

FULL TEXT OF STATEMENT FROM GERRY ADAMS MP

Since Peter Brooke was appointed by the British Prime Minister as the British minister responsible for the six counties he has made three major (and sometimes contradictory) statements in terms which are clearly aimed at Irish republicans. His last statement has been represented by sections of the media as a major shift in British policy. No doubt this point will also be made by the SDLP leadership at their party's conference this weekend.

Republicans, and everyone else, must examine Mr Brooke's remarks carefully. Are they indeed a major shift in policy? Are they merely part of a clever propaganda exercise? Is there a change in emphasis? The answers to these questions may not emerge for some time. What is clear, however, is that Mr Brooke wants to be part of a public debate on the question of partition, and the claim of his government to ownership of a part of Ireland. Unfortunately, he wants such a debate on his own censored terms and he excludes the very people, (many of us with an Irish mandate which he lacks) to whom, we are told, he wishes to reach out. Those who will argue in support of Mr Brooke's position should remaind him of this fact.

Mr Brooke either hints or points clearly to some future talks with Sinn Fein. Whenever he has been asked by us in the past to spell out his scenario for such talks he has fudged the issue. His refusal to talk to our party on the grounds stated by him, given his own involvement as head of the political wing of British army in Ireland is clearly untenable. His willingness to talk to other Irish parties, especially unionist delegations which include many incitees to violence, and other non-unionist supporters of British crown forces, expose his refusal to talk to Sinn Fein as a propaganda position against our supporters.

His assertions of goodwill towards those we represent will be dismissed quite correctly by them as patronising propagandistic platitudes which bear no reality to the life they are forced to live under British rule. Sinn Fein's position on armed struggle is quite clear. We believe that Irish people have the right to use armed struggle in the context of seeking Irish independence and in the conditions of British occupation in the six counties. Whether Irish people wish to exercise that right is a matter for them. That is our opinion. It is also a matter of political reality and a fact of life. It will be so, unfortunately, until the conditions which create it are changed. Sinn Fein wishes to change those conditions. We want a total demilitarisation of the situation and an end to armed conflict of all kinds in our country.

Sinn Fein offer Peter Brooke talks at any time and without any preconditions as an indication of our party's willingness to assist a process towards peace and justice in our country.

In the meantime, some of the points contained in Peter Brooke's statement need to be challenged, for example, the question of partition.

Partition - a denial of democracy.

Partition was never submitted to the Irish people for ratification. Its imposition represented and continues to represent a fundamental denial of democracy - a denial to the Irish people of the freedom to exercise their rights to national self-determination.

The pretext for partition - the wishes of a national minority to maintain British rule - holds no validity, morally or in international law, against the express wishes of the vast majority of the Irish people.

Partition perpetuates the British government's denial of the Irish people's right to self-determination. Because it is fundamentally undemocratic and repressive, partition perpetuates the cycle of oppression/domination/resistance/oppression.

The anti-democratic nature of the six county state itself precludes any solution within its confines.

Partition, imposed by Britain against the wishes of the Irish people and through force of arms, was never intended to resolve the underlying causes of the conflict in this country.

It has not and cannot resolve the underlying causes of conflict in this country.

So it is that 67 years after the partition of Ireland the conflict and political instability remain as deep rooted as ever.

The effect of partition was and is to erect a gerrymandered barrier against Irish re-unification in perpetuity. It flaunts (sic) all the accepted concepts of democracy. As such it is basically flawed. The inequities which the six county state has spawned, and the political violence from the oppressed which they provoke, are the inevitable consequence of its very existence. Inequality and oppression, and the resulting resistance, are the price which has had to be paid for a state founded on a system of political, social and economic privilege.

Partition also affects the 26 county state. It affects all of Ireland. It also affects the relationship between the people of Ireland and the people of Britain. These relationships can only be normalised in the context of Irish national self-determination.

The IRA has stated clearly on a number of occasions that for republicans, armed struggle is not a dogma. The IRA says that armed struggle is a method of political struggle adopted reluctantly and as a last resort in the absence of any viable alternative. For nationalists locked into a hostile and repressive sectarian state, systematically discriminated against, denied their rights as citizens, their cultural identity and dignity, abandoned by the Dublin government, subservience or armed struggle become the

only options. Political violence from all quarters stemming from the repressive and undemocratic nature of partition has been a feature of this state since its inception. The onus is on those who claim that there is an alternative to the IRA's armed struggle to prove that this is the case. Recent British claims that they are no longer politically committed to the Union provide an opportunity for those who argue such a position to test its validity.

### National Self-Determination

Self determination is a nation's exercise of the political freedom to determine its own economic, social and cultural development, without external influence and without partial or total disruption of the national unity or territorial integrity.

Ireland today clearly does not meet those criteria nor does the pretext for partition hold good against those criteria.

In the words of Sean McBride, winner of the Nobel and Lenin Peace prizes:

"Ireland's right to sovereignty, independence and unity are inalienable and indefeasible. It is for the Irish people as a whole to determine the future status of Ireland. Neither Britain nor a small minority selected by Britain has any right to partition the ancient island of Ireland, nor to determine its future as a sovereign nation".

The right of the Irish people, as a whole, to self-determination is supported by universally recognised principles of international law.

On the basis of these principles Sinn Fein holds the realisation of the right of the Irish people to national self-determination as our primary political objective, and we identify its denial as the major source of conflict in this country today.

The people of Ireland have never been permitted to exercise their right to national self-determination. British government policy has consistently denied the exercise of that right to the Irish people. The British government veto - explicit in that policy and reiterated by Peter Brooke continues today.

British government policy has sustained a division of political allegiance in Ireland - the national allegiance of a clear majority and the unionist allegiance of a national minority.

British government policy - manifest in partition - upholds the unionist political allegiance of a national minority against the national and democratic rights of the majority.

When a people are divided in political allegiance the democratic principle is that majority rights should prevail; the more so when such fundamentals as national rights are in question.

It is the British government's refusal to recognise Irish national rights - nationhood, integrity of the national territory, national

independence and sovereignty - which has caused the problem and maintains it.

The unionist veto, grafted by the British government onto its deliberate fracture of Irish national unity, has become the cornerstone of the British government's rationale for its continuing exercise of sovereignty over the six counties as the major reason for its continuing presence in Ireland.

Today's unionists represent some 20% of the Irish nation. They are a national minority; a significant minority but a minority nevertheless. To bestow the power of veto over national independence and sovereignty on a national minority is in direct contravention of the principle of self-determination

### Unionist Rights

Sinn Fein recognises that unionists have democratic rights which not only can be upheld but must be upheld in an independent Ireland. That is a democratic norm.

Moreover we would argue that those democratic rights would be greatly strengthened in an independent Ireland.

As unionists have frequently pointed out, most emphatically since the signing of the Hillsborough Treaty, the British government has, where it sees fit, chosen to ignore the wishes of the unionist population. This concept of consent is one applied selectively, and rarely, by the British Government.

Because, under British rule, the political status of the six counties is exactly what the unionists say it is - an off-shore "province" which is an integral part of the United Kingdom - its people cannot hope to have any significant say in the direction of their own affairs until they choose to exercise their influence within an all-Ireland system.

All argument which is based on a reference to the "wishes of the democratic majority" in the six counties is, therefore, based on a false premise, since it takes a stand in defence of something which they do not have anyway. And apart from its dependence on the illusion of self-determination, it tends - as all arguments based on false promises are wont to do - to lead in its practical application to contradiction and ambiguity.

Mechanistic democratic logic, applied rigidly to a situation such as that existing in the six counties, gets itself tied up in knots, basically because the problem is falsely presented from the start and because the real nature of the problem is over-looked.

The real problem can in no way be defined as one of forcing the Protestant population "into" anything; the real problem is one of forcing Britain to get out - and to grant democratic self-determination to all the Irish people without reference to their religion. If that democratic assembly, the Westminster

Parliament, should decide that it was its democratic wish to withdraw from Ireland, there is no democratic reason why it should not do so. Peter Brooke knows this as well as I do.

The argument that the democratic wishes of the unionist population, a national minority, are paramount and that the concept of coercion is, in itself, undemocratic is fraught with similar contradictions, ignoring, not least, the fact that 600,000 nationalists were forcibly coerced into the six county state. Where is the principle of democratic consent for northern nationalists.

The argument that the consent of this national minority elevated into a majority within an undemocratic, artificially created state, is necessary before any constitutional change can occur is a nonsense which the British have ignored when it has suited them to do so. More significantly it ignores the moral argument that the state which resulted from the creation of this artificial minority was inherently oppressive and violent. It ignores the fact that the present constitutional arrangements based on this false premise of "democratic consent" have led to decades of bloody war, and that all attempts to find a solution within these confines have failed. It ignores the reality in British and international law that the British government, if it wishes, can legislate itself out of Ireland and the unionists into a new situation.

Sinn Fein has long accepted that northern Protestants have fears about their civil and religious liberties and we have consistently insisted that these liberties must be guaranteed and protected. We offer Unionists a settlement based on their uniting with the rest of the Irish people and ending sectarianism.

Sinn Fein seeks a new constitution of Ireland which would include written guarantees for those presently constituted as "loyalists".

Our search for peace has to rise above the consequences of imperialist rule if the post-partition independent Ireland is indeed to be based on the unity of Catholic, Protestant and dissenter. We have no desire to turn back the pages of history, or to dispossess the loyalists and foolishly attempt to reverse the Plantation. We seek a settlement based on their throwing in their lot with the rest of the Irish people and the end of sectarianism.

#### British Neutrality?

The exercise of the right to national self-determination in practice involves, primarily, the acceptance of Irish national rights by the British government; in effect the ending of current British government policy and the removal of the veto that that government has arbitrarily imposed on the exercise by the Irish people of their national and democratic rights.

Without such a fundamental policy change by the British government it is difficult to conceive of unionists considering having to come to a consensus with nationalists. Indeed a guarantee of the maintenance of partition in perpetuity leaves unionists with no

reason to seek a consensus. Within the context of such a policy change Sinn Fein believes that agreement between people of the nationalist and unionist traditions is not only desirable but achievable.

We believe that consent can be obtained if the relevant parties and particularly the two governments concerned demonstrate the political will to achieve it.

As a first step both governments must establish Irish reunification as a policy objective. Will Peter Brooke advocate this? Will he advocate an end to the Union?

It is obviously desirable that everything reasonable should be done to obtain the consent of a majority in the North to the constitutional, political and financial steps necessary for bringing about the end of partition. This can best be achieved when the British government has established Irish re-unification as a firm policy objective.

If, as Peter Brooke implies, the British government is no longer bound by ideological or strategic considerations to the Union and the sole factor involved is unionist consent, then an opportunity to advance the situation clearly exists. Mr Brooke's claim to be that his government is politically neutral is contradicted by its pro-active defence of the union and partition. But, nevertheless his claim is a challenging one which deserves to be tested. If the British position is indeed one of political neutrality then they are open to persuasion that they should shift the massive resources and energy presently being expended in defence of partition and in attempts to find a partitionist arrangement and direct them instead towards some alternative arrangements. Given that the present partitionist arrangements have abjectly failed to deliver peace or stability, and given that the British have claimed to be politically neutral, then they must be open to persuasion that peace and stability can be secured in the context of Irish re-unification. Sinn Fein is willing, without pre-conditions or rigidity to enter into immediate dialogue in this context. Peter Brooke in his 100 day statement accepted the inevitability of talks with Sinn Fein. We have a democratic mandate to represent the views of our electorate. Why then postpone the inevitable, more so, when to do so perpetuates an unnecessary and bitter conflict.

But it is not only the responsibility of republicans to persuade the British of the logic of such a policy shift towards Irish national self-determination. Irish re-unification is the declared aim of all Irish political parties except the Unionists. It is therefore the duty of the representatives of Irish nationalists, north and south, particularly those who condemn armed struggle, to concentrate their considerable resources into such a process of persuasion.

Given British assertions of neutrality, the representatives of Irish nationalism, and in particular the Dublin government and the SDLP, are duty bound to advance the argument that the best way to

"see agreement among the people who share the island of Ireland" is for Britain to adopt a policy of ending the union in the context of a united Ireland and they should then actively seek agreement among the people who share the island of Ireland on how this can be accomplished.

Once this is the British objective the strategy (or strategies) for achieving it should be a matter of formal agreement between the representatives of the Irish people and the British government. The search for such agreement must of course involve northern Protestants and every effort must be made to get their agreement and involvement in the constitutional, financial and political arrangements needed to replace partition. Furthermore, regardless of their attitude to such arrangements, their rights must be guaranteed in whatever arrangements emerge from such deliberations.

In other words once the above objective becomes British policy and while the democratic policy contained in it is continued throughout its implementation, there must be due provision for the rights of northern Protestants and every effort made to win their consent. By adopting such a policy the British would be joining the persuaders.

It is also the context in which republicans and democrats will judge Mr Brooke's remarks and the comments of those who attempt to build a case against Sinn Fein based upon his statements. Surely if Britain now has no self interest in being in Ireland as Mr Brooke claims the British government must have an open mind on the future of Ireland and be open to such a proposition. In this proposition we are restating the democratic position that neither the British or the Unionists have a right to maintain partition and the union. We would also assert that the consent of northern Protestants, like any other interested group, is desirable on the constitutional, financial and political arrangements needed to end partition. It is a responsibility of all Irish democrats to guarantee that all Irish people are treated equally.

The fundamental republican and nationalist position has always been to get Britain to abandon its partitionist policy and adopt instead a policy of withdrawing from Ireland and handing over sovereignty to an all-Ireland government whose selection would be a democratic matter for the Irish people. This position is based on the principle of national self-determination and democracy.