

UNIONISM / DECOMMISSIONING

NIWC
Some points
on decomm.
20/7/97.

1. Everyone (in their right mind) wants de-commissioning.
 - Question is : how best to secure it.
 - Everyone knows it's impossible to secure in the absence of all-inclusive talks about the political future of NI.
 - Every political party on these islands (& beyond) is prepared to accept & work with this reality, with the exception of "mainstream" unionist parties.
2. So why is a "hang-up" with de-commissioning (as a precondition) a specifically unionist concern?
 - i, In truth, there's nothing intrinsically unionist in principle with this hang-up
 - ii, The impression is that it's a contrivance to avoid ever having to deal with Sinn Féin.
3. That's not how it's put, of course. It's dressed up as an explicitly democratic concern.
 - i, Which means unionists (unlike all other British/Irish political parties - including SDLP, Alliance, W.C, etc) are the sole guardians of democracy.
 - ii, Political practice during the history of NI makes this a most unbelievable claim.
4. There are 3 issues of particular relevance here which must be stressed if we're to cut through the nauseating posturing unionist politicians are indulging in.

4 First there's the issue of Consistency. Without doubt, unionists are inconsistent in their refusal to deal with parties associated with paramilitary organisations.

- They have ^{dealt} & continue to deal with loyalists
- It's only republicans they won't deal with.
- Therefore, the "decommissioning" issue isn't anything like as clear as they pretend
- Waters are very muddy here.

ii, Second there's the issue of Clean Hands. It's not just

● republicans & loyalist paramilitaries who've sullied democracy in NI. "Respectable" unionism has sullied too:

- NI only exists because of unionist guns a threat of force: guns never decommissioned by the way.
- Vanguard, Ulster Resistance, Third Force weren't just water-pistol clubs were they? Yet "respectable" unionists were involved.
- Even if with Third Force the weapons were "legally held", the threat was they'd be put to illegal purposes.
- Inflammatory political language also has to be noted as does a willingness to organise mass protests with huge violent potential when things aren't perceived to be going unionism's way (Remember Drumcree 1996?)
- So cut the hypocritical blether: Mainstream Unionism doesn't have "clean hands".

iii) Third, there's the issue of the context of Democracy, 3,

- Abstract democratic ideals can't simply be invoked to settle all that requires settling about decommissioning.
- Because democratic ideals only work in contexts.
- And context of NI is an abnormal, deeply divided society.
- Violence is part of our abnormality & can't be discussed or solved independently of it.
- - So: weapons are a reflection of our divisions & they won't be taken out of politics in the absence of trust.
- Trust can't be achieved by fiat, but only by political dialogue / substantive negotiations about our collective future in which everyone's voice is heard, allowed to be heard & listened to.
- - To isolate decommissioning from this is absurd; & everyone knows it.
- The challenge is to create the conditions which make our ceasefires permanent : & that means engaging in all-inclusive politics.
- It's blatantly irresponsible & disingenuous to pretend there's any other way.

MAKING OUR SOCIETY WORK SHOULD BE THE PRIORITY, NOT OSTRACISING THOSE WE DON'T APPROVE OF.