

An Irish anarchist analysis of the IRA statement to dump arms

The war is over – is coalition next?

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Statement from P. O'Neill instructing end to IRA armed campaign

The leadership of Oglagh na hEireann has formally ordered an end to the armed campaign. This will take effect from 4pm this afternoon.

All IRA units have been ordered to dump arms.

All Volunteers have been instructed to assist the development of purely political and democratic programmes through exclusively peaceful means.

Volunteers must not engage in any other activities whatsoever.

The IRA leadership has also authorised our representative to engage with the IICD [Independent International Commission on Decommissioning] to complete the process to verifiably put its arms beyond use in a way which will further enhance public confidence and to conclude this as quickly as possible.

We have invited two independent witnesses, from the Protestant and Catholic churches, to testify to this.

The Army Council took these decisions following an unprecedented internal discussion and consultation process with IRA units and Volunteers.

We appreciate the honest and forthright way in which the consultation process was carried out and the depth and content of the submissions.

We are proud of the comradely way in which this truly historic discussion was conducted. The outcome of our consultations show very strong support among IRA Volunteers for the Sinn Fein peace strategy.

There is also widespread concern about the failure of the two governments and the unionists to fully engage in the peace process.

This has created real difficulties. The overwhelming majority of people in Ireland fully support this process. They and friends of Irish unity throughout the world want to see the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement.

Notwithstanding these difficulties our decisions have been taken to advance our republican and democratic objectives, including our goal of a united Ireland.

We believe there is now an alternative way to achieve this and to end British rule in our country. It is the responsibility of all Volunteers to show leadership, determination and courage.

We are very mindful of the sacrifices of our patriot dead, those who went to jail, Volunteers, their families and the wider republican base.

We reiterate our view that the armed struggle was entirely legitimate. We are conscious that many people suffered in the conflict.

There is a compelling imperative on all sides to build a just and lasting peace. The issue of the defence of nationalist and republican communities has been raised with us.

There is a responsibility on society to ensure that there is no re-occurrence of the pogroms of 1969 and the early 1970s.

There is also a universal responsibility to tackle sectarianism in all its forms.

The IRA is fully committed to the goals of Irish unity and independence and to building the Republic outlined in the 1916 Proclamation.

We call for maximum unity and effort by Irish republicans everywhere. We are confident that by working together Irish republicans can achieve our objectives.

Every Volunteer is aware of the import of the decisions we have taken and all Oglaiagh are compelled to fully comply with these orders.

There is now an unprecedented opportunity to utilise the considerable energy and goodwill which there is for the peace process.

This comprehensive series of unparalleled initiatives is our contribution to this and to the continued endeavours to bring about independence and unity for the people of Ireland.

An analysis of the IRA statement by an Irish anarchist

The statement from the IRA is formulated to clearly comply with the various demands made by the British and Irish governments over the last year and to so try and expose the Unionist political parties as the ones opposing progress. As such it not only prepares the ground for Sinn Fein to re-enter government in the north but also for it to go into coalition in the south.

The years of the peace process have seen a real growth in electoral support for Sinn Fein in the south so that it would now be in the position to be a junior partner in a coalition government. By definition this would have to include one of Irelands right wing neo-liberal parties as the major partner. It is notable that the IRA statement lacks even a rhetorical reference to any sort of socialism — not even in the watered down form of the ‘equality agenda’ used in recent elections by Sinn Fein.

The other side of the peace process has been the ditching of much of the radical left rhetoric of the republican movement of the 1980’s. Pragmatism became the new watchword whether that meant meeting with George Bush at the height of the invasion of Iraq, imposing education and health cuts as part of the government of northern Ireland or voting for the bin taxes in Sligo in order to get power in the council. There is still a radically inclined grassroots in Sinn Fein, in particular in the urban areas, but it is a well disciplined one — accustomed to following the pragmatic line coming from the top.

The ‘whiff of cordite’ was always part of the reason this was possible — this and the lack of any serious and sizeable alternative. Now as the IRA disarms and the libertarian movement grows the space may open for a dialogue with many rank and file republican activists. This will be a major challenge for Irish anarchists in the years ahead. The article ‘After Nationalism ... A WSM member on leaving Sinn Fein’ is one example of the sort or reasons why some rank and file republicans may take this step.

Today’s statement is the culmination of over 11 years of a public process and more years of secret negotiations with the British government. Irish anarchists have written in considerable

depth about this process. I reproduce some extracts from key moments below but see the archive of articles at www.struggle.ws for more

When the cease-fire was broken in **1996** the Irish anarchist Workers Solidarity Movement said that

“As anarchists we welcomed the cease-fire but condemned the Peace Process in the sense that it has never at any time concerned itself with the reality of life that faces working class people in Ireland, both north and south of the border. Unemployment remains high in Ireland, as do the levels of poverty and inequality. This disastrous situation is one that has been created and ‘managed’ by two of the most important players within the Peace Process — the Irish and British Governments. They have never been offering anything else throughout the last eighteen months other than more of the same. These social conditions, and the fertile grounds they offer to the politics of sectarianism within Ireland, are the real problems that must be faced if a lasting peace is ever to be attained. Nationalism doesn’t recognise this; it offers no solutions to capitalism. It seeks to bind us together on the basis of ‘Irishness’ or ‘Englishness’ — so that we may be properly and securely exploited by both Irish and English bosses. This has been the underlying basis of the Peace Process from its inception. The Workers Solidarity Movement rejects it.

The real peace process that is needed is the development of a new politics within the working class communities — a politics that will recognise that anti-imperialism need not be the same as nationalism. The elitist and militarist armed struggle should be abandoned and replaced with mass action.

We are working for a new Ireland, an anarchist society where production is to satisfy needs and where control rests in the hands of the working class. The colour of the flag that flies over our heads is not important, but the quality of our lives is. Compared to the possibility of real socialism and real freedom, republicanism is politically bankrupt.”

www.struggle.ws

In **1988** in advance of the Good Friday / Belfast agreement the WSM wrote

“The people of Ireland, North & South will be asked to vote on the ‘Good Friday’ agreement. There is a great desire for peace which is being used to pressurise us into choosing between two completely flawed alternatives. The agreement, which was drawn up in secret by our so-called ‘representatives’, does not challenge the sectarian divisions which have bedevilled this country.

In fact the structures proposed in the agreement actually institutionalise sectarian divisions. Politicians elected to the proposed Assembly must declare themselves either ‘unionist’ or ‘nationalist’ — those who refuse will not have their votes counted in measuring the cross community support necessary for passing legislation. We are supposed to line up behind Catholic/Green or Protestant/Orange banners and seek the best deal for ‘our community’. The concept of working class interests is not even considered.

What the agreement proposes is bringing some nationalist politicians into a power-sharing arrangement with some unionist politicians. The division between rulers and ruled, between bosses and workers, between rich and poor remains. The biggest change will be a few nationalist faces sitting down with bigots like Trimble and Taylor, to make laws which preserve the dominance of the rich over the poor.”
www.struggle.ws

After three years of Stormont rule in **2001** the WSM observed that

“These politicians have spent their time in government proving to the British government and to international business that power is in safe hands. Thus we witness the farcical situation where parties supposedly ranging across the political spectrum from republican socialist to right-wing unionist can agree – with no controversy whatsoever – a programme of government. The only rows they seem to have are over what flags should fly and when, and what flowers should be put in the hall display!

The level of political debate and disagreement on economic and social issues is non-existent. From the DUP to Sinn Féin, there is effectively no difference as to the way forward. When disagreements arise, it is along sectarian lines – whether or not the Jubilee or the Royal Victoria Hospital should be closed, for example. Needless to say none of them were putting forward or fighting for the proposition that both should remain open. No, it was more important to prove to Tony Blair that Northern ministers were as good at implementing cutbacks as their London counterparts”
www.struggle.ws

It is also true however that the years of the cease-fire were a period in which Irish anarchists discussed, debated and changed their understanding of partition. This is not a process that is over by any means but the WSM positions paper ‘The partition of Ireland’ reflects much of the changed understanding that has been developed in that time. From this

18. The Good Friday Agreement came about as the culmination of Sinn Féin’s strategy for over a decade which was aimed at building various broad fronts around different issues in an attempt to gain respectability by pulling in Fianna Fáil members and church figures. This involved dropping all references to socialism to maintain unity with “the broad nationalist family”. This strategy was never going to deliver a united socialist Ireland, or any other significant improvements apart from those associated with “demilitarisation”. It represents instead a hardening of traditional nationalism and the goal of achieving an alliance of all nationalists – Sinn Féin, Fianna Fáil, SDLP, the Catholic Church and “Irish America”. Such an alliance has nothing to offer working class people, North or South, and we oppose it outright.

The Good Friday Agreement offered nothing except a sectarian division of the spoils and in fact copper-fastened sectarian divisions. We called for an abstention in the referendum on this deal, refusing to align ourselves with those calling for a ‘no’ vote, pointing out that they have no alternative to offer, just more of the same conflict that has ruined tens of thousands of working class lives. The republican forces of the 32

County Sovereignty Committee, the Real IRA, Republican Sinn Fein, Continuity IRA and the Irish National Liberation Army has nothing but increased communalism and sectarianism to offer. The loyalist opponents-whose rallies were attended by vocal supporters of the Loyalist Volunteer Force death squads -wanted a return to the time when Catholics lived on their knees in fear.

The Assembly set up under the 'Good Friday Agreement' demonstrates quite clearly the fact that the net effect of this agreement is to copper-fasten sectarianism, with elected members having to declare themselves 'nationalist' or 'unionist' in order for their votes to count. The political parties have shown that they are capable of plenty of agreement on economic issues – with no disagreement over budgets or spending plans, but issues such as what flowers should be put on display in the lobby or what flags should fly over Ministerial buildings are used to hype up the divisions between the two sides

19. The huge vote, North and South, in favour of the agreement -whatever else it might have indicated – showed quite clearly that the vast majority of people do not want a return to pre-ceasefire violence. Any return to armed struggle will deliver only more hardship and repression for working class people in the six counties.

We reiterate our view that permanent peace and an end to sectarianism will only come about after a British withdrawal and that working people from both communities must be convinced of the need to make the fight one for anarchism, not for 'national rights'.

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