

Bombs are no solution

Anarchists on End of IRA Cease-fire

Kevin Doyle

1996

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Finally, it happened. Three bombs in London in February, that killed three people, put an end to what had been an 18 month long cease-fire. As we go to press, it is still far from certain as to what will happen in the coming months but the prospects now may well be for a full scale return to the 'armed struggle' by the IRA. With this, undoubtedly, will come renewed sectarian attacks and violence in the North. It is a prospect that no one will welcome, least of all those living in the Northern Ireland.

The Peace Process was on shaky ground for quite a while, but particularly so in the last six months. The constant 'road-blocking' efforts of John Major and the British government inevitably caused strife. Throughout the last eighteen months they have placed obstacle after obstacle in front of every attempt to have a meaningful dialogue about the future of Northern Ireland.

Issues relating to ongoing discrimination and sectarianism in the North, and its political institutions — a central source of antagonism for the large Nationalist population — never saw the light of day. Instead, everything got bogged down on issues relating to 'arms decommissioning' (and this didn't include the guns of the British Army!).

Unlikely

Even when a compromise was finally reached on this issue — the Mitchell Principles — Major again destroyed any hope for dialogue with his 'new' proposals for 'elections before talks'. It was a performance that inevitably led to disaster and John Major stands fully to blame. At no time did he show any inclination to shift from his traditional stance of shoring up Unionist and Loyalist privilege in the North.

In many respects anarchists can be forgiven for saying, 'We told you so' A process that relied so heavily on the British and Irish governments was inevitably flawed. Were we to believe that either government would move in any substantial way towards bringing about meaningful change? Let's face it: this was always highly unlikely.

Both governments have far more in common than divides them, and this is not just in terms of economic policies. As much as anything else, both governments have assisted and presided over the existence of the Northern Ireland statelet for over 70 years, a statelet that has always been based on discrimination against one section of the community. Neither government has ever made any significant efforts to end the discrimination that is the basis of the Northern State. The British government, in particular, has actively assisted in propping it up.

Privilege

In fact, it was mass struggle and huge demonstrations by ordinary people (the Civil Rights Movement) that forced the first real compromises from the Unionist ascendancy in Northern Ireland. It was these efforts and not those of either the British or Irish governments that brought the first flowers of hope.

Sinn Féin seem to have forgotten this. Or have they? Of course those privileges are minuscule compared to the division between the ruling class and the working class. Major put the maintenance of these privileges, in return for unionist support in the House of Commons ahead of a chance of peace.

In many respects Sinn Féin's performance during this Peace Process has been an eye opener. Its strategy from the very beginning has been a nationalist one: the formation of the so-called Pan-Nationalist Front. Throughout the last number of years they have moderated their politics, in favour of an alliance between the main nationalist forces on this island: the Irish Government, the SDLP (in the North) and themselves, Sinn Féin.

But, it has been an sorry strategy and it has led Sinn Féin into defending some of the strangest and most worthless of things. To give but one example, in 1994, when the Irish Government fell (following the Fr. Brendan Smyth child sex abuse scandal) Sinn Féin, almost alone among political parties in the South, was calling for support for this Labour-Fianna Fáil government. This was at a time when the government was totally discredited. Strange politics indeed.

\$1000-A-PLATE

But the problems do not end there. The Peace Process never, at any time, addressed the huge problems that face so many people in Ireland today — both north and south of the border. Unemployment is now at record levels, as are the levels of poverty and inequality. This disastrous situation is one that has been created and 'presided over' by many of those central to the Peace Process, including, of course, the Irish and British governments. In this regard, they have never been offering anything else, throughout the last 18 months, other than more of the same.

Sinn Féin stands indicted for falling in so readily and easily with politicians who have punished working class people again and again. Sinn Féin's performance has raised real question marks about their claims to represent an 'alternative Ireland.' '\$1000-a-plate' fund-raising dinners say a lot, after all.

Very few people will welcome the return of the IRA's strategy of the 'armed struggle'. It is a strategy that is deeply flawed and a dead-end to all intents and purposes. It fails, even when it is at its most dramatic, to lay any basis for working class unity in Ireland, let alone within the North. In fact, more often than not it creates the opposite effect.

It builds tension, leads to increased State power (and the use of Emergency and repressive legislation) and it shores up 'traditional loyalties' Sectarianism will never end when the strategy being used to bring about a British withdrawal is primarily that of the 'armed struggle'. At its very best it will only lead us back to the very place that we've been for the last 18 months: cosy wheeling and dealing with the Clintons, Majors and Brutons of this world. What a prospect!

Over the last 25 years, Sinn Féin and the IRA have demanded the leadership of the struggle to bring change in Ireland. But their failure during this peace process, and their failure at the end of it to offer anything other than a return to the 'armed struggle' stands as a major indictment. Sinn Féin are nationalists first, and because of this they can never offer anything to those who do not share their 'Irishness.' These are not viable politics, not in today's Ireland.

SOLIDARITY

But, just as bad, they have shown themselves to be elitist and 'traditional' in their operations during the last 18 months. They have tried — very hard it must be added — to play 'the game of politics'. They have walked the 'corridors of power' but they have created no real mass-struggle

alternative to it; that is why they have no strategy now. They are floundering. All they can offer is a return to the 'armed struggle' – a policy that is certain to fail.

As anarchists, we remain convinced that real change is possible. The recent strikes in France confirm once again that the power of the working-class in Europe is far from finished. Workers have much in common. Often that commonality spreads beyond the borders of any country or the colour of anyone's skin. We believe that this is the way forward. The 'peace process' failed because it was conducted in the traditional elitist "men in suits behind closed doors way" trying to sort out our problems.

The chance for change remains because it will only come through mass mobilisation. Indeed it was the huge struggle of ordinary people in the Civil Rights movement that last won something progressive in the North. Imperialism remains as the great obstacle to progressive change in the North as it continues to fuel hatreds and successfully helps to divide and rule the people.

Northern Ireland is still the poorest area of Britain to live in. What is there worth fighting for? It is now more imperative than ever to build solidarity in our class around the issues that we face as workers: double-taxation, low pay, worsening job security and sex discrimination. Admittedly, this is not a short term strategy. But then where did 25 years of the armed struggle get us?

Why not start on the right road now?

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Retrieved on 7th December 2021 from struggle.ws
Published in *Workers Solidarity* No. 48 – Summer 1996.

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