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The Hillsborough Agreement

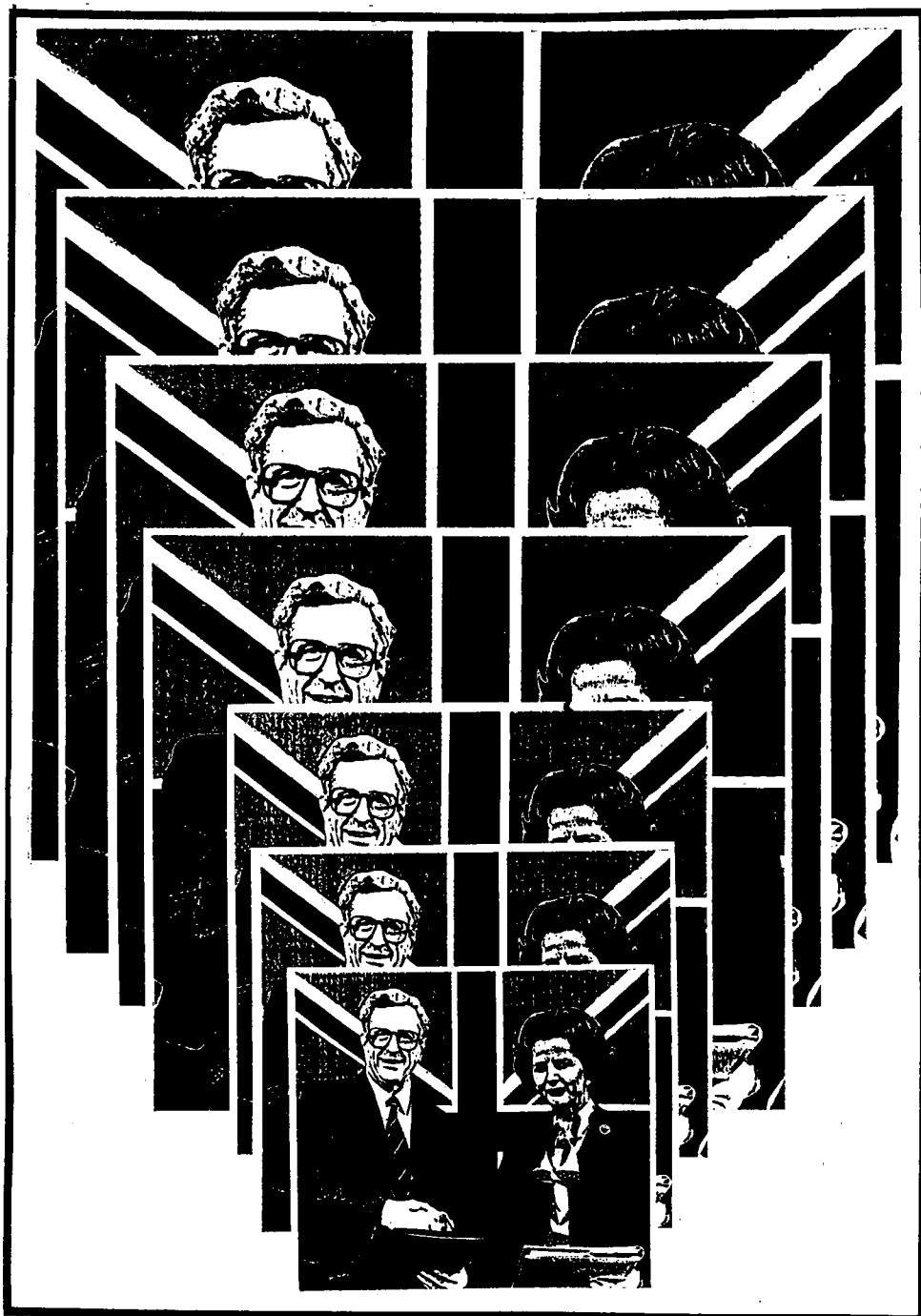


The text of the Bobby Sands Commemorative lecture
given by DANNY MORRISON in Twinbrook, Belfast on
Sunday 4th May 1986



The Hillsborough Agreement

This pamphlet examines the background to the Hillsborough Agreement, the agreement itself and how it has fulfilled the intentions of its signatories. It also looks at the nature of loyalism and 'constitutional' nationalism in the North.



The Hillsborough Agreement

AFTER THE loyalist pogroms against nationalists in August 1969, the British government, embarrassed internationally at the blatant sectarianism of the six-county state, for which it was ultimately responsible, put pressure on the unionist government at Stormont to carry out a series of reforms. At the same time, British Labour prime minister Harold Wilson signed the Downing Street Declaration in which Britain reaffirmed that there could be no change in the constitutional status of the North, within the union, without the consent of 'the majority', that is, the loyalists.

Similar reassurances ever since have done little to mollify the loyalists and, indeed, the abolition of the 'B' Specials, the reorganisation of the RUC, the suspension of Stormont in 1972, the Sunningdale Agreement of 1973 and 1974. The interning of loyalists in 1973, the Hillsborough Agreement of 1985, the re-routing of Orange parades, and the firing of plastic bullets in Portadown and elsewhere in 1986, have widened the breach between many loyalists and Britain, a breach which was always there. This has added fuel to the hitherto, mostly unarticulated preference of some loyalists to campaign not for integration with Britain, as advocated by some leading Official Unionists, not for devolution, which the DUP calls for, but for a negotiated independence or to go for a unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) if Britain decides to withdraw and loyalists hold sufficient military muscle.

Historically loyalists have never felt really secure, because they are a minority in Ireland, and because of the circumstances by which they came to politically dominate all of Ireland. Throughout the 19th century they opposed the extension of the franchise — even with property qualifications — to Irish Catholics. In 1912

they pledged, some by signing in their own blood, to defend Ulster, yet within a few years they ditched their fellow brethren in Cavan, Monaghan and Donegal for what they believed to be a more secure area.

Although secure for a while, it is clear that the six counties can be seen to represent the shrinking foothold of British imperialism in Ireland.

Now loyalism threatens civil war if it cannot get what it wants. The loyalists, quite clearly, are only loyal to *their* concept of the Union. They are not prepared to accept British government counter-insurgency attempts at significant reforms because they consider these to be the product of IRA activity and because they consider such concessions as being part of the slippery slope to an Irish Republic.

They have never learned to lower their expectations, and their failure to adapt to changed circumstances is a serious liability to their cause. Such intransigence has, of course, paid dividends in the past but it has also been the singular most important factor in contributing to the destabilising of the six-county state. Rather than value such intransigence as a bluff from which to negotiate the optimum,



Loyalist 'monster rally' in Belfast on November 23rd 1985

loyalists have elevated it to a holy principle. Those like Terence O'Neill (1969) or Brian Faulkner (1974), who saw the need to best preserve the six-county state by attempting to reform, were swept aside.

The two occasions since Stormont was prorogued when loyalists felt most secure with British policy were probably at the time of the Falklands/Malvinas venture in the South Atlantic (that was a *real* assurance of traditional British imperialism) and after the November 1984 London-Dublin summit at Chequers when Mrs Thatcher contemptuously dismissed Garret FitzGerald and the authors of the Forum Report with her 'Out, Out, Out' remarks, though she subsequently appreciated the damage she did to the cause of consitutional nationalism and came up with this present agreement.

THE LAST MAJOR ATTEMPT by a British government — again a Tory government — to stabilise the situation by appeasing the nationalist middle class and giving an 'Irish dimension' to the institutions of the state was the power-sharing Sunningdale Agreement of late 1973.

Power-sharing and the proposal for a Council of Ireland so outraged loyalists that in May 1974 they launched the Ulster Workers Council strike which successfully brought down the Executive of Brian Faulkner and Gerry Fitt. That strike had such a profound effect on the British that no major effort was made along the Sunningdale lines for another 12 years. In the intervening years successive Dublin governments were not particularly anxious about getting involved in the North and had no motivation to do so (dwelling instead on their own economic difficulties) and preferred to pay lip-service to Irish unity and were content with the performance of the SDLP. (In the meantime, the British government continued to attempt to deplete IRA ranks and demoralise republican supporters. It exploited the 1975 IRA ceasefire and Ulsterisation and Normalisation while attempting to criminalise republican supporters. During this period the importance of the heroic blanket protest to republican morale cannot be overestimated.)

The SDLP were able to survive because there was no organised political challenge to them inside the nationalist community. The SDLP just got along, even through the bad days of Roy Mason's rule (he considered them republicans!). The resignation of party leader Gerry Fitt in 1979 — he wanted to involve the party in a compromising agreement with direct-ruler Humphrey Atkins who was then chairing inter-party talks — probably was a refreshing development in the party, and allowed the highly-articulate John Hume to become leader.

From H-Blocks to electoral strategy

THE FIRST pressures on the SDLP built up during the late stages of the blanket protest and the 1980 hunger-strike. Their problems were compounded by the Bobby Sands' intervention in Fermanagh and South Tyrone in April 1981 following the death of Frank Maguire MP. Had not Austin Currie got egg all over his face for unsuccessfully challenging Frank Maguire in the Westminster elections in April 1979, on an 'independent SDLP ticket', it is quite likely that he would have ran against Bobby. It is interesting to speculate what would have been the effect on Sinn Fein's 'experimental' electoral strategy had the SDLP intervened in that election or in Owen Carron's, by either putting up a candidate or calling for a boycott, which they often claim they wished they had. Firstly, they certainly would have damaged themselves (with what lasting effect again one can only speculate) and the defeat of Bobby Sands would have left a bad taste in republican supporters' mouths about future electoral involvement. (Sinn Fein's electoral strategy would have also been seriously undermined had Bobby lost the election in circumstances where he was the sole nationalist candidate).

The comfort Sinn Fein can draw from developments since is that whereas its first electoral involvements in the occupied six counties (Bobby's, Owen's and Sinn Fein's in the Assembly elections) had to overcome a credibility hurdle with supporters and members (and if they hadn't been successful, defeats would have almost certainly sounded the death knell for electoral strategy), with the value of the strategy now having been established Sinn Fein can probably take set-backs more in its stride. Certainly, it absorbed a drop in its vote without recrimination or demoralisation, something which it could not have afforded to do in the early contests.

The votes received by Sinn Fein during the hunger-strike were explained by the establishment as being an emotional reaction to a tense situation. In June 1981, Kieran Doherty and Paddy Agnew were elected as TDs in the twenty-six counties but the drop in the republican vote in the February 1982 elections was some com-



Gerry Adams ousts Fitt in Belfast at the June 1983 Westminster elections

fort to Dublin that the June '81 vote was transitory. Perhaps the British government and Jim Prior, who was planning his 'rolling devolution' Assembly elections, thought the same.

Sinn Fein successes in the October 1982 Assembly elections (and Christy Burke's Dublin by-election result in December 1983) and the subsequent consolidation of its Northern vote has been of major concern, first to Dublin and then to the British government. (The political culture of the British parliament and its colonial experience have taught it to take things more in its stride.)

Dublin was concerned that if Sinn Fein were to overtake the SDLP in the North then Dublin would be left in a very awkward position as it relied on SDLP support to validate its whole attitude to the North.

Without any justification, the SDLP and their precursors have viewed Dublin (and also allowed it to be viewed) as the natural guarantor of the nationalist community. Dublin's position would be untenable if Sinn Fein were the majority representative of the nationalist community.

Dismay at such a prospect convinced the Dublin government that something had to be done. In March 1983, five months after the Assembly elections, FitzGerald agreed to setting up the Dublin Forum. (The Irish Independence Party had thought of the idea originally; the SDLP *had* mentioned it in their election manifesto, but made *no* reference to anyone being excluded — as Sinn Fein was, because of its principled position on the armed struggle of the IRA.)

The Forum sat amid a lot of pomp and circumstance and served the SDLP well in the June 1983 election — even though Sinn Fein's vote rose to 13.34% (overall). Against Sinn Fein's expectations, Hume did not use the Forum Report, which was issued in May 1984, in the European election one month later, but cleverly and

successfully fought on solely European issues and his international profile. In this election there was no expansion in Sinn Fein's vote.

In the May 1985 local government elections which were fought against the background of anti-personation laws and limited involvement (17 out of 26 district council areas), Sinn Fein's vote was shown to be still solid. Its enemies were convinced that it could take a toll on the SDLP over a period of time and Dublin believed that if republican support was not publicly and visibly undermined then Sinn Fein could take electoral successes very much into the twenty-six counties. Despite the fact that Sinn Fein is a very small organisation in the twenty-six counties, Fitzgerald is paranoid about republican success in the Free State, to the extent that he said in an interview that he would never allow Gerry Adams to take Sinn Fein into Leinster House!

Britain showed no great concern about the Forum Report. The London government said it did not want to reply to it before the European elections in case its reply affected the outcome. (Only one type of reply would have affected the outcome — a dismissal would have favoured Sinn Fein.) Then the excuse of parliamentary business and the summer recess was used to further delay a reply. The Official Unionist document, *The Way Forward*, released a month before the publication of the Forum Report, was hailed as 'very interesting' by British ministers, and was put on a par with the Forum Report. Both were discussed in parliamentary debates but the British government again showed no great concern about the Forum Report.

The Dublin government and the SDLP were fairly anxious throughout the summer of 1984, with the former hyping-up (it was wishful thinking) British responses to the Forum Report via ministerial and senior civil servant contacts.

Chequers and Brighton



AT THE Chequers London/Dublin summit in November 1984, Thatcher made her infamous 'Out, Out, Out' reply. Dublin and the SDLP were shattered. Republicans were proved correct. However, there were allowances made in the communique issued at the time for further inter-governmental developments, which went virtually unnoticed by republicans and most others.

Sometime afterwards (and probably as a delayed reaction to the October Brigh-

ton bomb), Thatcher realised the damage her 'Out, Out, Out' remarks had done to the cause of 'constitutional nationalism'. Dublin also recruited intense political lobbying from the US Senate and Congress for a British change-of-heart.

Then in early 1985 Thatcher made her complimentary remarks, when she addressed the US Congress, about working with her 'good friend' Garret FitzGerald. The stage was set, and serious talks began again.

While Britain could not have attempted unilaterally to stabilise the six counties and reform the RUC, in retrospect it appears certain that the re-routing of Orange parades by the RUC in the summer of 1985 were linked to the talks.

THE HILLSBOROUGH AGREEMENT shows that, in return for accepting British sovereignty in the six counties and the loyalist veto, Dublin has been granted a consultative role in Northern affairs (far short of the least demand of the three Forum options — condominium/joint sovereignty — but a big step forward as far as Dublin and the SDLP are concerned as it represents significant recognition of them from Britain).

The announcement of lodging of the Agreement at the United Nations with 'treaty' status has allowed Britain to claim 'Irish' (Dublin government and SDLP) consensus for its role as arbiter in Ireland, and to escape international criticism that it is engaged in a colonial situation. Thatcher hopes that in the long run Dublin's effective abrogation of Articles 2 & 3 of its own constitution through the clear statement of recognising the loyalist veto will eventually peter through to a substantial section of loyalist opinion.

About the Agreement, an editorial in the *Daily Telegraph* said:

"Let us remember one of the chief aims: it is to convince the world (particularly the United States and our European allies) that London and Dublin are equally opposed to the IRA and that what is going on in Ulster is not just the death agony of British imperialism. To plant that conviction is a worthy object, for which some risks are justified."

The risks referred to are the temporary upsetting of the loyalists.

Articles of the Agreement

THE DOCUMENT (passed by the British Houses of Parliament and the Free State Oireachtas and Senate) in its opening paragraphs talks about the "unique relationship" between the two governments and the North

(harking back to Haughey's "totality of relationships" and the first London-Dublin summits of 1980/'81 — which perished on Haughey hype, the hunger-strike and later, on the Falklands/Malvinas war).

It also talks about "*the need... to reconcile and to acknowledge the rights of the two major traditions*" and about mutual recognition and acceptance of "*each other's rights*." Their objective is summarised in the last paragraph of the preamble, reaffirming their commitment "*to a society in Northern Ireland in which all may live in peace, free from discrimination and intolerance, and with the opportunity for both communities to participate fully in the structuring and processing of governments*", in other words **stabilising the six-county state**.

ARTICLE 1

Article 1 deals with the status of the North and is the one found most objectionable by republicans and by Fianna Fail as it formally recognises the loyalist veto. However, it also states that there will be no change in the status of the North without the say-so of a majority, instead of **the** majority (the loyalists), which is not the same thing and is a subtle change.

Sub-section (c) of Article 1 was seized upon by Garret FitzGerald and Seamus Mallon as a major break-through, which it is not. Sub-section (c) says that if in the future "*a majority of people in Northern Ireland*" did consent to a united Ireland, Britain would have no hesitation in legislating for it. Loyalists have correctly stated that this treats them differently than, say, Cornwall or Yorkshire. However, Mallon has claimed that this proves "*once and for all*" that Britain has no especial interest or strategic interest in the North, which is nonsense. He has already stated on the record that he would be prepared to bargain an end to Free State neutrality in return for movement on the Northern political deadlock (so obviously he does believe that Britain has a strategic interest in Ireland!).

ARTICLE 2

Article 2 established the 'Intergovernmental Conference' (originally to be called a Commission, this name was dropped because of the threatening overtones it was believed it would have for loyalists).

The conference will deal with

- (i) political matters;
- (ii) security and related matters;
- (iii) legal matters, including the administration of justice;
- (iv) promotion of cross-border co-operation.

The conference may also discuss issues in the Free State or Britain which may affect relationships between London, Dublin and the North. Article 2 (b) also states that "*there is no derogation from the sovereignty of either the UK government or the Irish government...*"

ARTICLE 3

Article 3 defines the conference as being able to meet regularly at ministerial or official level and to break down into flexible sub-groups. The conference is to be jointly chaired (presently) by Tom King, Northern direct-ruler, and Peter Barry, in a new Dublin government cabinet position titled "*the Permanent Irish Ministerial Representative*". Barry is still Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Other London and Dublin ministers who are respective counterparts can also meet, including their attorneys general, the RUC Chief Constable and the Garda Commissioner.

Article 3 also establishes the Secretariat whose function it will be "*to service the conference on a continuing basis in the discharge of its functions*".

ARTICLE 4

Article 4 defines the objectives of the conference — referred to in the preamble as quoted above.

Articles 4 (b) and (c) refer to a devolution of power in the North in a way which would secure widespread acceptance (here there are hints of power-sharing). The Dublin government, as *official guarantors* for the nationalist community, declares its support for that policy.

ARTICLE 5

Article 5 (c) gives Dublin ongoing high-level representation to the British government on behalf of the nationalist community if a devolution of power proves impossible to achieve or sustain.

ARTICLE 6

Article 6 allows the Dublin government to put forward views and proposals on the likes of the Fair Employment Agency and, more importantly from the SDLP point-of-view and to the dismay of the loyalists, on the composition of the Police Authority and Police Complaints Board. However, this can and may also be used against the SDLP, for example, as a pressure point from the British calling upon

them to make nominations to the Authority and Board which would amount to SDLP recognition and support for the RUC.

ARTICLE 7

Article 7 is extremely important as it deals with intensified collaboration and a harmonisation of the efforts being made to repress the Republican Movement.

Serious incidents and forthcoming events, along with ways of making the RUC more acceptable, community relations and Catholic recruitment to the RUC, can be discussed.

Article 7 (d) allows for a review of British policy on prisoners, with Dublin able to raise individual cases. This was intended to create major division in the jails with the creation of a 'sign-out' process via the Catholic clergy/SDLP/Dublin government for prisoners who forswear the armed struggle but, like all the other mooted reforms, this has been shelved due to the loyalist protest.

ARTICLE 8

Article 8 refers to the harmonisation of laws and improving public confidence in the administration of justice. The possibility of mixed courts in both jurisdictions is to be examined as are ways to expedite extradition.

ARTICLE 9

Article 9 re-emphasises the whole area of cross-border security exchanges in terms of information, intelligence and liaison structures, but states that the conference should have *no* operational responsibilities — allowing Dublin in the future the freedom to claim that it was not involved in or responsible for a 'bad' RUC or British army operation, etc.

ARTICLE 10

Article 10 is on social and economic co-operation and talks about securing international support. Article 10 (b) allows for this co-operation to continue even if the aim of internal devolved government alludes them (perhaps representing a small, additional pressure on the loyalists to compromise with the SDLP).

ARTICLE 11

Article 11 allows for the scope and nature of the conference to be reviewed after

three years or earlier, if required — thus it is a very ambitious affair and is intended to outlast loyalist objections and resistance.

ARTICLE 12

Article 12 refers to the possibility of setting up an Anglo-Irish parliamentary body if so desired.

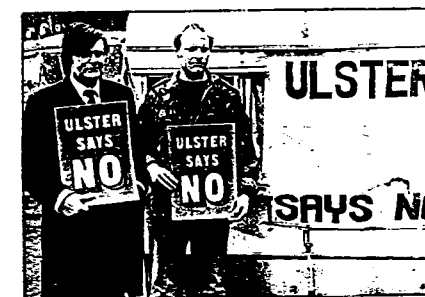
ARTICLE 13

Article 13 describes the Agreement as coming into effect when both governments exchange notification of their acceptance of the Agreement.

Meetings of the conference at Maryfield were not expected to take place in a glare of publicity, though civil servants with loyalist sympathies have leaked as many details as they are acquainted with. Actually, the first meeting dealt *only* with security matters, but that meant nothing to loyalists who still took the gate off its hinges.

The conference will deal with relations between crown forces and the nationalist community, security co-operation North and South, making the Northern judiciary more acceptable, considering whether the UDR should be in support of the RUC (i.e joint patrolling), impartial application of the law by crown forces, and the policing of border areas.

Loyalist reaction



DESPITE THE reiteration of the loyalist veto (again and again), that veto being enshrined in an international treaty lodged at the UN, and FitzGerald signing the European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism, the loyalists have naturally enough been outraged by the Agreement and their whole reaction has been that this is the slippery slope to an Irish Republic. Certainly, they have been shocked by Thatcher's 'turn-around' on the November 1984 Chequers summit. There have been some calls for UDI. Television pictures of loyalists like George Seawright assaulting Tom King, and some of the unparliamentary

language used by the loyalists in Westminster, only further emphasised the differences between them and the mainstream of British political parties.

Republicans have lost nothing by these antics which, it should be remembered, began with Sinn Fein's accession to the councils. The issue of Sinn Fein's presence in the chambers has been overtaken by these events but has yet to be resolved for the loyalists, and the proscription of Sinn Fein could well play a part in mollifying or reassuring the loyalists that there is a silver lining to the Agreement.

The reaction of the loyalists also initially helped Dublin and the SDLP to sell the Agreement, although what has now amounted to the suspension of the Agreement (to all intents and purposes) and the horrific campaign against Catholics, has left the SDLP and Dublin with very little to boast about at the minute.

Mrs Thatcher is renowned for her firmness and is showing no signs of wilting. Indeed, press reports suggest that the SDLP is more worried about the resolve of the Dublin government to see things through.

Thatcher's prime objective is to stabilise the six counties by attempting to **reform the state**. She is still hoping that major differences will emerge between loyalists and that 'the extremists' will eventually be (relatively) isolated. In recent days, some loyalists and Protestant ministers have called for caution, realising that protests which create a growing gulf between Britain and the loyalist community are political suicide, and advocating instead a re-negotiation of the Agreement or a lobbying on it.

If Britain were on the verge of successfully dividing the 'extremist' loyalists from



Sinn Fein has had a big impact in the councils

unionists in general, a repressive move against the Republican Movement could be expected to clinch it and, of course, would be more than acceptable to the Dublin government. The SDLP could be expected, as usual, to pretend to condemn repression and distance themselves from it (while benefitting from the removal of Sinn Fein's political rivalry and planning to re-enter Stormont).

How things will develop will, therefore, depend on how determined and successful are the OUP and DUP, which are presently joined together in a pact.

(Even if the Agreement fails, for whatever reasons, what will be left over will be high-level Dublin security collaboration – just as the Criminal Law Jurisdiction Act was the only remnant of the Sunningdale power-sharing agreement.)

After the Agreement was signed the SDLP were initially on a high. They were in good morale and the media did an excellent PR job in selling the Agreement as a victory for Dublin and the SDLP.

Whilst no Sinn Fein statement or spokesperson ever referred to the Agreement as a sell-out or to the SDLP as having sold out, they continually referred to that as being the republican position. This allowed them to have a monopoly, or exclusive claims, on whatever benefits were to flow from the deal. It also allowed them to paint Sinn Fein as being irrational – that is, wanting to have an electoral pact with a party whom it considered as having 'sold out' the nationalist cause!

This initial perception of the Agreement – as being a major step forward for the nationalist cause – paid electoral dividends to the SDLP in the January 1986 by-elections when Seamus Mallon became MP for Newry and Armagh. It is doubtful if the SDLP would make the same gains at Sinn Fein's expense were those elections to take place under present circumstances and understanding.

At the present point in time the loyalists are occupying the centre of the stage with their opposition which has gone through a number of phases: monster rallies; the boycotting of direct-rule ministers; the suspension of councils; withdrawal from housing, health and education boards; the resignation of Westminster seats to cause by-elections; a strike; confrontations with the RUC, and the tactic of unnerving and demoralising the RUC by attacking their homes because of their policing of the Agreement; and, lastly, a widespread campaign of sectarian attacks on Catholics and Catholic property, including places of worship.

The tactic of attacking RUC homes has allowed the bulk of the RUC, who are sectarian *and* anti-Agreement anyway, to argue internally against the role they have to play in policing the re-routing of Orange parades (whilst disguising their real, loyalist political sympathies). This was seen quite clearly after the secret recording of a recent Police Federation meeting where major opposition was expressed.

Whether or not a level of revolt inside the RUC will be reached which will force the British government to reconsider its commitment to the Agreement remains to be seen and depends on the determination of the loyalist paramilitaries to maintain these attacks in the face of not inconsiderable opposition within their own community.

Republican position

AN IMPORTANT lesson from this loyalist violence is that it disproves British, unionist and SDLP claims in the past that loyalist violence and sectarian assassination campaigns are a mere response to, or are provoked by, the armed struggle of the IRA.

What this violent response to the SDLP's strategy shows once and for all is that loyalists will react violently to *any* nationalist attempt to achieve their rights. When 'constitutional nationalists' looked like getting Home Rule passed at Westminster in 1912 – before there was an IRA – the loyalists set up the illegal UVF and threatened civil war.

When the peaceful Civil Rights Movement started a momentum for reform, Paisley organised counter-demonstrations and the RUC, at the head of loyalist gangs, launched the Belfast pogroms which left eight people dead and thousands homeless.

Again, in July 1972 when the IRA's armed struggle brought Britain to the negotiation table and when the IRA called a truce (something which loyalists had always been demanding) loyalist paramilitaries, believing that nationalists were about to make significant gains, stepped up their assassination campaign to its highest pitch ever in an attempt to blackmail Britain into reneging and as a means of blackmailing nationalist leaders into capitulating.

Republican criticism of the Hillsborough Agreement is that in return for its implementation it is not worth risking such a violent loyalist response. Had the Dublin government and the SDLP held out for substantial, worthwhile concessions from Britain there would still have been loyalist violence.

Catholics are now being burned out of their homes for an Agreement which in its first paragraph guarantees the loyalists that there can be no change in the status of the six counties without the consent of a majority. In other words, it enshrines the loyalist veto.

Republicans do not believe that the British judiciary, the RUC or the UDR can or should be reformed. But even on those fronts what has happened to SDLP promises of the judiciary being reformed? The British attorney general, Michael Havers, has said that show-trials and paid-perjurers are to continue being used. Plastic bull-



Sectarian attacks on Catholics are continuing

The recent confrontations have given the paramilitaries a new lease of life: they have begun recruiting. Every night there are small robberies taking place in loyalist areas as funds are amassed for the purchase of weapons and the sectarian attacks on Catholics have provided an occupation for the new recruits. This new lease of life for the UDA and UVF will also lead to a power struggle within the loyalist community – for example, up until Paisley returned from America, Peter Robinson appeared to be very close to the UDA for a period.

Whilst the Hillsborough Agreement has provided the spur for these attacks, that Agreement has failed to deliver to nationalists any of the small reforms promised by John Hume in the run-up to the January by-elections, but has lived up to its commitment to streamline cross-border security co-operation (for example, the garda Task Force has been re-activated and strengthened).



Repression of the nationalist community, and of republicans in particular, continues

ets are still being fired. Women prisoners have been moved from Armagh to Maghera and are still being strip-searched. The RUC has refused to sign a so-called Code of Conduct. The RUC do not accompany UDR patrols. Indeed, trigger-happy UDR soldiers shot and wounded two Catholics outside the Kildress Inn, Cookstown, just a few months ago. None of the soldiers have been charged. In Toomebridge a young, unarmed man was shot dead in controversial circumstances. There is still a shoot-to-kill policy. Nationalist youths who carry the Tricolour on marches are still being prosecuted in court. The Stocker Report, which is a damning investigation into a special RUC 'hit squad' operating a shoot-to-kill policy in Armagh has yet to be acted upon.

Of course, republicans should not rule out the possibility that Britain may well decide to make concessions on one or other of these issues if and when the need arises to bolster the credibility of 'constitutional nationalists'.

In the run-up to the January by-elections SDLP leader John Hume swore that financial aid from the USA in support of the Hillsborough Agreement would be here in February. It is impossible to quantify how many votes the SDLP received on that basis or on the basis of the wild hype which surrounded the Agreement, but attempts were made to link the passage of the Irish Aid Bill to the US Senate ratifying the Supplementary Extradition Treaty with Britain. The initial injection of aid now being talked about is a miserly ten million dollars, some of which has to be spent in the South and the remainder divided between loyalist and nationalist areas.

It is six months since the signing of the Hillsborough Agreement and the nationalist community has gained nothing at all. For several months the SDLP have distracted attention away from this fact by pointing to the loyalist response as some sort of indication that they would not be behaving like that unless there were major gains for nationalists in the offing. The SDLP has failed to understand that when loyalists say 'not an inch' and 'no surrender', they mean exactly that.

The SDLP, quite expediently, has used the confrontation between the loyalists and the RUC to praise the RUC. It took Sinn Féin to point out to Seamus Mallon and John Hume that the firing of plastic bullets at loyalists in Portadown on Easter Monday, 1986, was wrong, absolutely wrong, even if Mr Hume could claim in the House of Commons that he supported the RUC for 'impartially' implementing the law.

INEVITABLY, frustrated loyalists will increasingly turn their sectarian attentions on Catholics. Hidden behind the nightly figures of attacks on RUC property and other property, during this period, is a grim list of petrol-bombed Catholic homes. If anything, Mr Peter Barry has intensified the 'nationalist nightmare' without offering any prospects of it dawning into a bright new day.

The republican analysis has always been that loyalists will never have to think about reaching an accommodation with their fellow Irish people while they are overtly and covertly patronised by London and Dublin governments. Their present show-down with the British, particularly Mrs Thatcher, is an interesting cocktail which has never before been witnessed.

It is also interesting to note that in terms of the intergovernmental conference Thatcher and FitzGerald are prepared to ignore the wishes of 'the majority' in the North; in terms of the proposed secretariat, the rumoured internal reforms, and cross-border relations, they are prepared to ignore the wishes of 'the majority' in the North.

Republicans should cite these **good** examples when next they are lectured by Dublin about the feelings of the loyalists. For the purposes of the most important issue of Irish freedom and peace, and Irish sovereignty, republicans state unequivocally that this artificial majority should have no veto over the independence of this island.



The Agreement has mobilised the loyalist paramilitaries

Civil war

IN THE opinion of many loyalists, civil war is their supreme card. In actual fact civil war is the only (and one should say this guardedly) threat or weapon that they have. So, what about this threat?

The IRA are determined to maintain the armed struggle until they break the political will of the British government, and the British public, to remain here. Rebellious loyalists need to be 100% sure that such a time has come, since a premature move on their part – a major confrontation with Britain before Britain had decided to withdraw – would actually assist the campaign for a British withdrawal.

The IRA has no intentions of invading the Shankill Road or Sandy Row, so against whom will the Orangemen turn their guns?

Against the British army? No, that would be disastrous. Against the RUC and the UDR? Hardly, since the degree and extent of rebellious loyalist firepower (and thus the extent of bloodshed) will be dependent on a combination of desertions from those ranks and covert or overt collaboration from right-wing elements in the British Establishment. The settlement which Britain strives for and the circumstances of its withdrawal will also determine the extent of a civil war – that is, loyalists will only fight in proportion to the amount of hope they have in achieving their end, and even that objective remains unclear.

When it is crystallised down, what the loyalists are actually saying is that if the union is broken then they will either butcher Catholics to blackmail a British gov-

ernment into reversing its decision to withdraw, or they will attempt to drive Catholics out of the North to set up a new rickety, sectarian statelet.

Given the difficulty crown forces have had to date in rooting out the IRA, the defeat of the IRA would be impossible in a 'backs-to-the wall' situation where support for the IRA would be almost total in clearly defined, or traditional, nationalist areas. The twenty-six counties would also officially or unofficially get drawn into the civil war and, though the wimpish leadership of the SDLP and the Catholic hierarchy would buckle under the threat or actuality of widespread anti-Catholic pogroms, republicans, with a cool appraisal of history, would see this period through.

Republicans are prepared to talk with loyalists at any time. It is the loyalists who create difficulties and hooks for themselves. How can they talk to republicans, it is said, when the IRA is waging a war against the crown forces, which increasingly means the RUC and UDR because of Ulsterisation, and whose deaths loyalists (falsely) perceive as sectarian? Republicans, who have suffered more so than loyalists, and nationalists, who have borne assassination campaigns and decades of oppression, would have more legitimate cause to object to such dialogue than the hypocritical pretexts offered by unionist leaders who falsely claim, on behalf of their people, a monopoly of suffering. Yet republicans and nationalists would place no obstacles in the way of meaningful dialogue.

All deaths are tragic and all the bloodshed is attributable to the British presence, without which sectarianism – the basis for the six-county state – would wither. Loyalists have no right to treat nationalists as second-class citizens in their own country. Republicans believe that the nationalist people will not get their civil rights until they get their national rights, which means there must be a British withdrawal and Ireland must be allowed the right to self-determination.

In a united Ireland republicans guarantee those presently tied to the philosophy of loyalism that they will fight for their civil and religious liberties. Republicans promise them equality. Among the reasons why Sinn Féin is attacked so much by the Catholic hierarchy and the Southern parties is not because it is Marxist (which it is not) or because it wants to set up an IRA dictatorship (which is also nonsense) but because it is socialist, because it is opposed to the interference of the Catholic Church with the state, it wants a pluralist society, it supports the provision of family planning facilities and the right to divorce, and it would like the opportunity in an open, democratic society to canvass the people to support its policies.

Sinn Féin believes that the British connection distorts politics in Ireland and gives succour to sectarianism. Break that connection, not tamper with it as the Hillsborough Agreement is doing with equally bloody results, and things will fall into place, painfully at first, but eventually peacefully, (it will mean a whole new political realignment and, unfortunately, probably the emergence of a powerful and influential business party interest involving ex-unionists and ex-Fine Gaelers.)

This is an analysis unacceptable to loyalists.

Loyalism's great-strength — the British connection — is also its greatest weakness. British rule is vulnerable and the IRA is confident of breaking Westminster's commitment to the North.

The IRA faces one of the most sophisticated and professional armies in the world. The British army is recognised and the RUC is respected by the security branches of overseas governments as possessing the most advanced counter-insurgency expertise. But equally the Irish Republican Army is recognised by the British and internationally as being a determined and dedicated body of men and women, skilled in the techniques of guerrilla warfare.

Whilst London and Dublin maintain the Agreement, republicans need to be aware of the danger of the British and Free State forces launching a joint attack on activists, North and South, as a sop to loyalists and as a means of removing the Sinn Fein threat to the SDLP.



The IRA — facing a sophisticated enemy

Whatever happens in the months ahead it is quite clear that the Hillsborough Agreement has not worked. An examination of those factors that have ensured the survival of this long struggle against major difficulties and with little resources also points the way ahead.

In those areas where republicans are relevant, they enjoy support and can survive repression. Republicans must continue to build a popular base and must develop strategies to suit conditions.

In the twenty-six counties, where republicans have faced considerable isolation for decades, where some of the nationalist aspirations of people have been met by the semi-independence of the state, and where a large majority of the people of the state consider the institutions of the government to be legitimate, Sinn Fein faces particular challenges to its traditional perceptions.

With some flexibility, through comradely debate and discussion, it can meet these challenges.

Finally, the Hillsborough Agreement has not undermined Sinn Fein, or the armed struggle of the IRA, or republican advancement in the twenty-six counties. To paraphrase Martin McGuinness, speaking at the funeral of H-Block escapee Seamus McElwaine last April, what makes nationalists equal in the North is not Garret FitzGerald acting as their guarantor, but the Armalite in the hands of an IRA Volunteer.

More nationalists than ever are beginning to realise just that.

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