



# **A Scenario for Peace**

## **A discussion paper**

issued by the Sinn Féin Ard Chomhairle May 1987

re-issued November 1989

### **INTRODUCTION**

This document is presented by Sinn Féin for discussion and as an answer to those who claim that there is no alternative to the continuation of British rule. It does not represent the definitive republican position, nor is it exclusive of other proposals dealing with alternative scenarios for a British withdrawal from Ireland.

The first section re-iterates the Irish people's right to national self-determination, the second section deals with the question of the loyalists and the final section proposes a way in which the British government could withdraw and transfer power to an all-Ireland constitutional convention and national government.

### **NATIONAL SELF-DETERMINATION**

THE island of Ireland, throughout history, has been universally regarded as one unit.

The historical and contemporary existence of the Irish nation has never been disputed.

The Irish people have never relinquished their claim to the right of self-determination.

What has been in contest is the right of the Irish people, as a whole, to self-determination and their freedom to exercise that right.

For centuries, the relationship between the British government and the Irish people has been the relationship between the conqueror and the conquered, the oppressor and the oppressed.

The perennial cycle of oppression/ domination/ resistance/ oppression has been a constant feature of the British government's involvement in Ireland and the Irish people's rejection of that government's usurpation of the right to exercise control over their political, social, economic and cultural destiny.

From the late 17th century onwards, that usurpation provoked both revolutionary resistance and, within the narrowest confines of British constitutional legality, constitutional opposition. In the course of the 19th century, British oppression and famine caused the population of Ireland to be halved.

The only occasion on which the people of all Ireland have been permitted to hold free and fair elections to determine their political future was in the 1918 Westminster election. Sinn Féin, with a political programme demanding complete independence for the unitary state of Ireland, won the election with 69% of the vote.

Those democratically-elected representatives of the Irish people formed Dail Eireann and, on January 21st, 1919, enacted the Declaration of Independence.

The Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1922, the partition of Ireland and the Constitution of the Irish Free State were imposed on the Irish people under the threat of "immediate and terrible war". They were not submitted to the Irish people for ratification and their imposition represents a denial to the Irish people of the freedom to exercise their right to self-determination. The pretext for partition - the wishes of a national minority to maintain British rule - holds no validity against the express wishes of the vast majority of the Irish people.

Secession is not the same as self-determination.

Partition perpetuates the British government's denial of the Irish people's right to self-determination. It perpetuates the cycle of oppression/domination/resistance/oppression. In the words of Seán MacBride, winner of the Nobel and Lenin Peace Prizes:

"Ireland's right to sovereignty, independence and unity are inalienable and inalienable. It is for the Irish people as a whole to determine the future status of Ireland. Neither Britain nor a small minority selected by Britain has any right to partition the ancient island of Ireland, nor to determine its future as a sovereign nation."

## **LAW**

IRELAND'S RIGHT to sovereignty, independence and unity, the right of the Irish people, as a whole, to self-determination, is supported by universally recognized principles of International law.

The right to self-determination is enshrined in the two United Nations' Covenants of 1966, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights. Article 1

of each covenant states:

"1. All peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they determine their economic, social and cultural development."

The landmark Declaration on Principles of International Law Concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation Among States in Accordance with the Charter of the United Nations declares:

"... all people have the right freely to determine, without external influence, their political status and to pursue their economic, social and cultural development and every state has the duty to respect this right in accordance with the provisions of the Charter."

Partition is in contravention of the United Nations' Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. Article 6 of which states:

"Any attempt aimed at the partial or total disruption of the national unity and the territorial integrity of a country is incompatible with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations."

## **LOYALISTS**

THE MAJOR stumbling block to Independence is British colonial interference. However, it suits the British and the loyalists for the loyalists to be portrayed as the real obstacle to that Independence and allows Westminster off the hook, projecting itself as the 'honest broker'.

While we in no way wish to ignore the economic challenge which reunification presents, or minimise the extent of the problem, or the great trauma that will be experienced by the unionist population, we believe that loyalism derives an artificial psychological strength from the British presence, from the Union. Indeed, the

relationship between intransigence and past unconditional British support is recognised (though unacknowledged) by Thatcher's government, part of whose present strategy, via the Hillsborough Treaty, is to rock the morale of loyalists, split the unionists and force the emergence of a pragmatic leadership which will do an internal deal with the SDLP.

The loyalists are a national minority in Ireland. According to most opinion polls, the majority of people in Britain want to wash their hands of Ireland. Increasingly, loyalists are finding themselves in an untenable position. Their protest campaign against the Hillsborough Treaty has cost them dearly in PR terms and to the British public it has only emphasized the differences between the Six Counties and Britain. Their refusal to enter into dialogue (with anyone) and their disillusionment with the British government is producing a momentum towards disaster where Civil War, or a Unilateral Declaration of Independence, or repartition are among the irrational proposals put forward by some of the paramilitaries and politicians.

Sinn Féin seeks a new constitution for Ireland which would include written guarantees for those presently constituted as 'loyalists'. This would recognize present-day social reality and would include, for example, the provisions for family planning and the right to civil divorce.

The resolution of the conflict would free unionists from their historic laager mentality and would grant them real security instead of tenure based on repression and triumphalism. We do not intend to turn back the pages of history, or to dispossess the loyalists and foolishly attempt to reverse the Plantation. We offer them a settlement based on their throwing in their lot with the rest of the Irish people and ending sectarianism. We offer them peace. We offer them equality. It is only through the process of decolonisation and dialogue that a peaceful, stable Ireland will emerge. Only when independence is restored can Ireland hope to prosper and take her place among the nations of the world. Britain must take the

initiative and declare its intention to withdraw. That is the first step on the road to peace. Republicans will respond quickly and positively.

## **A SCENARIO FOR PEACE**

THE ENDING of partition, a British disengagement from Ireland and the restoration to the Irish people of the right to exercise self-sovereignty remain the only solution to the British colonial conflict in Ireland.

The Hillsborough Treaty and the processes it involves seek merely to camouflage the fact that the Six-County state is a failed entity, socially, economically and politically. The Treaty does not challenge the constitutional status of the Union but actually reinforces it.

Sinn Féin seeks to create conditions which will lead to a permanent cessation of hostilities, an end to our long war and the development of a peaceful, united and independent Irish society. Such objectives will only be achieved when a British government adopts a strategy for decolonisation.

It must begin by repealing the 'Government of Ireland Act' and publicly declaring that the 'Northern Ireland' statelet is no longer part of the United Kingdom.

Furthermore, it must declare that its military forces and its system of political administration will remain only for as long as it takes to arrange their permanent withdrawal.

This would need to be accomplished within the shortest practical period. A definite date within the lifetime of a British government would need to be set for the completion of this withdrawal. Such an irreversible declaration of intent would minimize any loyalist backlash and would go a long way towards bringing round to reality most loyalists and those of their representatives genuinely interested in peace and negotiation. It would be the business of

such negotiations to set constitutional, economic, social and political arrangements for a new Irish state through a Constitutional Conference.

## **CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCE**

FREE ELECTIONS to an all-Ireland Constitutional Conference would be arranged. The conference would consist of the elected representatives of the Irish people and would be open to submissions from all significant organizations in Ireland (e.g. the Trade Union Movement, the Women's Movement, the Churches) and would draw up a new constitution and organise a national system of government.

While the conference could have no influence on the decision by Britain to withdraw, it would play an important role in organizing the transition to a new governmental system. Should it fail agreement on a new Constitution, or on any other matter, a British withdrawal would proceed anyway within the fixed time period.

Republicans have consistently asserted that the loyalist people, in common with all other citizens, must be given firm guarantees of their religious and civil liberties and we repeat our belief that, faced with a British withdrawal and the removal of partition, a considerable body of loyalist opinion would accept the wisdom of negotiating for the type of society which would reflect their needs and interests. The irreversible nature of a British withdrawal strategy would be a major influence in convincing loyalists that we were entering into a new situation which could not be changed by the traditional methods of loyalist intransigence.

## **BRITISH WITHDRAWAL**

AS PART of the military withdrawal, the RUC and UDR would be disarmed and disbanded.

The introduction of United Nations forces or

European forces to supervise a British withdrawal or fill any alleged vacuum would only frustrate a settlement and must be avoided. Experience in other conflicts has shown that such a 'temporary' presence would become 'permanent' and the deployment would have a political bias. Their subsequent withdrawal would become a point of contention and there would be a re-run of the bloodbath-threat scenario. Similarly, there should be a real effort to avoid the introduction of forces from the 26 Counties.

The Constitutional Conference would be responsible for determining the nature and composition of an emergent national police service and the judiciary. There is absolutely no doubt in our minds that, if Britain were to be sincere about disengaging and was committed to an orderly transference of power, this could be achieved with a minimum of disorder.

All political prisoners would be unconditionally released.

A cessation of all offensive military actions by all organizations would create the climate necessary for a peaceful transition to a negotiated settlement.

As part of the settlement, the British government must accept the responsibility for providing financial support by agreeing by Treaty with the national government to provide economic subvention for an agreed period. Given the disastrous involvement of British rule in Ireland, reparations for an agreed period are the least contribution Britain could make to ensure an orderly transition to a national democracy and the harmonisation of the economies, North and South.