

# **The Price of Peace**

**The Downing street declaration and the republicans**

Workers' Solidarity Movement

1994

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**IN THE PAST MONTH or so an alien landing in Dublin would have been amazed at the total rehabilitation of Sinn Féin and the IRA. Up until then the English language had been ransacked for terms of abuse. Dictionaries of medicine and zoology were scoured in the search for more descriptive insults. Terms ranged from the mild sounding “men of violence” (no women in the IRA according to the media) to cynical/callous/brutal/cowardly Godfathers of crime, murderous/senseless/bloodthirsty killers.**

In the recent past they have rejoiced under the jolly sounding term of Republican Movement. This sudden turn around by the media was a result of the so-called peace process. This was initiated in secret meetings between Sinn Féin and the British government in March (though we now know there have been contacts since 1990).

## **WAR WEARINESS**

These negotiations represented the culmination of two trends. Firstly there is increasing war weariness and disillusionment among nationalists. The IRA in the 1970s believed that they could beat Britain out of Ireland in a short period of time. They quickly realised that this was not possible and settled for a long war of attrition. As the prisons continued to fill up, as families lost sons & daughters and then grandsons & granddaughters, the ability and will of nationalists to sustain the fight lessened.

On the British side a second factor has come into play. The massive bill for the devastation of several parts of the business heart of London prompted the British government to begin talking. This was a factor in pushing the establishment towards the latest set of talks. They have acknowledged they have no economic or strategic interest in the North and are tired of pumping in £4 billion a year (even if this is mainly made by workers through taxes). A significant section of the British ruling class want to disengage but can't risk leaving a violent and unstable situation behind.

Talks between the British and Irish governments culminated in the Downing Street declaration. This document (which, by the way, has no official or legal status) offers absolutely nothing to nationalists in the North. The vague reference to self-determination both North and South actually just reinforces partition and the unionist veto.

## **THE “NATIONALIST NIGHTMARE”**

There is no mention of the continuing level of discrimination against Catholics in the North. According to the last Fair Employment Agency report (February 1992) Catholics are under-represented in the workforce by 5–6%. Catholic male unemployment is two and a half times the Protestant level and has been for the last 25 years! [The RUC is 92.6% Protestant.] Neither did juryless Diplock courts, stripsearching, police use of torture, the Prevention of Terrorism Act or the daily harassment of Catholics merit a mention.

Sinn Féin now find themselves in a difficult position. It is hard to see how they can call off the military campaign for this document, even as the beginning of a peace process. After building up expectations they will now be seen as the ones who pushed away the olive branch. The unaltered Declaration offers little to their supporters, the Republican Movement's expectations have not

been met. The deal is unacceptable to them, as they have made clear through both official and unofficial spokespersons.

Unfortunately, being nationalists, they have little in the way of alternatives to offer. On RTE's "This Week" programme Bernadette McAlliskey spoke for many nationalists (this was about two weeks before the lifting of the gag on Sinn Féin imposed under Section 31 of the Broadcasting Act). She declared that the agreement was a calculated insult from the British government and an "unknown insult" from the Irish government. This is surely strange use of the English language. How many people have you, the reader, unknowingly insulted today!?!

## **FIGHTING SECTARIANISM: THE REPUBLIC OR THE WORKERS REPUBLIC**

She went on to say that it was essential to reject the declaration and convince John Hume and Albert Reynolds to negotiate a "a real peace.". The old nationalist bullshit; form an alliance with anyone in a green jersey. As if Fianna Fáil, "the extradition party", are going to help out. As if uncle Albert who has just signed an agreement ignoring nationalists and acknowledging the Unionist veto is going to lend a helping hand. Fianna Fáil were hanging republicans in the 1930s, interning them in the 1950s and are extraditing them today. A united Ireland is not particularly in the interests of most southern bosses. Nor is it much in the minds of the electorate. And who could blame them when the only prospect they are presented with is extending Albert's rule to the six counties? And who could blame them when the only prospect they are presented with is extending Albert's rule to the six counties? So why should Fianna Fáil give a damn?

Looking for allies like this shows the republicans are living in cloud cuckoo land. Only anarchism has the answers. Any solution within capitalism will do little to adjust the sectarian status quo. Sectarianism can either be left as it is or redressed by taking away the marginal privileges of Protestants. This is not acceptable. We fight not to take from Protestants and give to Catholics — we are struggling for more of everything for all workers. More jobs, more houses, better services, education and leisure facilities. We want to sweep away sectarian differences by increasing the standard of living for all workers... at the expense of the bosses. Anything less is not worth fighting for.

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