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THE SINN FEIN/ SDLP TALKS

JANUARY-SEPTEMBER 1988

Sinn Féin SDLP

PUBLISHED BY SINN FEIN

THE

SINN FEIN/

SDLP

TALKS

THE SDLP TEAM

● John Hume

● Seamus Mallon

● Sean Farren

● Austin Currie

THE SINN FEIN TEAM

● Danny Morrison

● Gerry Adams

● Mitchell McLaughlin

● Tom Hartley

THE SINN FEIN/SDLP TALKS

IN JANUARY 1988, just eight months after Sinn Fein produced its document *Scenario for Peace* which called for dialogue on the political situation in the North, the party received a letter from a third party asking it if it were willing to formally meet the SDLP.

This invitation came against a background of persistent attempts by the Dublin and London governments and most of the political parties, including the SDLP, to isolate Sinn Fein completely from the political arena. While calling for dialogue, exchanges, conciliation and talks, these governments and parties usually demanded unacceptable preconditions for talks with republicans when not excluding them altogether.

In 1982 Sinn Fein joined with the Irish Independent Party, People's Democracy and a number of independents in seeking a common approach to the Assembly elections scheduled for that October. A letter was sent to the SDLP, but the party made no reply. Since then Sinn Fein has issued a number of calls for inter-party talks with the SDLP, all of which were spurned.

Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams MP brought the letter of invitation from the third party (which wishes to remain anonymous) to the attention of the Sinn Fein Ard Chomhairle. SDLP leader John Hume had been similarly approached and expressed his willingness to meet Sinn Fein.

In the letter of invitation to the talks, Sinn Fein and the SDLP were called upon *"to explore whether there could be agreement on an overall nationalist political strategy for justice and peace"*.

The Ard Chomhairle welcomed the opportunity to enter into discussions with the SDLP, empowered the party president to explore the possibility of finding agreement on a wide range of issues, and established a monitoring committee to handle the details of the talks.

On January 11th 1988, Gerry Adams and John Hume met for several hours. They exchanged analyses and it was emphasised by both afterwards that there was *"no military agenda"*.

The political reaction to this meeting was immediate and fierce and became a regular feature following announcements of further meetings which continued until August 30th.

British government spokespersons including direct-ruler Tom King condemned the talks and questioned John Hume's judgement. Unionist reactions were unanimously hostile. DUP leader, Ian Paisley, called for unionist unity in the face of this *"new alliance"*. Official Unionist leader, James Molyneaux, described the talks as *"a fatal step for democracy"* and their timing as *"sinister"*, so close to a *"breakthrough"* in unionist talks with the British government, which might have led to inter-party negotiations with the SDLP. The Alliance and Workers' Party were equally hostile.

Media reactions were mixed. *"Unionists blame Hume — SF talks slammed"*, screamed the *News Letter* headline, while the *Belfast Telegraph* leader (Tuesday 12th January 1988), called the talks a *"serious mistake"*. The *Irish Times* editorial was cool and viewed the developments with caution, an unusual attitude for a newspaper which normally could find no wrong with the SDLP leader. The *Irish News* was as defensive as Hume himself on television: Hume should be able to talk to Sinn Fein *"without having his principles called into question"*, the editorial complained. The *Irish Press* took a similar line.

In mid-March the first two of eight documents or letters (four Sinn Fein, four SDLP) were exchanged and this was followed on March 3rd by the first of three meetings of party delegations. President Gerry Adams, Tom Hartley (General Secretary), Councillor Mitchel McLaughlin and Danny Morrison (Director of Publicity)

represented the views of Sinn Fein while John Hume, Seamus Mallon, Sean Farren and Austin Currie made up the SDLP delegation.

Between the 6th and 26th of September, all of the papers were published creating considerable media and political interest. The following includes all of the Sinn Fein and SDLP contributions, and also includes some of the reaction and misrepresentation of the talks as they continued.

Sinn Fein document No.1

17th March 1988

John, A Chara,

Please find enclosed, as promised, our views on proposals for an overall political strategy to establish justice and peace in Ireland.

Despite the awful realities confronting Irish society, I remain convinced and confident that we can overcome all of these obstacles to achieving justice and peace in our country. The task of creating the conditions in which peace can be established in Ireland is a daunting challenge but one which ultimately will be successfully met by the Irish people.

I trust that you will find our document interesting and stimulating and sincerely hope that you find in it sufficient points of mutual agreement.

I look forward to reading your paper and developing dialogue between ourselves and, of course, those that we represent.

Is mise le meas,

Gerry Adams.

INTROOUCTION

FOR AS LONG as Britain remains in Ireland, its presence distorts the political landscape. British interference has been and continues to be malign because its presence has been and continues to be based on its own self interests.

Through partition, Westminster set the political complexion of both states; the North, based on sectarian criteria, actually dictating the geographical size of the fledgling Free State. Although it has developed into a social democracy, the 26 Counties remains deeply conservative in social terms because it cannot escape the consequences of partition. These are reflected in intolerant social values (which would be diluted in a 32-County, pluralist Ireland); in economic terms (where the border disharmonises trade, commerce, agriculture, etc); in a political culture which increasingly embraces a revisionist attitude to history and Irish nationalism (which justifies and perpetuates partition but which saps national morale and pride); and in repressive laws, used against republicans and which ultimately help maintain British rule and partition.

The sectarian history of the Six-County state from 1921 until Stormont was prorogued in 1972 and direct rule instituted is well known and does not need reiteration.

In the past 16 years the actions of the British government in Ireland (especially the extent to which she has gone to maintain political control – the scandals of torture, shoot-to-kill, the Birmingham Six case, etc.) are overwhelmingly convincing arguments for the case that Britain intends to stay here in support of the Union.

Furthermore, the Hillsborough Accord will remain in effect for as long as it suits British needs and strategy, which we will elaborate upon later.

There has in recent years been an emphasis on loyalist sensibilities to an extent which tends to actually understate all that nationalists have suffered and continue to suffer. We agree that unionist people need assurance that in a re-unified Ireland their interests would not suffer. But what has been conceded to their sensibilities has been the continuing power to veto Irish unity and upon that veto rests the pretext for British rule in Ireland.

So, given the lengths to which Britain goes to remain here and indeed, to consolidate its position, one can only conclude that it believes it is in its interests to maintain the Union, to finance the Union, to let its soldiers die for the Union, to be internationally scandalised – at times – for the Union.

Britain's actions totally contradict SDLP claims that Britain somehow is now neutral since the signing of the Treaty.

Sinn Fein, however, believes that the solution should rest on the basics of the situation and the first principle is that a foreign power, the British government, has no right to be physically interfering in Irish affairs or ruling

any section of the Irish people. Only the domiciled people of Ireland, those who live in this island, can decide the future of Ireland and the government of the island.

Given all that the nationalist people of the North are going through and what they have suffered, given the practices of unionism, given the historical wrongs which the nation of Ireland has suffered at the hands of the British, it is totally unreasonable to disingenuously argue that the right of the people of Ireland to national self determination should be subject to unionist self-determination which is, in effect, the power of the veto once again.

SINN FEIN'S VIEW

The only solution to the present political conflict in Ireland is the ending of partition, a British disengagement from Ireland and the restoration to the Irish people of their right to sovereignty, independence and national self-determination.

Sinn Fein's view is that the British government needs to be met with a firm, united and unambiguous demand from all Irish nationalist parties for an end to the unionist veto and for a declaration of a date for withdrawal.

Within the new situation created by these measures, it is then a matter of business-like negotiations between representatives of all the Irish parties, and this includes those who represent today's loyalist voters, to set the constitutional, economic, social and political arrangements for a new Irish state.

We assert that the loyalist people must be given, in common with all other Irish citizens, firm guarantees of their religious and civil liberties, and we believe 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 as well as the needs of all the other people in Ireland.

The establishment of a society free from British interference, with the Union at an end, will see sectarianism shrivel and with the emergence of class politics a re-alignment of political forces along left and right lines. The Irish democracy thus created will usher in the conditions for a permanent peace, a demilitarisation of the situation, and the creation of a just society.

Within the general strategy position, the aim of our political struggle in the Six Counties is to popularise opposition to British rule and to extend that opposition into some form of broad anti-imperialist campaign. Our main political task is to turn political opposition to British rule in Ireland into a political demand for national self-determination. That demand will be eventually realised when the will of the British government to remain in Ireland is eroded.

The intended political effect of our political strategy is to bring the British government to the point where they want to leave by:

a. Frustrating British efforts to physically control the Six Counties:

b. Highlighting the coercive and colonial nature of the Six-County state:

c. Creating a broad-base anti-imperialist movement:

d. Developing the process of winning the confidence of the unionist population:

e. Winning widespread public opinion around to the correctness of this analysis.

Sinn Fein seeks to create conditions which will lead to a permanent cessation of hostilities, an end to the long war and the development of a peaceful, united independent and democratic 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 a 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 minimise any loyalist backlash and would go a long way towards bringing around to reality most loyalists and their representatives genuinely interested in peace and negotiation. It would be the business of such negotiations to set the constitutional, economic, social and political arrangements for a new Irish state through a Constitutional Conference.

ARMED STRUGGLE

Like other forms of struggle in Ireland, the armed struggle is about achieving the political demands for national self-determination, an end to partition and the creation of a 32-County Irish republic. Armed struggle is seen as a political option. Its use is considered in terms of achieving national political aims and the efficacy of other forms of struggle.

This need to wage an armed struggle arises from within the political experience of the northern nationalist

community. This experience has clearly taught them that the inherent undemocratic nature of the Union is maintained through the superior use of force by the British state; that the British state still acts against the democratic wish of the majority of the Irish people by its commitment to maintain the Union; and that Britain has no intention of withdrawing its political, military and economic interests from the Six-Counties. Add to this 60 years of ineffectual leadership by constitutional nationalist politicians whose unwillingness to confront the British helped lock the northern Catholic population into a state of second-class citizenship.

The IRA, it should be noted, has consistently pointed out that its actions are aimed at the Six-County state and not at the 26 Counties.

"All IRA activities are geared towards the successful completion of the struggle for the independence which was thwarted by Britain foisting partition on the Irish people and setting up a sectarian state in the Six Counties...

"All IRA Volunteers are under strict instructions, under General Anny Order No. 8, not to come into conflict with the armed forces of the 26 Counties. They are not the enemy...

"There is no campaign or armed conspiracy against the institutions of the 26-County state nor will there be."

– IRA Statement, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, December 10th 1987.

It should also be noted that armed struggle is forced upon the IRA. Neither the IRA nor Sinn Fein want this war but the ineffectualness of all other forms of struggle, the conditions of repression that we have experienced and British attitudes, have made armed struggle inevitable. The deaths and injuries caused by the war are all tragedies which have been forced upon the people by the British presence.

Your party's bargaining leverage, plus the continuous need for Britain to apply time and energy through the mechanism of its various political initiatives, are proof enough that the armed struggle has been beneficial to the political aspirations of the nationalist community.

SINN FEIN AND HILLSBOROUGH

The nationalist community in the Six Counties has an historical view of itself as a persecuted section of the Irish people. This view has always been reflected in its political demands. At the very core of these lies the demand for national unity. Other political demands which concern the need for better education and housing, equal voting rights, the ending of unemployment and job discrimination, and cultural rights, have run in tandem with this core political demand.

The degree of political, civil and economic rights afforded to nationalists within the Six-County state depended on the degree to which loyalists would tolerate the erosion of their position of privilege. Even optimum loyalist tolerance will not permit equality. Equality is synonymous with national rights. Partition is in direct contradiction to that.

Because of its acceptance of the Hillsborough Treaty, your party is presently the linchpin of a British government strategy which seeks to resolve the contradiction of the northern state. Present British government strategy is aimed at stabilising the Six Counties in its own interests by introducing limited or symbolic reforms which attempt to make the northern state more tolerable to a section of the nationalist community and to international opinion.

The advantage of the Treaty from the British government's point of view is that on the one hand Treaty supporters claim it to be part of the process of resolution when in fact the *(quid pro quo)* cross-border security cooperation from Dublin actually ensures that there is no resolution of the national question.

Since Sunningdale in 1973, the British have repeatedly attempted to establish an internal governmental arrangement involving unionists and nationalists. Our struggle and strategy has been to close down each option open to the British until they have no other option but to withdraw. The SDLP – with the conditions of power-sharing and a variable 'Irish dimension' – have continually given the British succour and allowed them to believe that an internal arrangement may be possible, a belief that would be reinforced by an SDLP involvement in a devolved assembly.

Sinn Fein is totally opposed to a power-sharing Stormont assembly and states that there cannot be a partitionist solution. Stormont is not a stepping stone to Irish unity. We believe that the SDLP's gradualist theory is therefore invalid and seriously flawed.

The claim that Britain is neutral ignores their role as a pawnbroker and guarantor of unionist hegemony. It ignores the basic political fact of life that unionist hegemony was created by the British to maintain direct British control over a part of Ireland and a major influence over the rest of it. Britain's continuing involvement in Ireland is based on strategic, economic and political interests.

Strategic interests are now the most important consideration in Britain's interference in Ireland. Quite apart from the very real, if somewhat exaggerated fear among the British establishment that an Ireland freed from British influence could become a European 'Cuba', even the prospect of a neutral Ireland is regarded as a

serious threat to British – and NATO's – strategic interests:

"NATO too is thinking in terms of a conflict that would require ships, supplies and convoys across the Atlantic. Few would reach Europe unless Ireland in whole or part was committed to the struggle".

– Sir Patrick Macrory, *Britain's Undefended Frontier*

43 Although the annual British subvention to the North is £1.6 billion-plus, it would be wrong to conclude that this level of spending negates any British economic interest in Ireland. With the development of multinational capitalism, the economies of both partitioned states have become largely dependent on non-native investment. While Britain remains the single largest source of foreign investment, British involvement in Ireland serves a wider role in securing the interests of Britain's multinational capitalist allies from the potential or perceived threat posed by an independent Irish state.

44 Though less important than strategic or economic considerations, there remains a significant historical and political commitment on the part of the British establishment to the Union. This stems from Britain's historical role as an imperial power and an inherent reluctance to see either its territories or its influence diminished. There is also – particularly within the Conservative Party – a political loyalty to the Union if not to the unionists themselves.

45 It is dishonest, therefore, to argue that Britain's role is that of a neutral peacekeeper. Britain's massive military and financial commitment is in fact a reflection of her continuing strategic, economic and political interests in Ireland.

46 Both Sinn Fein and your party would agree that the Six-County state was founded on inequality, and many nationalists, including your own supporters, would argue that the history of the last twenty years has shown it to be irreformable:

1. Stormont's response to Civil Rights demands.

2. Loyalist response to power-sharing Executive in 1974 and loyalist attitudes to date.

3. Stalker, Birmingham Six, PTA, Thain release, Exclusions etc...

4. Refusal of British government and employers to enforce effective anti-discrimination measures (still 2.5 Catholics unemployed to one Protestant) etc... We repeat, nationalists will only be afforded the degree of equality which loyalists will tolerate. This is even implicit in the British government's latest contribution to the discrimination debate.

47 It appears to us that, rather than concede the failure of Hillsborough and the irreformability of the Six-County state, the SDLP is desperately hanging on to the Treaty. The SDLP statement that *"it's the only little thing we got in 60 years"** ignores the fact that there is an alternative.

48 One of the effects of your support for 'Hillsborough' is that SDLP policy now contains a publicity thrust which seeks to criminalise the broad republican family. For your party the actions of the Republican Movement are now the core political problem. You now share, in a very public way, with the British government, the common aim of destroying the Republican Movement.

49 This publicity thrust has accelerated a continuous and ongoing confrontation between our two parties which demoralises the nationalist community.

THE UNIONISTS

50 In Ireland, unionism is the child of imperialism, its very name denotes in a very precise way the political reason for its existence – Union with Britain. Unionism evolved historically from the plantation, when those who would settle in Ireland and create a loyalist garrison to look after English interests were given power and sectarian privileges. It has been effective in postponing the struggle for national and democratic rights by the use of the political mechanism of religious sectarianism. This mechanism adopted its political form with the formation of the Orange Order and reached its highest form in the creation of the Six-County state. Partition created a unionist state for the unionist people. To maintain its existence, the unionist state has historically been politically rigid in thought and application.

51 Unionism as a reactionary political force has only one aim, the perpetuation of itself through the maintenance of British rule in Ireland, primarily through the use of violence. This violence has many forms all of which were used for the total coercion of the nationalist community. Institutionalised state discrimination in job allocation and housing, gerrymandered political boundaries, a heavily-armed paramilitary police force with a heavily-armed militia, backed up by a wide range of coercive legislation were the tools of state-sponsored violence.

52 For 50 years the British allowed the unionists total control of the management of the Six Counties. The systematic attack on the political, social and economic rights of nationalists was kept within the confines of the Stormont parliament. The British government facilitated this management via such mechanisms as the Westmins-

* **Seamus Mallon**

ter parliamentary convention known as 'transferred powers'. Throughout this period the British crown was the guarantor of unionist hegemony. Unionism was an integral part of Toryism. Partition and British control of the Six Counties was maintained through an alliance of successive British governments — Tory or Labour — and unionism.

Between 1968 and 1972, political events in the Six-Counties led to the break-up of the old established political order. Unionism had fragmented and the old nationalist party had disappeared to be replaced electorally by your party, the SDLP.

In 1972 Britain prorogued the Stormont parliament when it became clear that unionism could no longer politically manage the Six Counties. Since then Britain has attempted to stabilise the political situation in the Six Counties by drawing pragmatic unionists into an alliance with the Catholic middle-class and conceding a Dublin government interest. This new political alliance, while dependent on wider political forces, was still based within a gerrymandered political system where Britain could rely on the numerical 'majority' of the unionists. British military, political and economic interests were to be maintained under new arrangements.

Because of their rigid and reactionary view of politics, most unionists have been unable to accommodate this change in political alliances.

From the 'Northern Executive' to the Hillsborough Treaty, unionists sought to destroy any form of political institution that did not reflect their dominance of the Six-County political establishment.

However, within all shades of unionism there are elements which have already come to terms with the fact that the British government's shift in its political alliances does not represent a change in the basic power structure of the Six-County state, but now see Hillsborough as a modification of political institutions to accommodate the SDLP's acceptance of partition and the British state in Ireland.

The public perception, engineered by your party, that unionist acceptance of the Hillsborough Treaty is the end of unionist power and the unionist veto on the Irish people's right to self-determination is a dangerous political illusion. Unionist acceptance of the Treaty will not interfere with British control of the Six Counties.

The energies of your party have been aimed at internalising the conflict. This implies an acceptance of the legitimacy of the British connection which is to the benefit of the British government. **Your party has never challenged the British claim to ownership of the six Irish counties which constitute their statelet.**

PROPOSALS

We suggest that both parties could usefully consider the possibility of agreement on the following positions:

1. That Sinn Fein and the SDLP agree with, and endorse, the internationally established principle of the right of the Irish people to national self-determination.

2. That Sinn Fein and the SDLP agree that Britain has no legitimate right to be in Ireland.

3. That Sinn Fein and the SDLP agree that the IRA is politically motivated in its actions and that IRA Volunteers are not criminals.

4. That Sinn Fein and the SDLP agree that the British government and its forces in Ireland are not in a peacekeeping role.

5. That Sinn Fein and the SDLP would agree that failure to rule out nationalist participation in a devolved or internal Six-County arrangement actually encourages the British to pursue such policies and in reality would protract the conflict.

6. That Sinn Fein and the SDLP agree on a common solution to the political situation existing in the Six Counties.

7. That Sinn Fein and the SDLP join forces to impress on the Dublin government the need to launch an international and diplomatic offensive to secure national self-determination.

In the interim, between the acceptance of a common strategy and British disengagement, Sinn Fein and the SDLP would agree to a common platform of political activity which would safeguard the interests of the nationalist community. These issues would include action on: extradition, plastic bullets, strip-searching, RUC brutality, repatriation of prisoners, SOSPs and Lifers reviews, the Diplock courts, the UDR, the PTA, the EPA, the Payment of Debt Act, discrimination in employment and high nationalist unemployment, economic cutbacks in the health services, changes in social security laws, cultural rights, etcetera.

SDLP document No.1

THE FIRST SDLP document took the form of a letter from John Hume addressed to Gerry Adams.

In the letter he posed a series of questions (see Sinn Fein's second document) which included an invitation to a conference table convened by the Dublin government, an invitation which Sinn Fein accepted. At the meeting of the two delegations, on March 23rd, Sinn Fein pointed out that Mr Hume had subtly shifted ground on the objective of the talks by stating that it was to bring *"an end to all military and violent activity in the North of Ireland"*.

17th March 1988

Dear Gerry,

Following our recent discussion I promised to put to you in writing a summary of the views that I put to you on that occasion with a view to their consideration by your organisation and with a view to developing more in-depth discussions at future meetings. You promised to do likewise.

The views which I put on that occasion were broadly in two parts, firstly my comments on the analysis and methods of the Provisional Republican Movement and secondly arguments and proposals for a peaceful political alternative. I now repeat those points in writing. Of necessity thay are brief but I would hope that they could be developed in much greater depth and detail in any forthcoming discussion.

The basic method used by the Provisional Republican Movement is of course the IRA campaign.

The price of that campaign is already clear to everyone, not least to the members of that organisation themselves and to their families. Lives have been lost, people have been maimed, young lives have been wasted in prisons, untold damage has been done to the economy of this island as a whole, destroying hopes for the future of many of our young people and forcing them to leave and therefore to diminish Ireland. The statistics are well known and do not need repetition.

The people who have suffered most and the areas who have suffered most are the very people and areas that are represented by either SDLP or Sinn Fein. The other constant irritation to people are the numerous

complaints about harassment of security forces, house searches, heavy military presence on streets, providing constant strain and tensions in the daily lives of people who have enough problems, given the economic circumstances in which most of them are living. The justification given by the authorities in Northern Ireland is that all these activities by the security forces are a reaction to the IRA campaign and are consequences of that campaign. A great deal of relief could therefore be brought to ordinary people by ending the campaign and removing the stated justification for security force activity.

It is not an answer to suggest that the British presence is the primary source of our problems, and therefore the cause of all the violence.

It is not enough to suggest as Provisional spokesmen frequently do, that the cause of all the violence is the British presence in Ireland. All of us take our own decisions and use our own methods for dealing with that presence. We must also take responsibility for those methods and for their consequences particularly when such consequences can be foreseen. The IRA must take responsibility for their methods, as they do, but also for the foreseeable consequences of those methods which have brought so much suffering to Irish people.

It is clear to us that there is little chance of those methods succeeding in the foreseeable future in achieving the stated political objectives of the IRA. Does anyone in Ireland, even among supporters of the IRA, believe that the present British government will accede to the demand of the IRA made by force? Does that not mean that the whole country and the members and families of the IRA face at least another decade of what we have just been through with all the suffering and without any guarantees of achieving their objectives at the end of it?

Is it not time for the IRA and the members of the Provisional Republican Movement to seriously reconsider the methods that they have chosen to achieve their objectives or are they in danger of moving to a situation, or are they already in it, where the methods have become more sacred than the cause?

Even if, of course, the stated objectives of the IRA were to be achieved in the manner which they have set out, we in the SDLP would argue that that would not bring peace to Ireland but would lead to much greater chaos and to permanent division and conflict among our people. That is a serious charge but it is a view that is shared by the vast majority of the Irish people who do not endorse the use of force to solve political problems in Ireland or to achieve national objectives. It therefore deserves serious attention and consideration by members of the Provisional Republican Movement if they are open to genuine dialogue as to the way forward. It is a view that is also shared by a wide spectrum of British political opinion who wish to see permanent peace in Ireland and who are sympathetic to the Irish cause.

The objectives of the Provisional Republican Movement are a British withdrawal from Ireland or a declaration of intent to do so within a given period. In our view there is no difference in practice between those objectives because once a declaration of intent is made then the effect is no different from an actual departure. The political vacuum is immediately created and as all experience of such situations show the vacuum will be filled immediately as each section of the community moves to secure its position. This route is the route of maximum risk and is a risk which we believe no one has the right to take unless they do so with full authority of the Irish people.

What is the risk? In such a vacuum the likelihood is that the British army would become inactive. In the knowledge that their government has decided to withdraw all responsibility does anyone think that soldiers would be prepared to risk their lives? Each section of the community would seize its own territory and we would have a Cyprus/Lebanon style formula for permanent division and bloodshed. What would the 12,000 armed members of the RUC do? What would the 8,000 armed members of the UDR do? Is it not likely and natural in the emotionally-charged atmosphere that would obtain and in the absence of any acknowledged authority that they would simply identify with the community from which most of them come and become its military defenders? And what would happen to the Catholic community in such circumstances particularly in those areas where they are most vulnerable?

Is the risk involved in such a military policy not an awesome one and likely to ensure that the peace and unity of Ireland will never come. And would the contemplation of such risks and such consequences not justify a complete re-appraisal of their methods and their strategy by the Provisional Republican Movement? Or have they reached the stage where their certitude about both their methods and strategy amounts to the fact that their methods and their strategy have actually become more sacred than their cause, (the cause being a united, independent and peaceful Ireland) and to discuss them or to contemplate changing them is unthinkable. Such an approach is a purely military approach, and as has already been admitted on all sides, there can be no military solution.

There is a political alternative and in our view the political road is the only one that will ensure that there is lasting peace in Ireland. For the SDLP, Ireland is first and foremost its people, the territory is secondary since without people the territory isn't much different from any other piece of earth. The tragedy is that the people of Ireland are deeply divided and have been deeply divided for centuries on some very fundamental matters. But it is the Irish people who have the right to self-determination. It is the Irish people who have the in-

alienable right to sovereignty".

Unfortunately, the Irish people are divided on how to exercise the right to self-determination. The Irish people are divided on how to exercise the right to sovereignty. It is the search for agreement among the Irish people on how to exercise these rights that is the real search for peace and stability in Ireland. It is a search that has never been seriously undertaken by the nationalist/republican tradition in Ireland and it is the real challenge facing us today if we have any belief in the future of the Irish people as a whole. Does the Provisional Republican Movement accept that the search for agreement among the people who live on the island of Ireland (which means in practice agreement between what has become known as the people of the unionist and nationalist traditions) on how to exercise self-determination is a search that cannot be conducted by force. And does anyone believe that if such agreement were reached that any British government could refuse to endorse it?

Indeed the present British government has made clear in an internationally-binding agreement that if such agreement on the exercise of self-determination took the form of Irish unity that they would, in fact, endorse it. Is that not the clearest possible challenge to the nationalist/republican tradition in Ireland to begin the task of building a new Ireland with our unionist fellow citizens, an immensely difficult task given our past but one on which substantial and steady progress can be made in the absence of military and violent activity. Is that not the challange that has also been put two centuries ago by Wolfe Tone and never really taken up in his oft-qouted but misinterpreted diary statement of his objectives and his methods.

"To subvert the tyranny of our execrable government, to break the connection with England the never failing source of our political evils, and to assert the independence of my country – these were my objects. To unite the whole people of Ireland, to abolish the memory of our past dissensions and to substitute the common name of Irishman in place of the denomination of Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter – these were my means".

It is surely clear that Tone was stating with great clarity that his means or method of breaking the link with England was to unite the people of Ireland first.

And does that challange not also remove all justification for the use of violence because does not the British declaration on endorsing and accepting agreement among the people of Ireland on Irish unity not make clear that Britain is now saying that she has no interest of her own in being here and that her only interest is to see agreement among the people who share the island of Ireland

We in the SDLP would therefore like to pose some questions to the Provisional Republican Movement with a view to creating the conditions in which all military and violent activity will come to an end.

1. Do you accept the right of the Irish people to self-determination?

2. Do you accept that the Irish people are at present deeply divided on the question of how to exercise self-determination?

3. Do you accept that in practice agreement on exercising that right means agreement of both the unionist and nationalist traditions in Ireland?

4. If you accept 1, 2 and 3 would you then agree that the best way forward would be to attempt to create a conference table, convened by an Irish government, at which all parties in the North with an electoral mandate would attend. The purpose of such a conference would be to try to reach agreement on the exercise of self-determination in Ireland and on how the people of our diverse traditions can live together in peace, harmony and agreement. It would be understood that if this conference were to happen that the IRA would have ceased its campaign. It would also be understood in advance that if such a conference were to reach agreement, it would be endorsed by the British government.

5. In the event of the representatives of the unionist people refusing to participate in such a conference, would you join with the Irish government and other nationalist participants in preparing a peaceful and comprehensive approach to achieving agreement on self-determination in Ireland? Would we in fact and in practice take up the challenge laid down by Tone.

I think that you might agree that if we were to proceed successfully down such a road that the atmosphere throughout Ireland would be transformed and that the international goodwill would be overwhelming to such an extent that many things which seem either difficult or even impossible now would become attainable. Naturally the points that I am making in this letter are of necessity brief and I am looking forward together with my colleagues and yours in going into them in more depth in a spirit of genuine dialogue. May I also add that in spite of all the pessimism that is around and indeed my own realistic sense of the obstacles that lie in the way, I sincerely hope that we will be successful in attaining an objective of bringing an end to all military and violent activity in the northern part of Ireland.

Yours sincerely,
John Hume.

Sinn Fein document No.2

THE DELEGATIONS met again on May 19th. Sinn Fein presented its second paper which was in two sections: *Sinn Fein on national self-determination* (including the document *Scenario for Peace*), which answered questions posed by the SDLP in their first document. and *A proposal on joint action on Fair Employment*.

The SDLP made no written response to Sinn Fein's first document.

INTRODUCTION

FOLLOWING OUR EXCHANGE of documents in March, the purpose of which was to explore whether there can be agreement on an overall nationalist political strategy for justice and peace, we have studied and now answer in detail the questions posed by the SDLP. If you recall, in our paper, *Towards a Strategy for Peace,* we also proposed that there were a number of issues affecting the nationalist community on which Sinn Fein and the SDLP could jointly campaign without prejudice to differences of opinion on how best the national question can be resolved.

We have thus included, as a supplement to this paper, a proposal on the issues of eradicating discrimination in employment and the provision of equality of opportunity. Given that the British government are presently formulating legislation on this subject we are convinced that the greater the unity in support of national demands, the greater the pressure on the British government to deliver. We would ask you to respond to this proposal at the earliest opportunity.

NATIONAL SELF-DETERMINATION

Sinn Fein accepts self-determination to mean a nation's exercise of the political freedom to determine its own economic, social and cultural development, without external influence and without partial or total disruption of the national unity or territorial integrity.

Ireland today clearly does not meet those criteria nor does the pretext for partition hold good against those criteria.

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 Sean MacBride, winner of the Nobel and Lenin peace prizes:

"Ireland's right to sovereignty, independence and unity are inalienable and indefeasible. 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."

The SDLP has asked us five questions in relation to our attitude to the acceptance of the right of the Irish people to self-determination, the practical exercise of self-determination and how best to progress towards the realisation of that objective.

Please find below, our considered views.

1. Do you accept the right of the Irish people to self-determination?

Of course we accept the right of the Irish people to self-determination, i.e., the right of the Irish people as a whole. The right of the Irish people, as a whole, to self-determination is supported by universally recognised principles of international law.

The United Nations' Charter, Article 2 (1), states that one of the organisations' founding principles and purposes was:

"To develop friendly relations among nations based on the principle of equal rights and self-determination of people..."

The right to self-determination is enshrined in the two United Nations' Convenants 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:

"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 attempts aimed at the partial or total disrup-

tion 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."

On the basis of the principles outlined in the above quoted United Nations Charter, Covenants and Declarations Sinn Fein not only accepts the right of the Irish people to national self-determination but holds the achievement of the exercise of that right as a primary political objective.

2. Do you accept that the Irish people are at present deeply divided on the question of how to exercise self-determination?

Sinn Fein believes that this question betrays a confusion in the SDLP between the differences that obviously exist in Ireland on the question of political allegiance and the question of how to exercise self-determination. Because of the continual denial to the Irish people of the right to exercise self-determination it is clear that no basis of practical experience, since the unique experience of the 1918 Westminster elections, exists to support the conclusion offered in question No. 2.

The people of Ireland have never been permitted to exercise their right to national self-determination. British government policy has consistently denied the exercise of that right to the Irish people. The British government veto – explicit in that policy – over the exercise of that right remains today.

Sinn Fein recognises that British government policy has created and maintained a division of political allegiance in Ireland – the national allegiance of a clear majority and the unionist allegiance of a national minority.

British government policy – manifest in partition – upholds the unionist political allegiance of a national minority against the national and democratic rights of the majority.

When a people are divided in political allegiance the democratic principle is that majority rights should prevail; the more so when such fundamentals as national rights are in question.

It is the British government's refusal to recognise Irish national rights – nationhood, integrity of the national territory, national independence and sovereignty – which has caused the problem and maintains it.

Sinn Fein recognises that unionists have democratic rights which not only can be upheld but must be upheld in an independent Ireland. That is a democratic norm. Those democratic rights, however, must not extend to a veto over the national rights of the Irish people as a whole.

3. Do you accept that, in practice, agreement on exercising that right means agreement of both the unionist and nationalist traditions in Ireland?

The exercise of the right to national self-determination in practice involves, primarily, the acceptance of Irish national rights by the British government; in effect the ending of current British government policy and the removal of the veto that that government has arbitrarily imposed on the exercise by the Irish people of their national and democratic rights.

Without such a fundamental policy change by the British government it is difficult to conceive of unionists considering having to come to a consensus with nationalists. Indeed, a guarantee of the maintenance of partition in perpetuity leaves unionists with no reason to seek a consensus. Within the context of that policy change Sinn Fein believes that agreement between people of the nationalist and unionist traditions is not only desirable but achievable.

We believe that consent can be obtained if the relevant parties and particularly the two governments concerned demonstrate the political will to achieve it. As a first step both governments must establish Irish reunification as a policy objective.

Nationalists and democrats cannot concede a veto to unionists over Irish reunification. To do so would be to concede a veto on the exercise of national rights to a national minority and would flout the basic principles of democracy.

It is desirable that unionists or a significant proportion of them give their support to the means of achieving Irish reunification and promoting reconciliation between Irish people of all traditions. It is obviously desirable that everything reasonable should be done to obtain the consent of a majority in the North to the constitutional, political and financial steps necessary for bringing about the end of partition once this has become the policy objective of the two governments concerned.

4. If you accept 1, 2 and 3 would you then agree that the best way forward would be to attempt to create a conference table, convened by an Irish government, at which all parties in the North with an electoral mandate would attend? The purpose of such a conference would be to try to reach agreement on the exercise of self-determination in Ireland and on how the people of our diverse traditions can live together in peace, harmony and agreement. It would be understood that if this conference were to happen that the IRA would have ceased its campaign. It would also be understood in advance that if such a conference were to reach agreement, it would be endorsed by the British government.

5. In the event of the representatives of the unionist people refusing to participate in such a conference would you join with the Irish government and other nationalist participants in preparing a peaceful and

comprehensive approach to achieving agreement on self-determination in Ireland? Would we in fact and in practice take up the challenge laid down by Tone?

Although you will acknowledge that we have not accepted without qualification 1, 2 and 3 we would, however, respond positively to the proposal for a round table conference.

Obviously a conference of all Irish parties, not just those in the North, would be useful and attendance would pose no problem to Sinn Fein.

However, we do not believe that such a conference would be the best way forward (it would only be part of the way forward) because it would be held – as in your hypothetical question – in the absence of a prior declaration of intent to withdraw from Ireland by the British government.

We must, however, reject any notion of having preconditions imposed on our own attendance or on the attendance of any other party with elected representatives.

De facto sovereignty over the two states of Ireland is exercised by the British and Dublin governments.

Implicit in the exercise of Irish national self-determination is that the British government relinquishes its claim to sovereignty over the Six-County state. Political, constitutional and psychological reasons, therefore, dictate that the British government be involved in any process which will realise the exercise of Irish national self-determination. A conference would of necessity have to be prefaced by an indication from the British government that it indeed intends to relinquish its sovereignty over the Six Counties. Irish reunification as a stated policy objective would constitute, as a first step, the minimum requirement of such an indication.

In the absence of such a declaration, unionists assured by the veto conferred on them by the British government, would feel no compulsion to move towards a consensus on the means to constructive British disengagement. Alternatively, they would simply decline the invitation to attend.

We do not believe that a conference called by the Dublin government only can effect the desired objective of achieving the exercise of Irish national self-determination.

Such a conference might prove useful in concerting steps for alleviating some of the abuses suffered by Northern nationalists and for obtaining international support for that end. Furthermore, a re-affirmation of pan-nationalist consensus on Irish reunification would prove particularly constructive if there was a follow through in the form of seeking international support for that objective. But the problem would remain if neither the British government nor the unionists participated.

For nationalists the key questions are how to get the British government to recognise Irish national rights; to change its present policy to one of ending partition and the union within the context of Irish reunification and, having done so, how we secure the co-operation of a majority in the north to the means of implementing those rights.

In conclusion, we trust that the above explains our position vis-a-vis the questions you have posed to us in your document.

We look forward to receiving your written replies to the questions posed to you in the document we submitted to the SDLP delegation at the first meeting of our respective party delegations.

UNITY BY CONSENT

In the interests of developing the discussions which have begun between our two parties we would like to explore what is entailed in your policy of unity by consent. Will the SDLP define what it means by 'a majority'? We would welcome such a definition. In addition we would like to hear your views on how, having acquired, such 'a majority', the desired objective of unity by consent may be effected.

Sinn Fein proposals on joint action

IN OUR PAPER, *Towards a Strategy for Peace,* we expressed an interest in finding common ground with the SDLP on political activity which would seek to achieve and safeguard the democratic rights of the nationalist community. These issues would include, extradition, plastic bullets, strip searching, RUC brutality, repatriation of prisoners, SOSPs and Lifers reviews, the Diplock courts, the UDR, PTA, the EPA, Payment of Debt Act, discrimination in employment and high nationalist unemployment, cultural rights, British economic cut backs and changes in social security laws.

However, of a most pressing urgency are the issues of eradicating discrimination and the provision of equality of opportunity in employment. That urgency is dictated by the forthcoming British government revision of the fair employment legislation which will determine progress in tackling those issues over the next decade. While there are clearly divergences of opinion between Sinn Fein

and the SDLP in our respective analysis of the cause of the persistence of these inequalities and our approaches to their just resolution, there is, yet, much common ground particularly in the area of the legislative remedy which is required.

What is beyond doubt is that these injustices persist. This is evident in the consistent imbalances in the workforce. Equally evident is the fact that the greater the unity in support of the necessary remedy, the greater the pressure on the British government to deliver.

It appears reasonable to assume that the British government does not intend to provide the necessary legislative remedy by codifying the scope of remedial action – in the form of affirmative action measures – which employers may legally use and which the new Fair Employment Commission may legally impose on recalcitrant employers in the 'primary' legislation in relation to these issues.

Instead, it appears, the British government will opt for inclusion of the scope of remedial action available to both employers and the new Fair Employment Commission in a revised *Guide to Effective Practice*. That 'Guide', it is acknowledged, will be no more than a voluntary code. Attempts to employ or impose the remedies included therein are likely to be subject to continual challenge in the courts.

We therefore propose that Sinn Fein and the SDLP immediately set about jointly drafting a set of proposals apropos the necessary scope of remedy to be included in the forthcoming 'primary' legislation and that we initiate an intensive campaign – domestically and internationally – seeking support for the inclusion of those proposals in the revised legislation as a means of progressing movement on these issues.

Furthermore, we believe there is a pressing need for joint action on all aspects of the anti-discrimination campaign.

Accordingly we invite the SDLP to engage in discussions with Sinn Fein specifically aimed at affecting a broad-based comprehensive campaign on the issues of discrimination and equality of opportunity in employment.

BOTH delegations met again on 13th June. Sinn Fein supplied the SDLP with its third document, *Persuading the British – a joint call*. The SDLP gave Sinn Fein two papers: Document No. 2 – *SDLP comments on Sinn Fein proposals*, and Document No. 3 – *SDLP/Sinn Fein – 13 June 1988: Comments on Sinn Fein document, 20 May 1988, Pages 8 and 9*.

Sinn Fein pointed out that these two documents were not the two which were promised. They were to have been, the SDLP's political definition of 'unity by consent' and a response to Sinn Fein's questions 4 and 5 contained in *'Towards a Strategy for Peace,'* which repudiated the British claim to be 'peacekeeping' and which called for the SDLP to rule out nationalist participation in a devolved or internal Six-County arrangement.

Persuading the British – a joint call

SINN FEIN would like to explore the SDLP assertion that *"Britain is now saying that she has no interest of her own in being here and that her only interest is to see agreement among the people who share the island of Ireland."*

If this is the case (and Sinn Fein remain unconvinced that it is so) then it would appear that there is currently an opportunity and an urgent need to test the SDLP assertion by attempting to persuade the British government that the best way to *"see agreement among the people who share the island of Ireland"* is for Britain to adopt a policy of ending the union in the context of a united Ireland and should then actively seek agreement among the people who share the island of Ireland on how this can be accomplished.

Once this is the British objective the strategy (or strategies) for achieving it should be a matter of formal agreement between the representatives of the Irish people and the British government. The search for such agreement must of course involve northern Protestants and every effort must be made to get their agreement and involvement in the constitutional, financial and political arrangements needed to replace partition. Furthermore, regardless of their attitude to such arrangements, their rights must be guaranteed in whatever arrangements emerge from such deliberations.

In other words once the above objective becomes British policy and while the democratic policy contained in it is continued throughout its implementation, there must be due provision for the rights of northern Protestants and every effort made to win their consent. By adopting such a policy the British would be joining the persuaders. While such a scenario may appear improbable at present, surely if Britain now has no self interest in being in Ireland it must have an open mind on the future of Ireland and be open to such a proposition.

In this proposition we are re-stating the nationalist and democratic position that the unionists have no right to maintain partition and the union in opposition to a national majority. We would also assert that the consent of northern Protestants, like any other interest group, is desirable on the constitutional, financial and political arrangements needed to end partition. It is a responsibility of all Irish democrats to guarantee that all Irish people are treated equally.

Sinn Fein has long accepted that nothern Protestants have fears about their civil and religious liberties. We have consistently insisted that their liberties must be guaranteed and protected.

The fundamental republican and nationalist position has always been to get Britain to abandon its partitionist policy and adopt instead a policy of withdrawing from Ireland and handing over sovereignty to an all-Ireland government whose selection would be a democratic matter for the Irish people. This position is based on the principle of national self-determination and on the democratic position that Britain has no legitimate right to be in Ireland.

Maximum political unity in Ireland based on these principles and geared towards persuading the British government to adopt a policy of disengagement in the context of Irish reunification seems to us to be a fundamental part of a nationalist strategy towards justice and peace.

As a step towards such a strategy – which is the stated aim of our discussions – and as an exploration of the SDLP's assertion regarding the current British position, we propose that Sinn Fein and the SDLP jointly issue a call to the Dublin and London governments for them to consult together to seek agreement on the policy objective of Irish reunification. Having agreed this both governments would issue a public statement outlining the steps they intend taking to bring about a peaceful and orderly British political and military withdrawal from Ireland within a specified period.

The adoption of such a position by Sinn Fein, the SDLP and Dublin government would advance the situation, concentrate everyone's mind, not least the unionists, and put the responsibility where it belongs – with the British government.

SDLP comments on Sinn Fein "Proposals" *

Introduction

THE SDLP has no objection and indeed would be willing to work with Sinn Fein or any other party to develop a strategy towards the achievement of agreed common objectives. We would make it clear however that we would be working together on exactly the same terms – using democratic and peaceful methods and without any links or associations with any paramilitary organisations or with support or approval for such activity.

The "Proposals"

1. The SDLP view is that the Irish people do have the right to self-determination. The problem is that the Irish people are divided as to how that right should be exercised. The real search for peace, justice and stability in Ireland is the search for such agreement. In the SDLP view this has always been the case and has never been faced up to in any serious way by nationalists or republicans in Ireland. This is the real challenge facing all of us. It cannot be pursued by "armed struggle".

2. This question underlines a consistent weakness in the nationalist/republican approach. The tendency to get hung up on abstract principles such as whether or not the British have a legitimate right to be in Ireland. The Irish will always argue that they haven't, the British will always argue that they have, and both arguments will be based on different historical perspectives. The endless argument simply leads to a reinforcing of each position and no progress on the real problem. It is much better to deal with the factual reality than to have endless debate about ideological rectitude.

The real question is how do we end the British presence in Ireland in a manner which leaves behind a stable and peaceful Ireland?

Answer: Unite the people of Ireland first. What in fact we should all be discussing is how we achieve that objective and how we can persuade Britain to assist us in achieving that objective.

3. The SDLP view is that while the IRA may be politically motivated, no legitimacy can be conferred on its actions. To do so would concede the right of the majority of the Irish people to determine the means by which agreement in Ireland can be pursued to an unrepresentative and non-elected, non-accountable paramilitary organisation.

4. The SDLP view is that violence only produces further violence. The most effective response to violence in Northern Ireland is non-violence, despite the temptation to do otherwise.

Condemning the violence perpetrated by British forces cannot excuse paramilitary violence as a legitimate response. Both are counter-productive and create barriers to achieving political progress.

* The proposals contained in Sinn Fein's Document No. 1

The speediest way to end the military and armed police presence on the streets, together with all the consequences of that presence which weigh so heavy on the already disadvantaged people represented by SDLP and Sinn Fein is the political way. If the British government states that the reason for that presence on the streets and consequent activity is the IRA campaign, then remove the stated justification by ending the campaign. In the event of that campaign ending the SDLP will cooperate to the full with Sinn Fein in ensuring that the people in all areas are relieved of the pressure of the military and armed police presence. We have little doubt that in such circumstances that object could be achieved very quickly. As to the political presence our view on that is contained in our original document and in our answer to proposal number 3 is indeed central to our whole political strategy and analysis.

Does anyone doubt that the people who are suffering most from what Sinn Fein calls the "war" in Northern Ireland are the people of nationalist areas. Are there not grounds for ending that war by using the exact same reasons as Padraig Mac Piarais and his comrades in the GPO in 1916 when they laid down their arms lest they bring suffering on their people?

5. The SDLP has never argued for a purely internal settlement. The only people who do so are those who advocate an independent Northern Ireland. The SDLP has repeatedly made clear that relationships between Ireland and Britain as well as relationships within Ireland need to be resolved satisfactorily if there is to be lasting peace and stability.

6. This proposal is answered in the first paragraph.

7. The SDLP is prepared to enter into meaningful discussions with any political party which receives a popular mandate and which use democratic and peaceful methods, with a view to working for agreement in Ireland. To this end the SDLP would also join with such parties to seek such international support as would be appropriate.

SDLP document No.3

Comments on Sinn Fein document, 2 May 1988, pages 8 and 9*

Introduction

FROM OUR discussions it has emerged that while we are both agreed that the Irish people have the right to self-determination, there is a major difference between us on how necessary it is to obtain the agreement of unionists if there is to be unity in Ireland.

On the second matter it appears to us that in keeping with many people Sinn Fein confuses two vetoes exercised by unionists.

The unionists have a natural veto since they live on this island and since their agreement is essential if unity is to be achieved.

The unionists, historically, also had a veto on British policy towards Ireland, a veto to which they had no right whatsoever. That veto was exercised in that British policy denied Irish unity. Up until now successive British governments have been pro-union. Now, however, they are neutral in that they are saying, without taking a position themselves, that Irish unity is a matter for those who want it persuading those who do not.

There is, therefore, nothing to stop British governments becoming pro-Irish unity in their policies. Our task is to persuade them to go in that direction and to use all their considerable influence and resources to persuade the unionist people that their best interests are served by a new Ireland; a new Ireland in which unionist interests are accommodated to their own satisfaction and in which there is a new relationship with Britain.

These are the goals of SDLP policy. They are goals which we believe can only be achieved by political means and which have to be achieved by political means if the outcome is to be a stable and peaceful Ireland. It goes without saying that if a new Ireland is to be built politically, it should be as painless as possible for the people who have suffered so much. It must also involve the progressive breaking down of all barriers which have grown up between people in post-partition Ireland.

SDLP PROPOSALS

To the ends outlined above we would make the following proposals to any party interested in achieving these same ends:

1. Concerted political action, nationally and internationally, to persuade the British government to adopt, as a matter of policy, a commitment to and action towards progressively breaking down the barriers between both parts of Ireland that have developed since partition and to using all its influence and resources to persuade the unionist people that their best interest lies in a new Ireland which accommodates their interests to their satisfaction and which has a new relationship with Britain.

* These are actually comments on Sinn Fein's Document No. 2 which was handed over on May 19th: the date '2 May' would appear to be a mistake and probably should be '20 May': The 'pages 8 and 9' referred to correspond to the original document and not as printed in this pamphlet.

2. Concerted action to persuade the unionist people to join together with us in building a new Ireland.

3. In the interim concerted political effort, nationally and internationally, to alleviate the social and economic problems which affect all our people.

CONCLUSION

We wish to reiterate the very strong view that is central to all our discussions with you, that the right to self-determination and the exercise of self-determination depend on reaching agreement between the people of this island as to how self-determination is to be achieved.

It must be clear that such agreement cannot be achieved by force. In stating that we are simply restating what was said by Tone, two centuries ago, when he was quite explicit in stating that the way to achieve the right to self-determination of the Irish people was to unite Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter. The same sentiments were repeated a century later in Belfast by Parnell when he said that, "Ireland can never by united and can never have its freedom until the prejudices of the Protestant people are conciliated".

Are we at last ready to take up the challenge thrown down by both men and which have never really been taken up by the leadership of nationalist-republican Ireland?

July 11

GERRY ADAMS and John Hume meet in private. SDLP supplies its fourth paper. *SDLP response to questions raised in discussions and in previous Sinn Fein papers.*

Unusually, the SDLP appears momentarily to move towards support for the case for national self-determination:

"We are accepting the Sinn Fein statement that it is the Irish people as a whole who have the right [to self-determination] *and the Irish people should be defined as those people domiciled on the island of Ireland."*

The SDLP repeats that a precondition for the conference convened by the Dublin government which it mooted in its first paper would be that the IRA would have ceased its campaign. The two party leaders agree to carry out a review of the progress to date.

SDLP document No.4

SDLP response to questions raised in discussions and in previous Sinn Fein papers

IN ITS RESPONSE to our questions in our document of 17 March, Sinn Fein lists a number of academic quotations on the question of self-determination, but appears to avoid the reality that when all such questions are boiled down to their essentials it is people who have rights, not pieces of territory, and it is the Irish people who have the right to self-determination. Unfortunately the Irish people are divided as to how that right should be exercised. We are accepting the Sinn Fein statement that it is the Irish people as a whole who have the right and the Irish people should be defined as those people domiciled on the island of Ireland.

It is clear that there has been a profound disagreement between different sections of the Irish people, a disagreement that has been strengthened and made more difficult to resolve by the geographical concentration of the substantial minority who disagree in one corner of our island. We can have as many academic discussions or statements as we wish but the hard realities and the hard facts of the situation are that the Irish people are divided as to the exercise of the right to self-determination and as to how we live together. The other harsh fact is that if that disagreement is to be eradicated it must mean agreement between both the unionist and nationalist traditions. Others can help us to resolve the differences and to reach agreement but the main responsibility lies with the people of both traditions who are domiciled on the island of Ireland.

It is purely academic to argue that the unionist people have no right to a veto on Irish unity or on the exercise of self-determination or that British policy confers such a right on them. The harsh reality is that whether or not they have the academic right to a veto on Irish unity, they have it as a matter of fact based on

numbers, geography and history and they have it in the exact same way as Greek or Turkish Cypriots have a factual veto on the exercise of self-determination on the island of Cyprus.

It is against the background of these views that the SDLP asked whether Sinn Fein would attend a conference attended only by elected representatives of the people of Ireland and convened by an Irish government. This conference table is proposed in order to create the machinery whereby agreement on the exercise of the right to self-determination and as to how the people of Ireland could live together in peace, justice and agreement might be achieved.

In advance of such a conference we suggested that the British government should make it clear that it would endorse any agreement reached at it. This declaration would mean in practice that the British government was accepting the right of the Irish people as a whole to exercise self-determination. They have already made clear that if such agreement took the form of Irish unity that they would endorse it. It is surely logical that if the agreement took the form of something less than Irish unity that they would also endorse it.

Would not such a declaration relating to such a conference by a British government remove the stated justification of the IRA for their campaign, which is that the British are preventing the exercise of the right to self-determination by the Irish people and are in Ireland defending Britain's own interests by force?

Hence our second precondition for such a conference that the IRA would have ceased its campaign. What possible role would an IRA campaign have in persuading fellow-Irishmen?

In the event of representatives of the unionist people initially refusing to participate in such a conference we asked whether Sinn Fein would join with an Irish government and other parties in preparing a peaceful and comprehensive approach to achieving self-determination in Ireland. The same two 'preconditions' obviously apply here because the only obstacle in the way of achieving the exercise of self-determination would be the attitude of people who by Sinn Fein's own definition are fellow Irish people. That is an obstacle that cannot be removed by force. It can only be strengthened.

In addition it seems to us to reveal a deep misunderstanding of the Ulster Protestant tradition to suggest that it is largely the British influence and not their own choice and their own reasons that make them wish to live apart from the rest of the people of Ireland. Do we not accept whether we like it or not that they have deep-seated and deeply-felt reasons of their own based on many historical factors for their differences; differences which go back beyond partition, beyond even the Plantation, differences which were visible as far back as the 6th Century? To underestimate the task of really accommodating the diversity of the Irish people is to really intensify our central problem and to continue to push difference to the point of division.

The SDLP accept that the British government could play an influential role in assisting us to persuade the Ulster Protestant tradition that their best interest lies in coming together with the rest of us to build a new Ireland and to accommodate our diversity in the way that other nations have done and would be willing to join with others in persuading them. Hence our development of the proposal contained in question 5, in our response to you on 13 June.

We believe that agreement to such a proposal would be overwhelmingly received by the Irish people and would release enormous constructive energies within Ireland as well as massive international goodwill and support. We also believe that it would have a powerful response within Britain itself and within considerable sections of the Unionist people. We do not underestimate the difficulties in achieving our objectives but believe that for the first time we would be concentrating all our energies on the real Irish problem and would make consistent and steady progress.

From our study of your documents together with reflection on our discussions we believe that there are two basic differences between us that prevent us reaching agreement on a peaceful and political way forward both of which are interlinked. The first difference is as to whether the Unionists have a right to a veto on Irish self determination.

The second relates to our stated belief that Britian has no interest of her own in remaining in Ireland, that she has no strategic, military or economic interests and that if Irish people reached agreement among themselves on, for example, Irish unity that Britain would facilitiate it, legislate for it and leave the Irish to govern themselves.

The SDLP welcome the willingness of Sinn Fein, as expressed in their paper of 13 June, to "explore" our stated belief as to British interests. In the SDLP view, this belief is given expression in Article 1 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. In this Article the British government formally state for the first time in an international agreement that, given the existence of the required consent to change they would be prepared to facilitate and support legislation to give effect "to the establishment of a united Ireland". It is axiomatic therefore that it is exclusively a matter for the Irish people of the two traditions, without interference from Britain, and without British interests standing in the way, to agree on the terms on which they can unitedly share this island.

It also appears to the SDLP, and here we come to the core of our difference with Sinn Fein, that if our belief is correct, then the IRA's stated justification for their campaign is removed and it should cease and we should all concentrate on the task of achieving agreement among the Irish people. The question is, if our belief is correct, do Sinn Fein accept that the consequences for

the IRA campaign are as we state and would they ask the IRA to cease its campaign. If so, then it would be our responsibility in the SDLP to demonstrate to Sinn Fein that our belief was correct and we would believe that this should be a major topic of discussion between us as to how we could best do so.

The other and interlinked issue of disagreement between us is whether or not the unionists have a right to a veto on Irish unity, a subject that has already been dealt with above. The SDLP can fully understand why Sinn Fein say that "the unionists have no right to maintain partition and the union in opposition to a national majority". As we have already said however the argument as to whether or not they have a right is purely academic and we are a party of realistic politicians, not a team of theologians. We must deal with factual reality. The art of politics must be to respond to and try to reach beyond, the many complex relationships which history – however warped its impact – has bequeathed us and which are a part of the political reality of this island.

Whether or not the unionists may or may not have a right to a veto on Irish unity they, in reality, possess such a veto and have done so for a very long time. Solutions to the problem of division in Ireland have been postponed by nationalist/republican concentration on the language of ideological rectitude rather than trying to face the political reality. The challenge is to change this reality by political dialogue and not to estrange it further by the continued futile and counter-productive use of force against fellow Irish people.

The SDLP welcome the acceptance by Sinn Fein in previous papers that the search for agreement as to the future shape of Ireland must of course involve Northern Protestants and that every effort must be made to get their agreement and involvement in the process. We also welcome the sensitivity expressed towards "the fears about their civil and religious liberties held by Northern Protestants" and about the need for those liberties to be "guaranteed and protected" in your peper of 13 June. It is however an unfortunate reality that the Unionist people believe that their most fundamental liberty – the right to life – has been for some considerable time under severe threat. That such should be the case is surely repugnant to republicanism with its vision of an Ireland embracing all Irish men and women, irrespective of their history, traditions and beliefs.

The SDLP sincerely ask Sinn Fein to consider whether the achievement of this republican vision is being advanced and whether the Tone goal "to abolish the memory of past dissensions' is being furthered in any way by an IRA campaign which is directed largely against indigenous people seen by the Protestant people as the defenders and protectors of their heritage? This campaign is in conflict, we would agree, with the logic, thrust and, in many cases, the classic republicanvision and generosity of the language of the Sinn Fein paper.

The SDLP believe that, politically the positions of Sinn Fein and ourselves are not unduly removed from one another and are bridgeable. In particular, each of us have stated our commitment to protecting and preserving the ethos of Ireland's two great traditions. Our most significant difference, as stated above, and as reflected in our central arguments, is the degree to whch we believe that British policy towards Ireland is now neutral and agnostic. The SDLP believe and assert that this is beyond doubt. We further assert that this removes all justification for the IRA campaign if placed against their own reasons for justification.

We accept that to date Sinn Fein remain unconvinced of our belief but ask them if our belief is correct that they agree that the IRA campaign should cease and will they formally ask the IRA to end their campaign and use their considerable influence to persuade them to do so. If so it is for the SDLP to convince Sinn Fein that our belief and assertion are correct and let us discuss now how best we can do so. This issue is the crucial and central test of our joint willingness to present a clear political alternative to what has been called "armed struggle" in order to achieve peace and justice in Ireland.

Letter of review

August 14

SINN FEIN hands over its letter of review of the talks to John Hume. John Hume makes an oral response.

John a chara,

IN REVIEWING the dialogue between our two parties and the exchanges of documents I would like to state at the outset that while I am disappointed that we have not made more progress in the task set for us, Sinn Fein feels that our discussions have been very worthwhile. At the very least they certainly helped to close a gap in dialogue between the two parties which together represent the majority of Six-County nationalists. In that sense alone the talks have been good for the morale of the hard-pressed nationalist community which would clearly support joint action on their behalf on everyday and economic issues even if the more ambitious goal – outlined in the letter of invitation issued to us by the third party – were to presently elude us.

The invitation to the talks called upon Sinn Fein and your party "to explore whether there could be agreement on an overall nationalist political strategy for justice and peace". As part of the review perhaps I should explain to you how Sinn Fein handled this matter. I brought this letter to the attention of our Ard Chomhairle in Dublin which dealt extensively with it.

The Ard Chomhairle established a monitoring subcommittee which included Tom Hartley (General Secretary), Sean McManus (Party Chairperson), Danny Morrison (Director of Publicity), Martin McGuinness, Councillor Mitchel McLaughlin and myself. Later, after you and I held our first meeting in February, and you agreed to our proposal to include other party members in the talks, we drew our delegation from this monitoring committee.

On March 15th, our document, *Towards a Strategy for Peace,* which contained our views on proposals for an overall political strategy to establish justice and peace in Ireland, was presented to you for consideration.

In summary, we stated that the only solution to the present political conflict in Ireland is the ending of partition, a British disengagement from Ireland and the restoration to the Irish people to their right to sovereignty, independence and national self-determination. We stated that an end to the unionist veto and a British declaration of a date for withdrawal was the only way of securing conditions for justice and peace. We also outlined how a firm, united and unambiguous stand from all nationalist parties around these demands would hasten peace. We asserted that those who presently constitute themselves as loyalists must be given, in common with all other Irish citizens, firm guarantees of their religious and civil liberties.

Our analysis included a serious criticism of your presentation of the Hillsborough Treaty. The Treaty is the linchpin of a British government strategy which is aimed at stabilising the Six Counties in its interests yet your party has attempted to engineer a public perception that the Treaty is the end of loyalist power and the loyalist veto and that the British government has become 'neutral'. We also believe that your analysis helps the British 'internalise' the conflict. In fact, you accept the union with Britain.

However, to help develop the dialogue and mutual cooperation between the two parites and to advance the interests of nationalists our first document contained seven proposals. One (No. 5) called for us to agree that failure to rule out nationalist participation in a devolved or Six-County arrangement actually encourages the British to pursue such politics and, in reality, would protract the conflict.

The document ended by proposing that Sinn Fein and the SDLP join forces to impress on the Dublin government the need for an international diplomatic offensive to secure national self-determination.

Beisdes these seven proposals we also called for our two parties in the interim to agree to a common platform of political activity which would safeguard and advance the interests of the nationalist community covering, amongst others, social and economic issues, discrimination in employment and the whole area of repressive laws.

Before the delegations met on March 23rd we studied your letter to me of the previous week outlining your position. Our sub-committee met twice to discuss it. We felt that it lacked real political depth and analysis, relying on emotional rhetoric but camouflaged in nationalistic language. You ignore the substantial and ongoing contribution which British domination has made in creating and sustaining our political crisis. Your concentration on the symptoms of the problem leads you to blame the attitudes held by nationalists and loyalists as its cause. Because of this the British, in the SDLP's view, suddenly become the victims of Irish political intransigence rather than the cause of the conflict. British state repression and economic deprivation is erroneously presented as a reaction to the IRA's armed struggle.

Your letter, John, did not refer to you party's position on devolution. Subsequently, and presumably as a result of our discussions, SDLP party spokespersons were to state that the SDLP had no "ideological commitment to devolution". We are still awaiting a response to what that means "in practice". Because you have hedged your answer and refuse to elaborate the British government detect, and intend building upon, your ambivalence on this crucial issue. Your letter ended by posing a number of questions on 'self-determination' and a possible conference organised by the Dublin government.

On March 23rd, our parties had a good, non-acrimonious meeting which ranged over the political objectives of both. Not surprisingly, we reached an impasse over the role and intentions of the British government which, flying in the face of all the facts, you incredulously pronounce has no self-interest in occupying Ireland. Following this our sub-commitee met weekly to discuss this meeting and to draft answers to the questions asked of us. A considerable proportion of Ard Chomhairle time was also taken up with the Sinn Fein/SDLP dialogue.

The delegations met again an May 19th. We presented you with a detailed written response *(Sinn Fein on national self-determination)* to the five questions you had posed to us in your letter. Furthermore, we included a proposal on joint action on fair employment which we regard as one of the most burning injustices suffered by the nationalist people. Our detailed answers on national self-determination were set in the context of international law and of the rights of all the people of Ireland, including the loyalists, their rights and how their consent should be sought and how they should be consulted on the steps necessary for Irish reunification.

We sought your support for a proposal that the London and Dublin governments be called upon to establish Irish reunification as a policy objective. Lastly, with some reservations as to its value or effectiveness, we responded in a positive manner to your question on a conference to be convened by the Dublin government.

The method of your official response to our first document – into which we had put considerable time and effort – was, to say the least, disappointing. Sean Farren delivered a verbal reply lasting just over ten minutes which was completely negative and left little room for further discussion.

In order to ensure that the talks were not squandered we made a number of proposals. These were:

- That one more meeting be held which would assess the need for future meetings;
- That you clarify in writing what you mean by 'unity by consent';
- That we would look at the possibility of bringing back a proposal on the British role and a conference;
- That you would clarify in writing questions 4 and 5 put to you in *Towards a Strategy for Peace* on your attitude to the British role and on devolution.

On June 13th, the delegations met for the third time. As promised we delivered a document. *Persuading the British – a joint call.* This document contained a proposal for getting the British to adopt a strategy for ending the union in the context of Irish national independence.

I quote:

"As a step towards such a strategy – which is the stated aim of our discussions – and as an exploration of the SDLP's assertion regarding the current British position, we propose that Sinn Fein and the SDLP consult together to seek agreement on the policy objective of Irish reunification. Having agreed this both governments would issue a public statement outlining the steps they intend taking to bring about a peaceful and orderly British political and military withdrawal from Ireland within a specified period."

We also received two SDLP documents (1) *SDLP/Sinn Fein 13 June 1988* and *SDLP comments on Sinn Fein "proposals".*

At this juncture I had to point out to you that these two documents were not the two you had promised us which were to have been: your political definition of 'unity by consent' and a response to our questions 4 and 5. I also pointed out that the contents of the document *SDLP comments* had a number of political changes – in the form of words used – which had not been used by you in the previous meeting, as if you had more an eye to future publication.

We were most disturbed by the SDLP pronouncement in the document *SDLP/Sinn Fein 13th June* that the unionists have *"a natural veto"*. We would ask you to retract that statement as it seriously undermines nationalist presentation and perception of the Six-County state as 'artificial'. It does a disservice to those who have struggled for justice and Irish independence ouer the past 67 years against the gerrymander which is partition.

On July 11th we received another SDLP paper which ignored our written response on the conference proposal mooted earlier. Resting almost exclusively on the Hillsborough Treaty as a expression of British 'neutrality' the document then attempted to shift the responsibility for the continued intransigence of the loyalists onto the shoulders of the republicans (the logic of which could eventually lead the SDLP into 'understanding' or even supporting the suppressing of the IRA and the repressing of Sinn Fein).

In reviewing the dialogue which has taken place I must state that we felt at times that the talks were not being taken seriously since our analysis was dismissed lightly and verbally and only subsequently elicited a written response.

Without prevarication we answered all questions that were put to us and did everything that was asked of us yet we found the SDLP often evasive.

We made reasonable requests but were faced with negative responses.

The SDLP refusal to join with Sinn Fein on social and economic issues means that nationalists' interests suffer. You refused to work with us on fair employment or to join with us in calling upon the London and Dublin governments to adopt a policy of Irish re-unification. Conditions, which are not applied to other parties' participation in a conference, are being imposed on Sinn Fein whose mandate is qualitatively as equal as any other party.

Finally, some serious breaches of confidentiality – particularly those which mischievously suggested major differences of opinion in the Sinn Fein delegation – which appeared in the press could only have come from your delegation. These made our task more difficult.

Despite all the foregoing Sinn Fein still believes that the dialogue is worthwhile. The talks have been useful and help each side understand more clearly the views held by the other. They also raise the morale of the nationalist community which, clearly, would like to see more agreement and cooperation.

From our review it is obvious that the SDLP remains to be persuaded that it is the British occupation which is the central problem and the first hurdle to be overcome. The passage of time and British repressive practice will clearly expose the intentions of the Westminster government as anything but 'neutral'.

In conclusion I restate the issues which need to be focussed upon if we are to find agreement. These are:-

1. The role of the British government.
2. The unionist veto.
3. Improvements in conditions for nationalists in the Six Counties.

You have our position on all these issues. I invite your party to reconsider your rejection of them. Agreement by our parties, particularly on the proposal contained in *Persuading the British* would have a major effect upon London and Dublin. In this way, coupled with our other proposals for mobilising international opinion and opinion in Britain itself in support of Irish national self-determination, the whole situation could be moved on and conditions for justice and peace established.

We remain committed to the search for peace in Ireland and we do not consider our dialogue as being concluded. We should remain in regular contact. Given past opposition to face to face talks, the laying aside of that prejudice, I am sure you will agree, was a breakthrough in itself.

Is mise,
Gerry Adams MP,
President Sinn Fein

September 5

SMIULTANEOUS release of party statements closing this round of talks.

SDLP statement

on the end of present round of Sinn Fein/SDLP talks

THE TALKS between SDLP and Sinn Fein have ended without at this time reaching agreement on the objective of the talks.

From the beginning of these talks, the SDLP has put forward the view, consistent since its foundation, that violence or what Sinn Fein calls "armed struggle" is wrong and has no contribution to make to a resolution of the conflict in Ireland. We have argued that even in Sinn Fein and the IRA's terms, justification no longer exists for the use of such methods and that there are no obstacles on the road to achieving their political objectives which justify the use of armed force. We have asked the question, therefore, is the method now more sacred than the cause?

Is the IRA doing anything to advance the interests of the population in whose name it claims to act? Given that the traditional republican objective is to seek to unite Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter and to abolish the memory of past dissensions, how can it be said to advance those interests when the republican campaign of violence is making agreement with the Unionist population constantly more difficult, when it is directly responsible for more fatalities in the Catholic community in the last ten years than either the security forces or the loyalist paramilitaries, and when it bears a large part of the responsibility for massive unemployment and deprivation in the Catholic community? To those who claim the heritage of Pearse and Connolly, we say: what would they do in your place? They laid down their arms to prevent the further needless suffering of their people. Will you not do the same?

The SDLP's basic political view is that the Irish people as a whole have the right to national self-determination and that the Irish people should be defined as those people who are domiciled in the island of Ireland. This is a view shared by Sinn Fein. It is also shared by a majority of the people of this island. However, the SDLP has pointed out that since there is a very deep division among the people of this island as to how that right is to be exercised, it is the search for agreement on the exercise of that right that is the real search for peace in this island. Since this is a search which involves ourselves — all of the people of Ireland — it is self evident that it should not be pursued by armed force and cannot be won by armed force. The agreement of the unionist people is essential. Such agreement is obviously a task of persuasion not a task of coercion.

Another area of fundamental disagreement between the SDLP and Sinn Fein is related to the role, responsibility, motives and intentions of the British government. The SDLP has asserted that in Article 1 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, an internationally-binding agreement, the British government have removed the traditional republican justification for the use of violence.

In that Article, in the SDLP's view, the British government have made clear that if the people of the unionist and nationalist traditions in Ireland reach agreement on the unity and independence of Ireland, then the British government will legislate for it, facilitate it, and leave the people of Ireland, North and South, to govern themselves.

In short, they are stating that Irish unity and independence are entirely a matter for those Irish people who want it, persuading those Irish people who don't. It is clear from Article 1 and the Preamble to the Agreement that the British government have no other interest at stake in the exercise of Irish self-determination except that violence or the threat of violence shall not succeed. In this context the "armed struggle" can only be a negative factor.

The SDLP has not convinced Sinn Fein that this is the British position, but we would pose a question to every member of the Provisional Republican Movement, both in Sinn Fein and the IRA, and to their supporters. If the SDLP is correct, that this is the British position, do you agree that it removes the stated justification for the "armed struggle" of the Provisional IRA?

The SDLP does not accept that the British position as

stated in Article 1 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement gives a veto to the unionists on Irish unity. The British government have no right to do so and it is not the British position that gives a veto to any section of the people of Ireland. It is the presence of the unionist people, domiciled on the island of Ireland, their numbers and their geography that require of necessity their agreement with the rest of us as to how we share this island. Just as the island of Cyprus cannot be united unless there is agreement of both the Greek and Turkish traditions, neither can there be unity of Ireland unless there is agreement of both the nationalist and unionist traditions.

In addition, it seems to us to reflect a deep misunderstanding of the Ulster Protestant tradition to suggest that it is the British influence alone and not their own choice and their own reasons that have made them wish up to now, to live apart from the rest of the people of Ireland.

Do we not accept, even though we may not like it that they have deep-seated and deeply-felt reasons of their own, based on many historical factors, for their differences; differences which go back beyond partition? Did not Wolfe Tone accept those difference two hundred years ago when he talked of uniting Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter as his means of breaking the connection with England. If he wanted to unite them they must have been divided. We also must face the fact that the people of Ireland remain divided for reasons which go beyond the British presence.

The SDLP does not deny that the task of persuading the unionist people that their best interests lie in coming together with the rest of the people of this island to build a new Ireland, which accepts and accommodates all our differences, will be a very difficult one. But we believe that with the ending of the IRA campaign, and the consequent demilitarisation of the North, it would be possible to harness with enthusiasm and energy all the resources of democratic Ireland, involving every political party with an electoral mandate in the task of persuading our fellow citizens in the North.

Indeed, the leader of the Irish government has already on a number of occasions made clear his willingness to initiate such a process by calling a conference of all mandated parties on the island to prepare such a strategy. It would also be possible to harness the massive international goodwill towards this country and towards our objective – goodwill which is at present confused and thwarted by the continuous violence on our streets.

This process of search for agreement among the people of Ireland is the political alternative that Sinn Fein has consistently challenged politicians to produce.

We regret that to date we have not persuaded Sinn Fein on these matters. That is particularly evident from the violence we have experienced in recent weeks. We condemn that violence unreservedly. But we also believe that it is the deepest responsibility of those of us in the nationalist community who believe in democracy and a peaceful solution to our problems to do everything in our power to persuade Sinn Fein and the IRA that "the armed struggle" is wrong, that it is without justification, that it is inflicting the greatest damage on the prospects of unifying all the people of Ireland, and that it must be ended so that political progress can be made.

We welcome, therefore, the opportunity which the political meetings with Sinn Fein have given us to state our views face-to-face and to argue them fully and thoroughly. We say again that constitutional politicians, whether nationalist or unionist, have a solemn duty to change the political climate away from violence and towards a peaceful accommodation of our differences.

The SDLP hopes and expects that the debate on these crucial issues which has begun will continue in the public and private arena, particularly among all those who regard themselves as republicans, and that it will lead sooner rather than later to an end to the agony of all the people of the North.

Sinn Fein statement

on the end of present round of Sinn Fein/SDLP talks

AT THE BEGINNING of this year Sinn Fein and the SDLP received a written invitation from a third party to engage in a political dialogue aimed at investigating the possibility of developing *"an overall political strategy to establish justice and peace in Ireland"*. Any suggestion that the talks had any other purpose is untrue.

During this dialogue several position papers and analyses were exchanged.

From the outset, our proposals were based on our overall view that justice and peace can best be established when the Irish nation can exercise its right to national self-determination and the conflict over British interference in Irish sovereignty is resolved.

Sinn Fein believes that any strategy which seeks to establish national self-determination must have as its objectives:

- To persuade the British government to change its current policy of partition to one of ending the

Union and handing sovereignty to an all-Ireland government whose selection would be a democratic matter for the Irish nation,

- To persuade the unionists that their future lies in this context and to persuade the British government that it has a responsibility to so influence unionist attitudes.

The method of achieving these objectives should include:

- The securing of maximum political unity in Ireland based on these objectives,
- The launching of a concerted political campaign internationally, using Dublin government diplomatic resources to win international support for Irish demands,
- The mobilising of support in Britain itself which would create conditions in which the right to Irish self-determination can be exercised.

During this campaign a debate, aimed at leading to dialogue must be initiated with northern Protestants and northern Protestant opinion on the democratic principle of national self-determination.

They must be assured by our full commitment to their civil and religious rights and be persuaded of the need for their participation in building an Irish society based on equality and national reconciliation.

There is also a need to establish a democratic structure by which the above can be agreed upon, implemented and overseen, or, failing this, to encourage informal agreement to implement the above.

Finally, Sinn Fein believes that there must be concerted political action, nationally and internationally, to defend democratic rights and to defend and improve the social and economic rights and conditions of the population of the Six Counties and that transgressions of these rights must be exposed.

The round of talks has now concluded.

In summing up the talks Sinn Fein President, Gerry Adams MP said:

"It is to be regretted that Sinn Fein and the SDLP are unable to agree, at this time, on 'an overall strategy to establish justice and peace in Ireland'.

"Sinn Fein welcomed the opportunity for face-to-face talks between the two parties which represent the nationalist population of the Six Counties despite intense external pressure aimed at prohibiting the talks. We note that that opposition is not shared by the combined constituencies of the two parties and has been welcomed by many nationalists in the 26 Counties.

"From the outset of the dialogue Sinn Fein has put the consistent republican and democratic view that the root cause of the conflict in Ireland is to be found in the British government's denial to the Irish nation of its right to national self-determination.

"Successive British governments are directly responsible for the maintenance of the conditions created by that denial in which perennial conflict has ever been present. Our discussions with the SDLP elicited the shared political view that the Irish people as a whole have the right to national self-determination and that the Irish people should be defined as those people domiciled on the island of Ireland (and its off-shore islands). In that context it was accepted that an internal Six-County settlement is no solution.

"However, the Sinn Fein delegation was somewhat perplexed that the SDLP continues to maintain that the British government is now a neutral party to the conclict in Ireland.

"This claim ignores all the historic evidence of British domination in Ireland and is wholly contradicted by the events of the past 20 years, all of which point to the continuing commitment of the British government to impose its will by force on the Irish people through the maintenance of partition and continuing loyalist dominance of the Six-County state

"In the face of British government injustice and oppression the SDLP, to substantiate claims that the British are neutral, can only point to Article 1 of the Hillsborough Treaty despite the fact that the loyalist veto is explicitly contained within this article, despite the fact that the British government asserts that the Treaty is a *"bulwark against a United Ireland"* and despite the fact that even Charles Haughey recognised the Treaty to be a *"copper-fastening of partition"*.

"To confer neutrality on the British government would be to confer neutrality on the Turkish government whose military invasion has partitioned the island of Cyprus.

"The Sinn Fein delegation, in attempting to explore the SDLP policy of 'unity by consent' was dismayed to discover that contained within this policy was a recognition and acceptance of the loyalist veto.

"The SDLP now appear to accept as absolute the power of veto of a national minority to obstruct and thwart the democratic right of the Irish people as a whole to exercise national self-determination. This position is of course untenable for a party which claims to act in the interests of Irish nationalists.

"Self-determination is universally accepted to mean a nation's right to exercise the political freedom to determine its own social, economic and cultural development without external influence and without partial or total disruption of the national unity or territorial integrity.

"The democratic position, and here the SDLP share our view, is that the search for agreement on a lasting, democratic and peaceful solution must involve northern Protestants and every effort must be made to get their agreement and involvement in the constitutional, financial and political arrangements needed to replace partition; and, that the civil and religious liberties of northern Protestants must be guaranteed and protected.

"We concur with the SDLP in stating that the real

question is how do we end the British presence in Ireland in a manner which leaves behind a stable and peaceful Ireland.

"The Sinn Fein view is that all experience to date shows that any alliance between sections of Irish nationalism and the British government in the governance of Ireland can only culminate in an unequal partnership which serves the broad British government interest. British government interests have thus been maintained to the detriment of the interests of the Irish nation.

"What is required is an alliance of Irish political parties and opinion, informal or otherwise, pursuing objectives which look to the interests and well-being of the Irish nation with the aim of normalising relationships within the Irish nation and between the Irish nation and the people of Britain.

"To that end and in response to an SDLP proposal, Sinn Fein agreed thet a conference of all political parties in Ireland, convened by the Dublin government, aimed at reaching agreement on the exercise of national self-determination could make a positive contribution to an eventual, lasting, democratic and peaceful solution.

"Likewise, as a step towards such a strategy and as an exploration of the SDLP's assertion regarding the current British government position of putative neutrality, we proposed that Sinn Fein and the SDLP jointly issue a call to the Dublin and London governments for them to consult together to seek agreement on the policy objective of Irish re-unification. The SDLP rejected this proposal.

"If Irish nationalist parties and the Dublin government are genuine about ending the British presence then they must be involved in concerted political action nationally and internationally to bring about conditions in which the right to national self-determination can be exercised.

"There is also a need for concerted political action, nationally and internationally, to defend the democratic rights and social and economic rights of the population of the Six Counties and to expose transgressions of those rights. The SDLP rejected our proposal on these terms.

"While the SDLP feel unable, at this time, to join with Sinn Fein in the concerted manner described above, despite the potential within such an initiative to advance towards an overall strategy for justice and peace, it is to be hoped that they will do so independently and that they will exhort the Dublin government to do likewise.

"While we have not presently succeeded in agreeing on *"an overall political strategy to establish justice and peace in Ireland"* Sinn Fein believes that the quest for such a strategy must continue.

"We firmly believe that the broadest possible alliance, informal or otherwise, of nationalists, republicans, socialists and democrats in active and constant pursuit of a political solution which finds its basis in the democratic principle of national self-determination, is the best means of expediting the achievement of peace and justice in Ireland.

"We remain committed to the pursuit of these objectives and to dialogue aimed at achieving a strategy by which they can be secured.

"We consider our discussions with the SDLP to be an important part of this process and we look forward to further debate and discussion with all those genuinely interested in developing a strategy to establish justice and peace in Ireland."