

TOWARDS A PEACEFUL IRELAND



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THE proposals contained in this document “Towards a Peaceful Ireland” were drafted by Dáithí Ó Conaill and completed on December 29, 1990, three days before his death. They were subsequently adopted by Republican Sinn Féin of which he was Vice-President and updated in 2001:

For decades the people of Ireland have suffered war, strife and political turmoil. The cost has been high, approximately 3,500 lives have been lost to date, liberties have been denied and two generations have grown up in an abnormal situation. With significant changes taking place in the world, many people ask why it is so difficult to bring about peace, stability, and economic development in our own country.

It should be evident to most people by now that the unresolved national question is the root cause of our problems. Resources which would normally be used for economic development, both North and South are diverted to sustain a regime of repression under a façade of political consensus. Constant efforts are made by the British government with the collaboration of the Dublin administration to resolve the Northern situation by military means; yet it is widely recognised that a military solution is not feasible in the long term. All parties involved in armed activity are on public record as admitting that a political solution will have to be found eventually.

Various political solutions have been tried to date and have failed. The Dublin administration has never made a serious effort to produce worthwhile proposals while the British have blundered from one failure to another. Conflict and instability have continued. The latest so-called political solution is the Stormont Agreement signed on Good Friday 1998 and it too is now doomed to failure. While the Agreement attempted to secure British rule and safeguard the future of the 26-County State, it has only succeeded in creating an “institutionalized sectarianism” that is going to constrain the right of all the people of Ireland to self-determination.

With the revision of Articles 2 and 3 of the 1937 Constitution and the recognition of the role of Stormont, the Agreement has ensured the continuation of a situation where a divided people is now ruled on behalf of the British establishment. The Stormont Agreement has

succeeded only in subverting former Republicans to act as agents of British rule. Such an arrangement can never be viewed as a long-term solution. The evidence from other conflicts around the world points to the fact that a desire for national self-determination can never be quenched by Quisling deals or political packages that ignore the basic cause of the conflict. In the euphoria of what is now being sold as a new beginning, many people gloss over the root cause of the trouble: that is the British presence and until that presence is removed all agreements are doomed to fail. It is as simple as that! In this context there are many people who despair of an eventual solution. To overcome that feeling of hopelessness, Republican Sinn Féin makes the following proposals.

(1)

All-Ireland Constituent Assembly

The lack of democracy is at the root of the National issue. The restoration of democracy without any influence from the British would secure a way forward. There cannot be two different sets of questions posed in the two parts of Ireland to determine a way forward for the entire country as was tried under the Stormont Agreement. The Irish people, acting as a unit, must be free to exercise their national right to self-determination. Towards that end Republican Sinn Féin calls for the establishment of a Constituent Assembly representative of the whole people of Ireland and elected by the suffrage of the adult population. The Assembly would have the sole function of drafting a new Constitution and would have six months to complete its work. The agreed constitution would be submitted to the people in referendum for acceptance or rejection.

Republican Sinn Féin believes that drafting a new 32-County Constitution would be more democratic, just and lasting than amending an existing flawed 26-county document. Furthermore, an open democratic forum would be more meaningful to the Irish people today than meetings behind closed doors between politicians who have failed the people so often. All elements of Irish society would be free to contest the election for the Assembly. The internal relations of the Irish people with one another and their external relations with Europe and the world at large would be determined through free and open debate. As a contribution to that debate, Sinn Féin Poblachtach has prepared a set of proposals — ÉIRE NUA — which outlines the basis for a new Constitution in a federally structured Ireland. Such structures will be necessary to ensure justice for all, including the 18% of the national population who have supported the unionist position.

(2)

Declaration of Intent to Withdraw from Ireland

Prior to the setting up of the Assembly, the British Government must declare that it will withdraw its forces and establishment from Ireland within twelve months of the adoption of a new Constitution by the people of Ireland. Can the British government statement of November 9, 1990 by Cabinet Minister Peter Brooke that Britain has “no selfish or economic of economic interest” in staying in Ireland be interpreted as a political declaration of intent to withdraw? If it can, then the British must prove their sincerity by publicly committing themselves to withdraw from Ireland after the Irish people have adopted a new Constitution.

(3)
Towards a New Ireland

Coupled with the two above-mentioned proposals there must be an amnesty for all political prisoners and people on the wanted list. The British have already agreed to this therefore it is not an insurmountable obstacle. The fact is thousands have endured great hardship – from imprisonment to the deaths of the twelve hunger strikers and gross injustices inflicted on people who only sought the freedom of their country. All political prisoners must be released one month prior to the election of a Constituent Assembly.

Given the acceptance of the above three proposals, there would be no necessity for the continuance of armed struggle. All elements, including the British, engaged in such activities should cease action immediately on acceptance of these proposals. By so doing, a new spirit of freedom would pervade the country and the Irish people could, at long last enter into a dialogue of genuine discussion to fashion the Ireland of the future.

Failure to adopt these proposals will prolong the current situation in regard to the continued British presence and will lead to further loss of life, police harassment of the people, political prisoners languishing in jail and an ever-widening gap between rich and poor. Such conditions cannot be allowed to continue.

Seo é Bóthar na Síochána.