

SOCIALIST VOICE

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A pincer movement

THE present impasse in the peace process is due in the main to the manoeuvring and manipulation by the British Government and the security apparatus within the British military. Whether “Steak Knife” is or is not the person whom the press has named is important only in so far as it has struck another blow against the leadership of the republican movement. It is part of a continuing strategy to weaken and divide the republican movement and isolate Sinn Féin so that it will carry the blame for the impasse.

The hope and aspirations that the Good Friday Agreement brought to the people of Ireland have come to a standstill. It is clear to everyone except those blinded by unionism that David Trimble’s stalling and half-hearted commitment to the agreement have led to the present impasse. He has always had a half-in, half-out approach, depending on the external pressures placed on him.

Sinn Féin has been manoeuvred into a position of being the fall guy over the question whether the war is over or not by the British, American and Irish governments. It is clear that the political bar was set so high as to inflict the maximum political damage on Sinn Féin and to ensure the maximum political return for David Trimble.

The political strategy being pursued at present by both the British and Irish governments is to save David Trimble and the UUP. But the saving of Trimble is not possible so long as he has this half-hearted approach to the Good Friday Agreement. It is now most likely that the DUP will be the largest unionist party when the election to the Assembly is called. The small unionist parties are collapsing into the DUP. Nearly half the candidates elected to stand for the UUP are anti-agreement candidates. The

Alliance vote is collapsing and will most probably go to the UUP, with some to the SDLP. It is still not clear whether the PUP or the Women’s Coalition will survive, as the political environment becomes polarised and people vote to maximise the voting strength of each side. It is also possible that the two unionist parties, UUP and DUP, could emerge as the two largest parties. Where will this leave the d’Hondt voting mechanism and cross-community support for positions in the Executive?

The atmosphere of compromise that pervaded the political situation at the time of the Good Friday Agreement seems to have disappeared for the moment. The only clear outcome is that the IRA has moved a long way towards saying that the war is over and that politics are primary for the republican movement. A reflection of this change was the speech by Gerry Adams in which he outlined the response to the three questions posed by Blair. Sinn Féin was giving the political lead and direction and in many ways reflects the dominance of political forces within the republican movement.

Unfortunately, republicans should have stated long before now that the war is over for this generation, though they could not speak for future generations. Instead they have been ►

“ Unionism is likewise a discredited creed. The effect of the Unionist policy in Ireland has been to weaken the secular forces of the country and to increase the power and influence of clericalism in every department of secular life . . . We do not trust either of the English parties on any of the questions that divide Ireland, and we are satisfied that both Liberals and Tories will continue in the future, as they have done in the past, to play off Irish Protestants and Nationalists against each other, to the prejudice of our country.”—**Manifesto of the Independent Orange Order**, 14 July 1905.

► forced, or appear to have been forced, by the British and other governments into a position of declaring it over. If Joe Cahill can say they won the war and now they must win the peace, then he must believe the war is over. It appears to republican supporters that Sinn Féin has bowed to British pressure, something they have not done in thirty years of struggle. This all comes on top of the “Steak Knife” revelations—all aimed at demoralising Sinn Féin and the republican grass roots.

It is clear as never before that if Sinn Féin is to make political advances in the whole of Ireland, and in particular its most immediate target to become the largest nationalist party in the North, then the IRA is a millstone around its political neck. The recent comment by Ahern in which he was critical of Trimble is an attempt at political damage limitation, as they have clearly misjudged the mood of the people in the North. In public they have disagreed with the suspension of the Assembly elections, but in private they no doubt support the British position.

The political settlement hammered out that resulted in the Good Friday Agreement should continue to be supported. The relationships outlined and inherent in the agreement are the only real way forward. It is ironic that five years later the full agreement has still not been delivered on by the British government. In conflict resolution situations, all sides need to see that everyone else is holding up their end and delivering as promised. Double-speak only spreads confusion and reluctance to move forward. The only realistic demand at this time is to support the calls for

the complete and immediate implementation of the agreement by all involved. The struggle for democracy is still the Achilles heel of both unionism and British imperialism.

What the suspension of the election has exposed is the anti-democratic fissure at the heart of the Good Friday Agreement. The real power lies with the British Secretary of State; thereby the British government has the final say—very much the powers of the Government of Ireland Act in a new form. David Trimble will never move forward as long as he can rely on the British government to bail him out of a crisis of his own making. Unionists will never accept that they must move and change as long as they feel they have the ear of the British. The unionist veto is not gone, though it has been weakened by the agreement.

To weaken Britain’s ability to arbitrarily take political decisions over the heads of the Irish government, there are a number of areas that need to be strengthened in the Good Friday Agreement.

- **First is a reduction in the powers of the Secretary of State. His role should be reduced to that of a consultative position on behalf of the British government.**

- **Cross-border bodies should have more autonomy and should be suspended or restricted only with the consent of the Irish government.**

- **The development and strengthening of the all-Ireland nature of the political and economic co-operation inherent in the Good Friday Agreement should be supported.**

There’s no such thing as democratic imperialism

THE debate about a proposed new constitution for the European Union and the attitude adopted by a number of EU member-states has exposed deep division both here in Ireland and within the ruling elites in Europe. The US aggression against Iraq has opened up deep fissures between the United States and the leading countries in the European Union. It has also heightened contradictions over global demands, positions, and interests.

It has always been our view that the economic, political and military interests of the European Union would not always coincide with and may in fact clash with the strategic interest of the United States. The new constitutional treaty now being debated, which will come before the peoples of the European Union next year, is being driven by a new impetus from France and

Germany mainly. The belief is that some form of benign, social-democratic imperialism can be constructed to combat rogue, aggressive, free-market imperialism.

It is also conceivable that the United States will use the new members, mainly in eastern Europe, to slow up or even prevent the emergence of the centralised European military alliance, as it successfully used them before, during and after the invasion of Iraq.

It is in the best interests of Irish democracy that we should continue to oppose the leaking of decision-making processes from democratic national institutions to the European Union. Democratic opinion should oppose the new constitutional treaty, which will further erode Irish democracy and democratic accountability.

Privatisation is not the answer

DESPITE the adoption of the new partnership agreement and the restriction it places on workers' wages, and thereby their living standards, the economy is still showing signs of recession and economic downturn. Though this new agreement will run only for eighteen months, the leadership of the trade union movement has conceded a very dangerous principle: that of binding arbitration in the settling of pay disputes.

They will become in effect the policing and enforcing arm of the agreement—a situation that we, as well as others who have opposed social partnership, predicted would happen. We now have a whole generation of trade union leaders, as well as a whole generation of workers, who have known nothing but social partnership. Apathy towards and within unions is on the increase. If you took out the workers organised in the public sector, the membership in the private sector is small and shrinking.

As the Government continues to cut back on public spending, and the cuts bite deeper in health, education, and social welfare, the drive towards privatisation will only intensify. Government income shortfalls will be met by the sale of public assets.

It is also clear that sections of public-sector workers are prepared to defend their jobs and keep public assets public. A very positive development is the recent vote and strike action by CIE workers against privatisation, and Aer Rianta workers balloting on strike action if their company is broken up ready for privatisation. Everyone should support the call of the group of unions for a vote for strike action to prevent the break-up and sale of this very successful state-sponsored company.

We have very contradictory developments taking place. On the one hand, workers will support calls for the retention of certain companies within the state sector, and on the other hand groups of state workers are willing to go along with sell-offs provided the ASOP gives them the right deal. It is a reflection of working people's understanding of the processes going on in society that workers have supported and continue to support a process and a leadership that has failed and is failing to deliver what it promises. They continue to vote in large numbers for parties that clearly have little or no interest in the needs and demands of working people.

Privatisation is not about creating greater efficiencies and value for money but has more to do with enriching the minority in our society. It has been shown right across the board that the

majority of people do not benefit from privatisation. In Britain a very small segment of society have reaped huge fortunes from the sale of public assets; the general public have picked up the tab in higher prices for services like water, transport, education, and health. Unfortunately many do believe the nonsense that ownership does not matter, that only efficiency and service count. Well, most people believed that service charges were a minor inconvenience and not worth the hassle. Now the service charges continue to rise. A lot of these services have been and will be privatised. Charges will keep going up until it becomes very profitable for private companies to move in. Hasn't the ESB been criticised by private electricity producers for selling electricity too cheaply? People should take heed of what these people are saying. At least with a public service you can force politicians to respond. How do you get a private monopoly to respond—turn off your electricity in protest?

There are wider issues that the labour movement should also be aware of. We must continue to win the argument about why people should join a union or vote differently, that they can make a difference in how society is run, to establish new priorities for society, to offer a renewed vision of a different Ireland, that the endless consumption of consumer capitalism may meet short-term material needs but in the long term is devoid of any humanity or social values, of the basis for a more humane, just and secure world.

Join the struggle for socialism. Join the Communist Party.

Please send me information about membership of the Communist Party of Ireland.

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Solidarity with Cuba

Communiqué of solidarity by participants in the international conference “Karl Marx and the Challenges of the Twenty-first Century,” 8 May 2003

HUMANITY has always dreamt of a better world, one marked by equality, solidarity, and the ability of all people to survive and to develop their human potential. Today we are living through a nightmare, in a new era of world domination: that of armed neo-liberalism.

The series of interventionist wars, from Yugoslavia to Iraq, traversing Afghanistan, constitutes what seems to be only the beginning of a longer process.

But fortunately the recent and immense protest against the war and in favour of peace has demonstrated that the people of the world, including significant sectors of the North American people, reject this nightmare.

This project is led by a group of leaders from the United States who seek not only to control the resources of the planet but also to establish a universal juridical, political and moral order under their cynical hegemony.

These leaders are militarising the world and are initiating what they call cynically “preventive wars.” They do not hesitate to violate international rights and to generalise the inhuman practices inaugurated at Guantánamo. Further, they do not hesitate to reduce the civil liberties of their own citizens and to destroy the democratic tradition of their own people.

They do not hesitate to adopt attitudes and actions with hegemonic and racist characteristics.

Cuba is at the doorway of the empire, and it fears, not without reason, that it can be one of the next targets. There are many signs that support this fear: the growing media offensive, the accusations of terrorism, diverse types of provocations, an increase in the extent of the blockade, the financial support for opposition and for subversion, the announcement of future attacks on the country by government spokesmen.

Today Cuba is trying to realise those dreams of a better world. No-one knows better than the Cuban people themselves how far they have to go yet to realise their dreams. But the political and social achievements of the revolution, the result of their socialist project, demonstrate that dreams can be realised. Those achievements and hopes for a better world are threatened by a power based in inequality, force, and war.

Despite our pain about the recent use of capital punishment in Cuba, a pain we know is shared by the Cuban government itself, we understand that we must fight against the nightmare that threatens Cuba and all our dreams for a better world. We denounce the current process of violence on the part of the US government. We oppose turning Cuba into another Iraq, and we reaffirm our solidarity with the Cuban people and their revolution.

For a free, united, federal, democratic Iraq

**Joint statement by Iraqi Communist Party
and Communist Party of Ireland**

After a successful speaking tour of Ireland by Dr Ghanem Hamdun, a representative of the Iraqi Communist Party, the two parties issued the following statement:

The Communist Parties of both Iraq and Ireland, who stood side by side against the war on Iraq as well as the dictatorial regime, called for an end to the military occupation by the United States, Britain and other foreign armed forces in Iraq as soon as possible. In the meantime, they hold these forces responsible for violation of the Geneva Conventions, which has led to the further loss of life and property of civilians in addition to the casualties and devastation of the war.

Both parties called for a central role for the United Nations in the process of stabilisation and transition towards democracy, guaranteeing Iraqi people the democratic right to decide their own future free of outside interference.

Both parties highly appreciated the unprecedented movement around the globe to avert the war. Although it did not succeed in stopping this war, it did have an impact on how the war was conducted, thereby saving the lives of additional thousands of ordinary Iraqis. It is important that world public opinion remains focused to ensure that the wishes of the Iraqi people are paramount and that the governments of the United States and Britain fully live up to their declared commitments about democracy and a speedy end of military occupation.

Both parties supported the call for the building of a free, united, federal, democratic Iraq. They agreed to continue to co-operate and strengthen the links between them.

*Iraqi Communist Party
Communist Party of Ireland*

21 April 2003



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