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INTRODUCTION :

The decision of the British Government to prepare a disengagement from the Six Counties of Ireland over which they still claim control is something that can be based on several considerations. These can include anything from a failure to achieve a military victory over the Irish Republican Army; pressure-- economic , moral, political etc. -- on the British mainland to be rid of the mess ; considerations related to the new relationships between peoples in Western Europe, and a British desire to play a constructive role in the politics of Europe; a realisation that the declaration of intent to withdraw is essential for creative political evolution in the North at present; an acceptance that the type of government which prevailed in Northern Ireland over the past fifty years can only lead in the end to the same conclusion as the general British colonial experience-- or a pure and simple decision of the part of HMG to be rid of the burden , the embarrassment and the cost of running the area in the way that we have seen over the past 5-6 years.

The Republican Movement is not particularly concerned about the factors, or combinations of factors which will ensure a British withdrawal. It would like to hope that at this late stage HMG will have seen the errors of her past performance and is motivated by a genuine desire to settle the age-old " Irish Question" permanently and justly and in a way that can benefit both islands and lead to a new friendly and fruitful relationship between them as equals in the world community. In short Republicans would like to think that moral considerations are entering into the arena at long last and that the British decision to go home would be taken because it is manifestly the right thing to do. But if that is not the case , and if there are other reasons for disengagement , then Republicans accept that these will do in the circumstances. Two points however should be clear from the outset.

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i.) The disengagement must , in the ultimate , be total , so that future relations between the two countries will be similar to that which exists between normal sovereign states. Half-measures, "special arrangements " partial withdrawal or disengagements in certain spheres of influence only are not acceptable. This is the only basis on which a new and friendly relationship, as equals, can be built to the mutual advantage of both. It should also be clearly understood from this that while the Irish Republican Movement believes in an independent line in international affairs and sees its aims and objectives in the context of emerging nations throughout the entire post-colonial world , it does not intend to compromise Irish national sovereignty in the interests of any international power-game or ideological war. In that context it is prepared to actively support a free and independent Ireland which would be militarily neutral but which would also be able to assure Britain that its territory or resources would not be used in a way that would be detrimental to legitimate British interests. On the contrary , as soon as Ireland's right to freedom , unity and independence is recognised by HMG the Republican Movement will concentrate all its efforts on reconstruction and reconciliation , including the active promotion of friendly relations with our nearest neighbour.

ii) The decision to withdraw is and must be essentially a political decision. Complex legal , financial and other matters remain to be resolved. Military considerations , like other factors, will have to be worked out. But all this must take place in the context of a clear political decision , whatever the reasons or motivation for that decision, to change the present policy towards Ireland and to substitute a policy of ultimate disengagement.

If this is accepted , then the details requested in the list of questions submitted to the Republican Movement are basically a matter for experts and Civil servants. Some of the issues are complex. The projections would be influenced by the nature of the withdrawal, the time-scale , the type of Ireland that would evolve in that context, etc. Indeed some of the questions are so detailed that they resemble a theoretic economics examination paper more than a real-life political working document.

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However, we assume that the authors are genuine and sincere in their probing of the way we envisage future evolution, and while it is not possible to work out detailed answers to the specific questions at this stage, it is possible to sketch some of the basic principles and assumptions on which such projections might be undertaken at a later date.

SINN FÉIN'S APPROACH :

Basic to the Sinn Féin position is the belief that as soon as HMG accepts the futility of a military solution to the Irish Question and the right to Irish independence is recognised, by the abandonment of the partition arrangement (and the partitionist assemblies in which Republicans can never participate) as a basis for a permanent settlement, Sinn Féin will actively enter the new political arena, North and South, and struggle by political means for the achievement of its policies and its own vision of Éire Nua ... a New Ireland. Sinn Féin also recognises of course, that it cannot hope to get the support of all sections and that the Irish people, having won the right of self-determination, may decide in a democratic fashion to adopt some policies and programmes which might not be in keeping with our ideal of a Federal Ireland with Democratic Socialism. But this consideration does not mean that Sinn Féin will abandon its efforts to get its own policies on social, cultural and economic matters accepted through the ballot box. Nor does it mean that we must wait for the achievement of Ireland's independence before we expound the broad outline of such policies. These policies are already published and are being fought for by our elected representatives at County Council and other levels of devolved government in the Twenty-Six Counties. What we can do here, therefore, is to see how current Sinn Féin policy would apply to the questions raised in the context of a declaration of intent being clearly articulated and a National Convention of all Irish interests (without direct British intervention) being planned to decide the future of the nation and the relationship between the differing Irish communities.

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Basic Assumption :

Basic to such a development would be an assumption by HMG and Republicans that the costs of governing the Six Counties of Northern Ireland would no longer continue to escalate as they have done over the past number of years. The Northern Ireland Green Paper of September 1974 shows that the direct subvention from U.K. Central Funds -- the amount necessary to fill the gap between receipts from taxation in Northern Ireland and public expenditure by Stormont -- has risen from £52 m. in 1966-'67 to £313m. in 1973-'74. It is difficult to calculate the actual costs of total subvention. Factors like high inflation rates, the real costs of the British Army presence, the costs of compensation for war-damage, even factors such as the cost of operating internment and the complications associated with the requirements of E.E.C. regulations, make the task even more difficult and the figures for recent years, somewhat untypical of what used to be the "normal relationship" between Whitehall and Stormont. But it seems fair to state one obvious fact about the essentially "colonial" relationship which has prevailed between London and Stormont. Northern Ireland has been run at a loss, according to the calculations of current orthodox accountancy. The amount is open to debate. So too is the assumption that this had to be necessarily so. Sinn Féin would argue that, like the "Irish Imperial Contribution" in the 19th century, the deficit had at least as much to do with the type of relationship which was established between London and Stormont (or Dublin Castle) as it had to do with real running costs. But having said that it is well to recognise the historical legacy of that "colonial relationship" and to face the facts that there is at present, an accounting deficit of over £300m in the Northern Ireland Annual Budget each year.

We assume that it would be an essential part of the new HMG policy to halt this escalation, in effect to "freeze" the Whitehall contribution to whatever it will be in the year that the announcement of the decision to withdraw is made, and to prevent further escalation.

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This commitment of , say £313m, would then be gradually reduced over the years of withdrawal and. as new structures of government for all Ireland were evolved. In any case the burden on Whitehall would , once halted , begin to become less difficult as the value of money continued to decline. The reduction in the level of military activity should also lead to considerable savings , but against that the initial problems associated with the development of a proper security and police force in the New Ulster might require some of the savings that would be made.

The mechanics of phasing out the British involvement in Ireland, including the costs to Whitehall , is also a matter of political choices. Some of the options have already been outlined in the UTV television series. There are others or combinations of those selected by the politicians on those programmes. All depend on the broader political choices which would be made e.g. the exact nature of the new governmental relationships within the whole island, the amount of involvement in the E.E.C. or the trading arrangements made if the New Ireland withdrew from the E.E.C. Sinn Féin, as the political wing of the Republican Movement, have very definite views on these matters which they would put forcefully to the all-Ireland electorate. But within the context of the questions posed for us here, it is necessary to concentrate on " Northern Ireland" as we find it to-day and to try to detail the factors which would have to be considered in the context of a phased British disengagement.

The first point we would like to stress is that while we realise that the Six County area in the past and even more so to-day, is being run at a net loss , according to the way the costs are calculated, this does not necessarily mean that this would be the case in the future , given the new freedom and self-determination, given the fresh revolutionary spirit for social change that would flow from an end to the present conflict, and assuming that due consideration was given to the special factors in the case which we now have to face.

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It is well to remember that the Irish Free State , which Republicans in 1922 realised to be inadequate because it did not gain full freedom and therefore did not present a full opportunity to harness the resources and talents of the Irish nation , began as a poor and weak community. Nevertheless , despite the many shortcomings , and obviously inadequate arrangements for the full development of Irish potential , sufficient progress was made within the unsatisfactory system to continually " bridge the gap" with Northern Ireland. We would argue that if both parts of Ireland had been given a full chance to develop their nation since 1922 , the whole Irish nation would be considerably better-off to-day, would have built peaceful and friendly relations with Britain and the Six County area certainly would not have continued to be a drain on Whitehall.

The essential difference in the limited progress that has been made in both the North and the South in the past 50 years is that while Northern Ireland remained in a state of continued dependency , Southern Ireland gradually succeeded in building up better conditions from her own resources and initiative within the limits imposed on the Dublin regime by the 1920-'22 and subsequent settlements. Sinn Féin is convinced therefore that the Six Counties and Ireland in general , can , if given a real chance, develop a satisfactory life for all its people , in the future. But in the intermediary years, special measures will be necessary to overcome the generations of neglect and to change the essentially colonial relationship between Britain and Ireland into one of equal nations. The main consideration will be the re-structuring of the Northern economy in a way that will take account of the new situation , of the new relationship with the rest of Ireland and that will undo the worst effects of the years of neglect and the more recent troubles. Some of these changes will be gradual. Some will be more immediate. The factors for consideration and for which Sinn Féin will advocate its own Éire Nua policies would include :

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1: The new evolution of a discernible home market in the entire island of Ireland as opposed to the present "local market" of just 1½ million people. This is not simply a question of scale and figures. More important structural considerations like improved transport to the South, rationalisation of communications media, advertising and the evolution of an "Irish mentality" in business and marketing horizons are known to be more important than plain economic statistics in cases like this.

2: It would be part of Sinn Féin policy to develop native industry at all levels to the maximum possible extent, even where such projects might be marginally "less viable" or even marginally more expensive than imported alternatives at present being used. For example the development of peat (or indeed limited quantities of oil or natural gas) would be given preference to an over-concentration on imported fuel, if they helped to make the economy as a whole more self-sufficient and therefore more free to provide development and employment opportunities in neglected areas.

3: We would envisage a reversal of the basic philosophy in current economic development policies, North and South, replacing an emphasis on export-orientated branch-factories, with an emphasis on maximum development of natural resources, the rapid growth of a home market and positive assistance through various types of financial incentives to keep the wealth generated within the country in the country. This would not mean a total abandonment of the policy of attracting foreign industry, including British industry, as long as such industries were genuine innovations, and not take-overs of existing Irish firms. There would, of course, be much closer supervision of this "attraction" policy to ensure a reduction in the number of failures and to ease the burden on the grant-paying tax-payer. The I.D.A. in the Twenty-Six Counties is engaged in a re-think along these lines at present, in the light of the post-1958 experience.

4: It is accepted in the September 1974 White Paper that the "traditional industries" of Northern Ireland are in decline in any case. The numbers employed in textiles have fallen from 65,000 to less than 20,000 in the past 20 years.

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The numbers in shipbuilding have fallen from 24,000 to 10,000 in the same period. Sinn Féin would seek to industrialise the Six Counties, and all of Ireland, in a way that these enterprises would not require continuing subsidy. Food-processing, fishing, the increasingly important ore and basic metal now being mined and all other sectors where there would be a definite marginal advantage, would be given top priority.

5: Northern Irish Agriculture obviously stands to gain more from the policies which would be logically followed in an All-Ireland context than from the present minority role it enjoys in the U.K. context. Whether this type of development took place in an E.E.C. context or outside the C.A.P., the demand for food and the obvious advantages which Ireland in general has in providing food, is another sector of the economy that could reasonably be expected to expand massively in the years ahead.

6: The question of Ireland's membership of the E.E.C. and the type of relationship which might be negotiated, instead of total membership, is something which would have to be considered as soon as the whole island had the political freedom to do so. Sinn Féin believes that the Irish population is too small, and the level and scale of Irish industry generally is still too low to expect anything other than peripheral type development in a full Common Market situation. It would advocate a type of trading relationship along the lines of what has been negotiated by Norway, Sweden or Greece. The chances of obtaining a good deal outside full membership would, we feel, be greatly enhanced if sought for in the context of a real and lasting solution of the "Irish Question".

7: But whatever the context, the steps to be taken by a new Irish government, in the event of HMG deciding to disengage, and to work positively for that aim, are, we feel, obvious particularly in the Six Counties context.

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These would include :

- (i) A major saving on " security", army, prisons etc.... the cost of which would be available for more productive purposes.
- (ii) A positive effort to re-construct the "lame-duck" sectors of the economy which have been hit particularly in recent years due to the troubles , and due to the fact that they are very old in any case.
- (iii) The initiation of a policy of really viable industrialisation in both the neglected areas of the Six Counties (some in the context of all-Ireland economic effort) and in areas where there is obviously no long-term hope for the " traditional lame-ducks".
- (iv) A major Anglo-Irish effort at re-construction not only to make up for the decades of neglect but to overcome the decline that has accompanied the destruction of recent years.
- (v) The initiation of an enthusiastic all-Ireland economic development programme , run by Irishmen and suited to local conditions.

Sinn Féin has every reason to believe that such an effort, given the changed atmosphere that would then prevail in the whole island and between the British and Irish peoples , would have several extra factors in its favour that would distinguish it from all previous efforts to date. For one thing it would be^a co-ordinated national effort but so structured to suit local and regional needs. If self-government is now considered to be the best thing for Algeria, Rhodesia and all other former colonies , then surely the Irish communities in all parts of the island are capable enough to be entrusted with the planning of their own destiny ?

It is well to remember that for the first time in modern history the new Irish state would be able to command the respect and loyalty of all its traditions. This should encourage bright, talented and well-educated people North and South, who now emigrate, to stay at home and help in the new adventure in nation-building.

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In the Six County context it should be possible to draw, for the first time , on the whole-hearted co-operation and endeavours of the Nationalist community in those areas of chronic unemployment and community disinterest at present.

Sinn Féin also believes that the wave of patriotic feeling , for so long directed into a largely military effort against the British occupation , could be tapped to achieve a peaceful , prosperous and self-respecting friendly neighbour West of Britain. It does not deny that there will be problems or that indeed sacrifices may be called for. But the current state of the U.K. and world economy would suggest that such sacrifices are going to be necessary in any case. The important difference would be that the appeal in Ireland would not fall largely on deaf ears if made in the name of a self-governing Federal Ireland which would be a real home for all our people.

Sinn Féin accepts that at some stage between the British phase-out and the point where the new policies and opportunities bear full fruit, there may have to be some slight variations in the statistical " parity" at present prevailing between the Six Counties and the U.K. But it has to be remembered that this " parity" is confined to some matters only e.g. Social Welfare. Nobody suggests that the overall standard of living in most parts of Northern Ireland is anything like that enjoyed by , say , the Home Counties around London, just as British people realise that there are very considerable variations in the life-style of the different regions , depending on the range of facilities, proximity to large centres of population, even historical , geographic and weather conditions as e.g. between South Wales and the top of Scotland.

As well as that it must be accepted that even financial " parity" can be deceptive. Social Welfare payments for example , can mean much more to a family in rural Tyrone which has some of its own supplies of food, vegetables etc. than to a flat-dweller in central Belfast.

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The Belfast family may , on the other hand , have better employment and educational facilities than the rural family. In short, one's standard of living, as can be seen from examples all over the world, is directly related to the immediate cultural milieu and to the

expectations and priorities of the people in question. Central to this calculation of the "quality of life " is the amount of real control over his own life which the individual feels he has.

Economic statistics are important and it is necessary to research them. But it is absolutely futile to try to solve what is essentially a political problem by tabulating figures on their own.

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