and it has brought a wide range of democratic forces into play.

Two years ago I said, having studied the example of the ANC, that negotiations do not signal an end to political struggle but an extension of it. Negotiations are a new area of struggle for republicans. The Sinn Fein peace strategy, with its clear objective of a negotiated peace on this island, remains the obvious political priority for our party.

What confidence is there that the British will change their policy on Ireland?

There is no evidence that this British government wants to change its policy. On the contrary, all of the available evidence supports the widely-held view among nationalists that John Major wants to maintain the existing status quo with perhaps a few minor cosmetic modifications. Unfortunately that has been the pattern of British behaviour in Ireland over the centuries.

In my view the British will only change their policy on Ireland with great reluctance. Sinn Fein's peace strategy seeks to develop a democratic strategy which can maximise the dynamic for them to do this and to bring about the fundamental constitutional and political change which is essential for a lasting peace.

There is already evidence that political pressure and public opinion can move the British to new positions, whether in agreeing to ministerial meetings which they sought to delay or avoid, or in the u-turn over providing clarification to Sinn Fein on the Downing Street Declaration.

Sinn Fein continues to seek entry into the Stormont talks. Given that public opinion is dismissive of these why is Sinn Fein continuing to demand entry?

Sinn Fein has a significant democratic mandate. Those who vote for our party have the right to be represented in any negotiations or political talks. The British government has no right to exclude Sinn

Fein from any talks.

It is regrettable that the 26-County government has chosen to support the British government's exclusion of Sinn Fein.

Despite this, and other differences between us in the search for peace, it is true that the 26-County government has come to this situation in a good faith way, seeking to make it work. There is clearly a better focus in more recent months, but the reality is that we will never get anywhere in terms of a peace process unless the British government is faced up to by a 26-County government, which acts decisively in the Irish national interest, and which understands that that is what the British government does. It always acts in the British national interest.

Sinn Fein is the only party which does not accept the unionist veto. Is it not the case that Sinn Fein would be isolated on this crucial issue should it enter negotiations?

The current talks process is deeply flawed and not just because Sinn Fein is excluded. It is essential that a proper process of negotiations ensures a level playing pitch in which all sides are equal and no one holds a veto nor is the outcome predetermined or any particular outcome is precluded. Sinn Fein has no problem with the issue of consent. We certainly have a major problem with the unionists being given a veto.

On the one hand you have to argue, you have to fight for, you have to seek, you have to negotiate for their consent, along with our consent and the consent of all sections of the people. And you have to keep pushing for that all the time, reaching out to unionists, trying to open a dialogue which is meaningful, and can make a difference.

At the same time we have to make clear that nobody has a veto. I don't look to a veto, neither does the 26-County government or John Hume. The unionist leaderships should not be given a veto.

Naturally, the fact that there are others who interpret the "veto" as "consent" makes the process of negotiation more problematic.

What is your view of an electoral pact with the SDLP for the next elections?

The SDLP has consistently rejected an electoral pact. Sinn Fein is certainly willing to discuss the possibility positively. However, in the absence of any agreement with the SDLP, Sinn Fein will obviously be contesting all the seats.

* Abridged from *An Phoblacht*, 19 September 1996



“We are the British presence in Ireland”

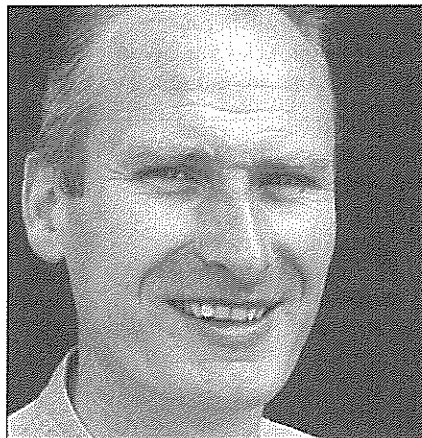
Billy Hutchinson interviewed

THE most positive thing that came out of the Apprentice Boys events was that people recognised that there had to be a dialogue. For the very first time the Apprentice Boys met with residents' groups which had former IRA prisoners and people who could have been perceived as Sinn Fein members on their committee. They spoke to them, and that was a positive move. But there was never going to be an agreed settlement to the march. The Apprentice Boys felt that they had entered into negotiations to resolve the problem, but the Bogside [Catholic area] residents were asking for more than they could deliver.

I hope in future people don't think back and believe that there's no point meeting because they're going to give you demands that you can't deliver on.

This march in particular, the Appren-

* Billy Hutchinson, a leader of the Progressive Unionist Party in Northern Ireland, talked to Pete Radcliff and Ivan Wels from *Workers' Liberty* on the weekend of the Catholic/Protestant confrontation over the Apprentice Boys' march in Derry.



tice Boys', was hyped up into some sort of Armageddon. But the cease-fires don't rest on one parade or another. They rest on the wider political situation.

If the Loyalists go back to war, it will be on the basis that democracy has broken down in this country and that the IRA have refused to take part in a democratic process. As yet we are a long way off that. What we need to do now is to create the conditions where the IRA will call another cease-fire and Sinn Fein will get involved in

talks.

We have been brought under great pressures during the marching season. We come from the Loyalist tradition. People expect us to be very hard-line on the defence of our own culture. We have been saying that we have reached a stage where the people in working-class communities have to look for what is best for those communities.

We want people to enter into dialogue. Some people may want to march down a road. Others shouldn't say: "No, you can't march down this road." But if we sit down and talk we can make agreements about how many times you can march down a road, or how many people, or whatever.

There has to be a resolution which can suit both sides, that allows one side to march without the other side being frightened. We've said that both this summer and last summer. We'll continue to say it. Some people have been saying that we should force these marches through. We have been saying that won't work well for the future. We all live here, and we are going to have to share this island. We have to find ways for people to recognise and

respect each others' cultures. The start has to be through dialogue.

The problem with the dialogue is that everyone has been concentrating on the political talks at Stormont. They're all expecting them to be a panacea and to deliver everything. But I don't believe that is where what we want will be delivered.

Other institutions within our society — statutory institutions, educational, churches, universities, etc. — need to be involved in dialogue. They need to look at how they can change things within their organisations and for the people who use their services.

Within the community there are all sorts of people, including paramilitaries. There is a role for community workers trying to get them to address the problems in their own communities, not just the problems of sectarianism, but also the serious socio-economic issues. We want them to look at what happens between the two communities.

More needs to be done with the governments and the political parties as well, insofar as we move those things forward. It has to happen from the ground up and the government initiative or the political parties' initiative has to be only one part of it.

Sinn Fein supporters have welcomed the formation of parties such as yours. How do you feel about Sinn Fein's response to your party?

I would be satisfied with Sinn Fein's responses to our party to a certain degree but I wouldn't be happy with Sinn Fein's response to the Unionist community at large. I don't think they understand the Unionist community. They have not even

tried to understand the Unionist community until relatively recently, I think in the last year, when they understood that they were going to get all-party talks, and they tried to engage the Unionist community.

Sinn Fein needs to recognise the Unionist community as the British presence in Ireland. They need to deal with the Unionist community, and not John Major or any other British Government. They need to deal with the people who live here. No matter what solution any government comes up with, it is not necessarily going to be accepted. My argument with Sinn Fein would be that I can accept any democratic agreement that is reached by the people, but I couldn't accept an agreement that is reached by two governments and then imposed.

We should all talk and find agreement, rather than getting someone else to impose something. Even if it suited me for John Major to impose British rule upon the Irish people, I still wouldn't be satisfied, because I know that we are going to have 600,000 people who are going to be disquieted, and that's not what we need. We need to ensure that we have the majority of the minority community here satisfied. Maybe we will have 2% of those people dissatisfied, but then we will have to find ways of dealing with those people within the rule of the law.

We believe that people need to be developing dialogue within their own communities, and I think there has to be a positive view given to the talks. Unfortunately Sinn Fein has been very negative about the talks, not because Sinn Fein don't believe in the talks but because the IRA know the talks are not going to lead to a

united Ireland.

I would say to Sinn Fein that I know it's going to be hard. The talks are there. You have to get involved and shape them in the way you feel they need to be shaped.

We have taken nothing but abuse from the very beginning, going back to December 1994, when we were involved with British civil servants. We had to fight them the whole way through, saying we had a point of view that had to be heard. We've believed in ourselves and we've continued to do that.

For us the important thing is that all parties in Ireland, including Sinn Fein with an IRA cease-fire, should sit down and talk. Irrespective of whether we know the outcome will suit us, we still need to get involved. At the end of the day if the outcome doesn't suit us, it goes to a vote. Sinn Fein and the SDLP have a sizeable vote, over 30%. If you have a referendum where 75% of the people need to vote to pass something then they have safeguards.

The IRA are being disingenuous. They are carrying out a campaign on the mainland, although they've cut back on it. They are not allowing Sinn Fein into the talks because they're not going to get a united Ireland within the next 5, 10 or 15 years. But they are going to have to wait. They must allow Sinn Fein into the talks, and those talks must take place with a peaceful background.

What are your views of the Labour Coalition, which did reasonably well in the May elections?

There's got to be some sort of settlement worked out before you get a labour coalition and the guns are all buried. There are possibilities in the council elections due in May 1997. If the Progressive Unionist Party get maybe five or six people elected, we could hold the balance of power in Belfast City Hall. We would judge everything in terms of class. We would look at how everything affects working-class people right across the board, and we would make decisions on that basis which would be different from those of other Unionist parties.

None of us have been involved in local government at any level, so we would want to feel our way around. We would certainly be wanting to form alliances with other people on the left on the City Council. One of the big issues is competitive tendering. We're totally opposed to putting contracts out for competitive tendering and laying off workers. We would prefer the council to keep control of the workforce. That is the sort of issue we would want to take up.

The PUP has a good relationship with the trade union movement. But the trade union movement only gives lip-service to

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the PUP because they see us as the people who brokered the cease-fire, which means that workers are not being killed, and also because they see that we are the people who would be arguing the issues that affect them most, such as competitive tendering.

Once they see us in power, and they see what we are going to do, I think there are all sort of opportunities, on trades councils for example. We have been arguing that the trades councils in Northern Ireland today, like in Belfast and Derry, are a bit of a joke. They don't really do anything for working-class people. We would like to see them given a good shake up and people put into them who are going to do something to enhance the lives of working-class people in those areas.

Have things gone back to what they were before the cease-fire? Or have they moved on?

The nationalists will use Drumcree in a sensationalist manner, and the republicans will use it, saying that Drumcree was 1969 all over again. One of the things you have to understand is that, although this isn't my view, traditional Unionists believe that democracy has been unbalanced in this country for the last 27 years. Republicans have been holding a gun to the Unionists' heads; they can kill and bomb people to get their own way. The Unionists see Drumcree as some sort of balancing act to make things symmetrical. They want to show nationalists that we can bring things to a standstill too. We can stretch the security forces. We can do it, and we can do it without firing a shot. That is how it is seen.

It's a question of who has the biggest gang and who's the best fighter, and that's always going to be the problem in this country where there's always a threat of violence. But one of the things about the traditional Unionists is that they see themselves as very law-abiding. Some people in the traditional Unionist camp won't speak to me because I have been involved in Loyalist paramilitary activities and because I've been to prison.

The Apprentice Boys, for example, won't talk to me, and they expel people like me from their organisation because we've been to prison. If we have moved back to 1969 it would be a lot worse. The guns would have been brought out and the killings would have started again. But they haven't.

I believe that people like Trimble don't want a return to anything like 1969. If you go up the Falls Road, which is a nationalist/republican area, you will see on the walls, "No Return To Stormont." I don't want a return to Stormont, and I'm a Unionist. The UVF are on record as saying that if

there is a return to Stormont the way it was, before it was prorogued, they would take up arms against it. That's coming from a Loyalist paramilitary organisation.

The Stormont regime discriminated against me. I lived in a hovel. It discriminated against me as a working class Prod. My father had to go to England to get work, and then he came back and got casual labour over here. So it didn't just work against Catholics, it worked against Prods.

I take heart that neither Republicans nor Loyalists are taking up guns in Northern Ireland at the moment. We all learnt quite a lot from Drumcree and we are certainly not back at 1969. We are a good bit on. We all take three steps forwards and two steps back. As long as we don't take two steps forwards and three back, we're moving forward. It will take quite a long time to get the sort of society we want to live in. But we'll get there eventually. I think that the way forward is through left politics.

It's easy to say that people should talk. But it has to be controlled so that you are not bringing people in who have never had discussions with the other communities. That could frighten them, and we have to be careful. There are a lot of community groups that can take on these issues and are doing it at this point in time.

We and the Workers' Party are planning a conference on education. At the moment the Workers' Party are going through a lot of changes after the last election. We are getting together in September and would hope to plan something in the autumn about integrated, comprehensive education.

Education is a hot potato in this country at the moment, and not only on the issue of integration. The government is looking for cuts, and they plan to shift the administration from Ballymena to Derry. People from Ballymena who can't afford to travel to Derry are going to lose their jobs, and they're going to give the jobs to the people in Derry. Since the people from Ballymena are more likely to be Protestant and the people from Derry more likely to be Catholic, what they will be doing is taking jobs from Protestants and giving them to Catholics. I don't think that that is the way it should work.

We argue that the education system should be integrated and education taken away from the churches. Sinn Fein supports the right of churches to be involved in schools: so their policy on education is exactly the same as that of the Catholic church. The three strongest supporters of conservative education and abortion policies in Northern Ireland are the DUP headed by Ian Paisley, the Catholic Church and Sinn Fein.

Give up your dreams

By Bertolt Brecht

Give up your dream that they will make
An exception in your case.
What your mothers told you
Binds no one.

Keep your contracts in your pockets
They will not be honoured here.

Give up your hopes that you are all
destined
To finish up Chairman.
Get on with your work.
You will need to pull yourselves
together
If you are to be tolerated in the
kitchen.

You still have to learn the ABC.
The ABC says:
They will get you down.

Do not think about what you have to
say:
You will not be asked.
There are plenty of mouths for the
meal
What's needed here is mincemeat.

(Not that anyone should be
discouraged by that.)

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