

WORKERS BRIEFING

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It's political surrender Stupid!

The announcement by the IRA that a number of its arms dumps had been inspected and sealed by international inspectors was met by a telling silence in the republican areas of the north. No one asked what the move meant. There was no discussion. The reason for the silence is really quite simple. It is because there is really no disguising the meaning of the IRA action. It is glaringly obvious that this is the final surrender by the republican movement.

There is another reason for the silence. Republicans are silent because the real surrender of their movement was a political surrender and took place long ago. For a move-

ment whose leadership has accepted partition, the unionist veto, British occupation and the return of a Stormont parliament a few guns are nothing, all the more so when a dejected and weary base of supporters have gradually demobilised.

In a sense it was IRA militarism that led to its own downfall. On the one hand militarist elitism helped to demobilise the early mass mobilisations of working class nationalists. On the other hand a strategy based on out-terrorising the imperialists could only end in the constant terror of the imperialists and their loyalist allies eventually wearing away the morale of the republican base.



Martti Ahtisaari and ex-ANC secretary-general Cyril Ramaphosa.

They have changed the illusions of militarism for the illusion that the British will act fairly and that they have found a new species of unionism that will agree to abolish sectarianism and establish democratic rights.

This has already proved to be an insane illusion that simply justifies republican co-operation in the administration of the North. Democracy in Ireland is as far away as ever and its eventual resolution will depend not on the forces of republicanism, but on those of socialism and the working class.

THE MYTH OF MODERATE UNIONISM

The hidden centrepiece of the Good Friday agreement is Unionist leader David Trimble. The agreement has the enthusiastic support of Irish capitalism and Sinn Féin offer firm support as junior partners, but it is not they who serve as the base of British rule in Ireland, but the right-wing unionists. And it is from the right that the Irish settlement still faces serious threats.

The weakness of the British strategy is that it assumes a 50% "moderate unionist" base. Yet at every test this majority crumbles. Even under massive British pressure David Trimble just survived a challenge to his leadership from the far right. The majority for a resumption of the Stormont executive was even more humiliatingly close, even when the unionists were given a series of changes which made it painfully clear that not even the limited promises by the Patten commission of change to the local sectarian police, the Royal Ulster Constabulary, would be honoured. They were also given private assurance that the Union Jack, long a local symbol of sectarian domination, would retain its position as the official flag of the state.

Downhill

Things have got a lot worse since then. Unionist grandee and Trimble supporter Lady Hermon was defeated in a unionist selection meeting in North Down. David Burnside, ultraright reactionary and former leading figure in British Airways, won the South Antrim selection. On the ground the UFF has been gradually moving away from the agreement and giving background support to the LVF in its shooting war with the UVF. This has escalated into a war of the flags between the UDA and UVF, where each side claims a loyalist area as its own. The UDA has been winning the battle for support and its front organisation, the UFF, has been issuing blood-curdling threats to re-launch the random sectarian killing of Catholic workers.

Worst of all was the fate of efforts by the British and Trimble to solve the Drumcree issue. The idea was that the Orange order would speak to the Parades commission. Up until now they have spoken to no-

one, insisting on their undiluted sectarian privilege to walk where they like and intimidate local Catholics. Speaking to the commission directly, rather than through their legal representatives, would establish their moderation and win them swift passage. Unfortunately for Trimble the sectarians not only threw out the proposal, they also kicked out the small group of grandees who had suggested the "compromise".

The Orange right are now gearing up for war at Drumcree. It's Catch-22 for Trimble. If the far right win he's finished, but it is also hard to see how the Trimble minority could survive the infighting that would follow defeat. In a desperate attempt at a survival he recently launched a new group, "Reunion" in the hope of recruiting more representatives of the Unionist bourgeoisie into the party.

"Britishness" of the North

It's not only Trimble and the British that have a problem. The strategy of the Dublin capitalists is to support Trimble and save the agreement. To that end they acquiesced to the changes in the Patten report and secret concessions on Flags and emblems that effectively ripped up the Good Friday Agreement. Brian Cowan, the Dublin Foreign Affairs minister, signalled this immediately after the re-establishment of Stormont by saying that it was unrealistic to expect changes in the "Britishness" of the North and that not every section could expect to get what they wanted in the dispute about Flags and emblems. Even more interesting were the signals sent out by Sinn Féin. They could "not advise" nationalists to join the new RUC said Gerry Adams. In other words they saw the Good Friday agreement disappear before their eyes, but instead of walking away they agreed to become the loyal opposition, lobbying the British for some concessions in their favour.

Trimble "moderation"

One sort of difficulty is based on the pressure on the Trimble wing of unionism. A much more funda-

mental problem is posed by the fact that there is no "moderate" wing to unionism. It is after all Trimble who convinced the British that even the vacuous Paten report was too much and would have to be effectively reversed. It is the Trimble wing that would have delivered a triumphal march at Drumcree. It was the Trimble wing that stymied Sinn Fein in recent Mayoral election in Belfast by rushing from Stormont to vote for Paisleyite arch-bigot Sammy Wilson.

The British are finding a policy based on unionist moderation uncomfortable. Irish capital are finding it quite uncomfortable. Gerry Kelly, struck from behind by an RUC baton as they force yet another Orange march through nationalist areas, can stand as a metaphor for Sinn Fein in finding it most uncomfortable of all.

After stealing almost everything else in Zimbabwe - whites steal the show

(article by Dave Bangs first carried in our sister paper in Britain, Socialist Outlook)

THE RABID RACISM of the British press response to the land occupations in Zimbabwe has all but obscured the appalling injustice of white dominance over the land there.

One in four Zimbabwean adults are dying of AIDS, starved of drugs or medical care. IMF imposed cutbacks caused a 40 per cent rise in the number of mothers dying in childbirth. Between 20,000 and 40,000 minority tribespeople died in Mugabe's genocide of the Ndebele uprising of the 1980s. Yet it is the deaths of 3 white farmers that the British press mourns.

In the 15 year war of liberation from 1965-1980, it was those white farmers who were the main enemy. For those black nationalist guerrillas crossing back over the border, struggling through the bush, it was those white farmers who they fronted up to - with their Special Forces, razor wire, dogs and guns.

For all the thuggery and manipulation of the ZANU attacks on the opposition MDC, here in the ex-colonial country, we should not forget the symbolism of the use of the war veterans to lead the land occupations. The reclamation of the lands stolen by the whites is unfinished business of the war of liberation.

In a political game replete with symbolism, it is not by chance that the ZANU veteran gangs should have attacked farmers like Martin Olds, ex-fighter in the white supremacist counter-insurgency Grey Scouts, who even called his farm Compensation (how sick can you get?).

Violence

For us as socialists, the clamour over the land occupations raises many basic issues. The Land is Ours circulated a statement denouncing white domination but arguing that "none of this justifies violent seizures in today's climate".

But what is today's climate? Is the reality of class

rule fundamentally different today than it was when Irish farmers burned out British absentee landlords 80 years ago?

Whether poor landless folk in Zimbabwe are facing up to white farmers or the mandarins of Mugabe's IMF backed regime, they will find that the realities of ruling class violence everywhere confront them.

When the anarchist workers of the Spanish *latifundia* rose against their pro-fascist landlords in 1936, or when the French serfs of the medieval *jacqueries* painted the night sky red with the flames of burning chateaux, they did so only after endless years of cruel repression.

The horror of the British media at the violence of the land occupations is primarily a horror of the class violence of the dispossessed. We can argue that this violence was needlessly cruel, that it often attacked other poor black people, or that it served the purposes of the corrupt ruling party. But it is its character as a threat to white property and international investment that chills the British media.

The British connection

Many of the big media shareholders and establishment tycoons may well have more personal reasons for their horror of the killing of white farmers.

Members of the House of Lords, newspaper barons and others with big British landholdings also own huge estates in Zimbabwe. In Brighton, the Evening Argus has been giving free publicity to the notorious and frightening landlord and convicted arsonist Nicholas Hoogstraten, who has a million acre holding in Zimbabwe and close links with the Mugabe regime, going back to the 1960s when he funded ZANU in the war of liberation.

The role of the state

Time and again the media have contrasted the

'lawlessness' of the armed land occupation with the urgent need to return to the rule of law. The independence of the Zimbabwean judiciary has been praised. The need for due legal process in the takeover of land, the consent of the seller and proper compensation have been stressed.

Yet whom has this judicial independence served? Any radical land reform at the time of independence was scuppered by the pro-imperialist terms of the Lancaster House settlement, which guaranteed that no expropriation of the land should take place until at least 1990.

Of course, Mugabe should have challenged the terms of this settlement, which institutionalised a continuing political role for the white settlers and business owners and the continuance of their property rights. But to do so would have brought him squarely into confrontation with imperialism, and that he was not prepared to do.

All the main judgements of the Zimbabwean judiciary in the post Lancaster House period have supported the property rights of the whites.

The process of extracting land from them for poor rural blacks has been confined to quasi-commercial sale, mostly of marginal land, which has then tended to fall into the hands of Mugabe's cronies.

The rule of law and the independence of the judiciary have been a major block on social progress in Zimbabwe, because it means the rule of bourgeois law and the independence of the bourgeois state. Law is not neutral.

It serves the dominant class. It is Mugabe's implied threat to the independence of the bourgeois state that frightens European commentators most, not the prospect of legal, gradualist land reform - or even squatter violence.

As *The Economist* (22 April) said, "deplorable as it is, the violence ... is not, in itself, the main cause for concern. Nor are the calls for land reform... The sinister feature, rather, is the president's role in the current campaign... The president says, 'This is not a problem that can be corrected by the courts.' He thereby lends his support to mob rule."

If the wider needs of their class rule dictate, then the bourgeois state can take very radical action.

In the crisis of the Second World War, the British state took over vast tracts of private land for war production, war facilities and for military training. Stately homes were temporarily (and sometimes permanently) expropriated and private ornamental parks unceremoniously ploughed. Farmers who did not comply with local state directions were expelled from their land.

What capitalist investment must have, however, is stability. And even a whiff of the self-activity and rebellion of the poor will send such investors off and away.

The Mugabe regime and the MDC

Driven by the pressure of imperialism, the Mugabe regime is desperate. All the vicious cut-backs of the IMF-born Economic Structural Adjustment Programme, with its end to food subsidies, abolition of the minimum wage and massive rises in the price of basic goods have not recreated the high growth rates of the first years of independence.

Huge strike movements of state and industrial workers, uprisings in the townships, demonstrations and student protests have mobilised the poor.

Yet the growth of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) has taken the course so often followed by new opposition movements in the years since the fall of the Stalinist regimes discredited their version of socialism.

Although born out of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions and mobilising large sections of the poor, the MDC was soon captured by business interests.

Democratic in its rhetoric, the MDC is neo-liberal in its programme, calling for all state-owned companies to be privatised in two years, for central bank autonomy, and a 100-day IMF-style stabilisation. No wonder it has been joined by the ranks of white farmers.

A real land reform

The British government has linked the process of land reform to the re-establishment of the rule of law and an end to the compulsory purchase of white-owned land. There is concurrence with the Mugabe regime that the reform should be confined to around 1500 of the 4500 white-owned farms, and to the purchase of those "farms which are voluntarily offered for sale".

Yet despite the heavy ZANU orchestration, it is difficult to conceive that the process of land occupation does not already involve the spontaneous activity of many poor and landless folk who merely wish to take advantage of these new opportunities.

That is how it should be. Genuine land reform does not require the consent of the landlord or their compensation. It is merely a return of what has previously been stolen to its rightful owners.

It proceeds in response to local needs and results from the self-activity of the landless themselves. It would be criminal to spend a penny on compensating the expropriated farmers in an economy where the average income has dropped to £279 per year.

Of course, the continuing presence of the white ex-farm owners in the capacity of skilled farm workers (if they have such skills) would be undoubtedly useful to the farm sector. It would be fascinating to see how many stayed, in such circumstances.

And of course, the Mugabe regime should not themselves benefit from the process of redistribution.

The Land Is Ours calls for an Independent Arbitra-

tion Board fully representative of the landless people to oversee the process of reform.

It calls for British financial aid for land redistribution to be consistent with the aims of local democratic accountability and to take into account the needs of indigenous, tribal and nomadic people, and for it to be ensured that priority for the best agricultural land is given to the landless of Zimbabwe to be managed sustainably, taking into account environmental considerations.

Britain's promise of a mere additional £36 million of conditional aid to fund this process is paltry.

As George Monbiot says in the Guardian, "our debt to the people of Zimbabwe runs into billions".

The problems of Zimbabwe are not primarily the problems of local corruption and commandism. They are the legacy of more than a century of imperialism. The comfort and wealth of Britain is built on the super-exploitation of Zimbabwe and other neo-colonial states.

Our first duty is to repay our debt for the suffering of the black population of Zimbabwe.

The land is theirs!

A NEW LEFT VOICE IN THE DAIL

Ireland has a new left wing voice in the Dail after the election of Seamus Healy from the local Workers and Unemployed Action Group in the Tipperary South by-election. Healy topped the poll after nearly doubling his share of the vote from the 1997 general election and after the ruling Fianna Fail vote underwent an unprecedented collapse. It was the worst by-election result for the party in the history of the state and one of its leaders was forced to confess that the fall by over 14 percentage points was 'huge'.

Corruption had been 'at the core of this by-election' Healy insisted, and the vote took place just after yet another scandal had rocked the southern establishment. The latest affair is really the sting in the tail of events going back to 1996 when a working class woman was killed by a well connected architect, Phillip Sheedy, while the latter was drunk and driving at high speed, showing 'recklessness of an extraordinary degree.' He was sentenced to four years in jail despite one judge, Cyril Kelly, attempting to get the trial judge to realise that Sheedy was a 'graduate' from 'a good family' and would be in a position to compensate the dead woman's family.

A year later a solicitor unconnected to the case got a phone call from a senior court official telling him that judge Kelly was waiting to review the case (although only the original trial judge was supposed to be able to do this) and asking when an application for review going to be made. This intervention was made after Sheedy's sister apparently bumped into a Supreme Court judge, Hugh O'Flaherty, in the street and asked him if anything could be done about the case. O'Flaherty told the court official to get the case relisted and sure enough it came before judge Cyril Kelly, who

freed Sheedy in proceedings lasting only a few moments, in which no submissions were made by any lawyer and while the only state solicitor at the court was on a phone call.

As soon as Sheedy appeared in court the judge expressed concern for his mental health on the basis of a psychological report that didn't exist and which Kelly subsequently tried to add to the file. When the shit hit the fan a judicial inquiry into the affair was set up but not unexpectedly failed to get to the bottom of it and failed in particular to reveal collusion between Kelly and O'Flaherty. O'Flaherty refused to answer questions from the Dail about the affair and resigned rather than face the impeachment proceedings that were being forced on the government.

It might have joined the ranks of all the other scandals that have hit the headlines but for the fact that Fianna Fail, which 12 months earlier had threatened to impeach him, nominated O'Flaherty to the £147,000 a year post of vice-president of the European Investment Bank. Having failed to explain his behaviour his apologists among government ministers claimed his intervention was prompted by purely humanitarian motives. Unfortunately the tidal wave of public anger forced O'Flaherty into a radio interview where he explicitly rejected this but failed to explain himself. Public anger was further inflamed when the Tanaiste, Mary Harney, from the supposedly squeaky clean Progressive Democrat coalition partner, claimed the public would forget about it all in a matter of months.

There had been some grounds for this confidence. Until very recently opinion polls had not shown dramatic falls in the government's popularity and

even the most recent had not predicted the collapse that the by-election has produced. Commentators are now saying that this latest scandal is the last straw that will break the camel's back and that a general election is on the way in the autumn.

Unfortunately the choices that will be before Irish workers at that election will be dire. There is no state wide left alternative as existed in Tipperary South and the left victory there is the culmination of hard local work going back over fifteen years. The Workers and Unemployed Action Group has seven representatives on local authorities but is a purely local phenomenon. There is nowhere else where the left has this implantation and only a few other constituencies have a credible left candidate.

A strategy of simply copying this victory is therefore

not on. Not that this is a search for short cuts. There will be no alternative to patient work at local level but a simple concentration on this work would be a collapse into the worst sort of electoralism that would have severe effects on the politics of any left force attempting such an approach. This puts more responsibility on the new TD and the Socialist Party's existing TD, Joe Higgins, to take the lead in posing a new way forward for the left. The first task would be to build resistance to social partnership that has shackled the workers movement to the requirements of the Celtic Tiger.

So far The Socialist Party have simply used Higgins as a means to build their own organisation, with limited results, but this is an evasion of responsibility. Whether the new TDs are up to the task of staking out a new way forward for the left is the question to be posed by all socialists in Ireland today.

The ANC and the Irish Peace Process

Throughout the period of the peace process, Sinn Fein have sought to draw parallels between Ireland and the transition to democracy in South Africa. Whatever the accuracy of such parallels, there is no doubt that the example of the African National Congress (ANC) has greatly influenced Irish Republicans on both a practical and ideological level.

The most obvious example of this is the recent appointment of the ANC's Cyril Ramaphosa as one of the international inspectors to oversee the decommissioning of IRA weapons. According to a report in *The Observer*, ANC cadres were deeply involved in producing the IRA's newest initiative on arms. The key figure in this was one time commander of Umkhonto we Sizwe and former ANC cabinet minister, Sathyandranath 'Mac' Maharaj. It is reported that he held a

secret meeting with IRA leaders in Belfast in February, shortly after the British Government suspended the short-lived power-sharing executive, to find a way of breaking the decommissioning deadlock. He then reported back to his ANC colleagues, including Cyril Ramaphosa, that a formula for dealing with the arms issue was possible. That formula became clear in May when the IRA issued a statement on the inspection of its arms dumps, and Ramaphosa was subsequently appointed as one of the two international inspectors.

The role of the ANC in this process was to give credibility to the Republican leadership's major shift on decommissioning. The message to grassroots Republicans was that if the ANC supported, and was actively involved in the process of IRA decommissioning, then it

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was acceptable. After all, isn't the ANC a national liberation movement that has been successful in achieving its objectives in South Africa, and isn't Sinn Fein replicating that success in Ireland? This is the crude but effective argument that has underpinned the ANC's intervention in the Irish peace process. It ignored both the fact that the political gains of the ANC were not on offer to Sinn Fein and that even the progress in South Africa involved adopting the economic programme of the white capitalist elite.

Comparisons between with South Africa have long been a feature of Irish Republican rhetoric. In the 1980's, this emphasised the concept of common struggle and solidarity of oppressed peoples'. However, in the 1990's, with the dramatic changes in South Africa, this shifted to the concept of negotiations and political settlement. When comparing Ireland with South Africa, Sinn Fein leaders talked not of struggle but of historic compromise. In this period, one of Gerry Adams's most common calls was for unionism to produce a *de Klerk*.

Yet, it was not the case that the emphasis on South Africa as a model for Ireland is coming only from Sinn Fein. The ANC has also pushed this concept, and has given active support to the Republican leadership's peace strategy. The earliest example of this was Nelson Mandela's first visit to Ireland in July 1990, when he called for direct negotiations between the British government and the IRA. In 1994, Thabo Mbeki offered to put South Africa's experience at the disposal of the parties in Northern Ireland.

Throughout the period of the peace process there have been numerous visits to South Africa by Irish politicians. In June 1995, Gerry Adams visited South Africa and held talks with Nelson Mandela. One of the most important meetings held in South Africa was the Arniston Conference in 1997. Hosted by the Ministry of Constitutional Development, it brought all the Northern Ireland parties together to meet with the politicians who were instrumental in bringing about South Africa's transition. This conference was also addressed by Nelson Mandela, who shared his thoughts with the parties on the challenges of negotiating political settlements.

ANC influence on the peace process has been exerted most powerfully when its cadres have visited

Ireland to give support to the Sinn Fein leadership. The most obvious example of this was its role in winning grassroots Republican support for the Belfast Agreement. In April 1998, an ANC delegation visited Dublin and Belfast at the request of Sinn Fein. This delegation included the Constitutional Affairs Minister, Valli Moosa, Provincial Premier, Matthews Phosa, and Cyril Ramaphosa. The fact that the ANC had sent three of its top cadres shows how seriously it was taking its intervention.

Although it met a number of political parties, the important meetings were with Republicans. The most significant of these was a meeting with IRA prisoners at the Maze, which was conducted jointly by Sinn Fein's Gerry Kelly and the ANC's Cyril Ramaphosa. The ANC cadres also joined Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness in the Ulster Hall in Belfast to address a republican rally, at which they strongly endorsed the Belfast Agreement. Interventions by the ANC have continued in the last couple of years, with its cadres attending and speaking at critical Sinn Fein conferences. The appointment of Cyril Ramaphosa as an arms inspector is merely the culmination of the ANC's long-running involvement in the Irish peace process. Ramaphosa's conversion from trade union militant to banker was never mentioned.

Although the ANC may not have the political power of Bill Clinton or the financial muscle of Irish America, it has the 'struggle' credentials which carry weight with Republican activists. On an ideological level, it is seen as a national liberation movement that has successfully achieved its objectives, and as model that can be emulated by Sinn Fein. On a practical level, its endorsement of the Belfast Agreement and its involvement in IRA decommissioning, makes the unpalatable appear acceptable. The intervention of the ANC has greatly aided the Sinn Fein leadership in winning over its supporters to the peace process.

PUBLICATIONS

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Support and distribute the socialist discussion journal "Red Banner".

We also contribute to "Fourthwrite", A journal of debate open to republicans and socialists.

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The pathetic, the joke and the insult

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When the new social partnership deal was negotiated workers were promised 5.5% in each of the next two years while inflation was already running at nearly 4%, and this didn't count mortgage repayments. Now inflation is at 5.1% and Bertie Ahern says it could rise to over 6%. Those opposed to the deal said it was rotten and now we have been proved correct.

Under pressure from its members ICTU made vague noises about seeking renegotiation unless something was done about inflation. Now they have welcomed the government's latest response, but what exactly have they welcomed?

The Pathetic

We are promised that there will be no increases in charges from public bodies for the rest of the year, but CIE has already got its price rise and prices in the ESB are falling! Big deal!

The Joke

Apparently the price of a pint is to be frozen but we have been informed that it is very difficult to prove what the price of a pint is on any particular day and make sure it doesn't increase. Replies on a postcard please to Bertie Ahern if you can work out how much it costs you when you buy your next drink and two weeks in a holiday home in France used by Mary Harney and Charlie McCreevy if you can spot when it increases. But, if this proves all too much we have been told that the new liquor bill will extend opening hours so we

can be overcharged for longer.

The Insult

The office of the Director of Consumer Affairs will recruit more staff and increase advertising 'to encourage greater price awareness among consumers.' Having decided to do next to nothing about controlling prices the government wants us to be more aware of exactly how much we are being fleeced! According to all the experts 'price controls are a very blunt weapon' and not easy to enforce. Funny how they have no trouble calling for controlling the price of labour.

The response to this new confidence trick by ICTU leaders has been to particularly welcome the call for social responsibility by the government from the various trade organisations which profit from price rises! Once again hollow warnings by ICTU have been ignored and the latest is the threat to seek renegotiation of the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness come the next budget.

Everyone should support the call for a special delegate conference of ICTU to review participation in this rotten deal. The demand should not be for renegotiation but for complete rejection and creation of an effective strategy to defend workers living standards. The real corruption scandal is not the degeneracy and dishonesty of the rich and powerful but that we are supposed to be in partnership with them!

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