

'We want to keep talking with the British' say Provos

"THE BASIC demand remains a public declaration by the British Government of its intention to withdraw from Ireland and until that demand has been met the war will go on," was the uncompromising message of the Provisional IRA leadership in the first major interview for nearly two years (See Page 1).

"The British civil servants gave such a commitment to withdraw explicitly on behalf of the British cabinet in the talks with Sinn Fein representatives in January of 1975. Indeed, such a commitment was a pre-condition of a resumption of the ceasefire (there had been a three week ceasefire during Christmas of 1974), but in later talks they refused to give this undertaking in writing." They said that they feared a 'Congo' situation arising from a public declaration on withdrawal."

The Provisionals refused to name the civil servant who made the commitment on withdrawal, as the talks between Sinn Fein and the civil servants had been merely suspended and could be re-opened at a later stage.

The talks ceased in February of this year because, the Provisional leadership assert, there had been over 1000 breaches of the terms of the truce by the British. "It was really the RUC who provoked the breaking of the truce because they insisted on continuing raids in Nationalist areas and on having British army support while they did so."

The Provisionals also went on to claim that Gerry Fitt, Paddy Devlin and Oliver Napier had encouraged the Northern Ireland Office in the belief that the IRA was on its last legs and was negotiating from weakness. This persuaded the British that the truce was dispensable.

through benign indifference and often through positive interference.

"The peace-women are for the most part sincere people, who have reacted understandably to the prolongation of the struggle. But, they must appreciate that the simple-minded peace for which they clamour is a chimera. So long as this state exists and in spite of periodic outbreaks of tranquility, there will be violence and the peace women should devote their attentions to this fundamental fact and not be misguided by mere catch-cries.

"We in the Provisionals are determined to overthrow the 6-County state, which has caused so much strife, so much suffering and anguish to both communities, and in doing so we are doing something substantial to achieve real peace and real justice on this island.

Asked about the absence of any mandate from the Irish people in whose name they profess to be acting in their campaign of killing and bombing, they replied: "Our support is considerably more substantial than is generally recognised. The peace marches were not remotely as large as reported in the media and, in any event, many of the people who attended them have since appreciated our point about the hard necessity of achieving the basis for a real peace.

"The SDLP support in the Nationalist community is also greatly exaggerated for the boycott in Nationalist areas at the convention election in 1975 was 54%, which left the SDLP with something substantially short of the remaining 46% — possibly around 36%.

"Also, you must take into account the massive turn-outs at our rallies and demonstrations, such as that outside the GPO to commemorate 1916, the annual marches to Bodenstown and Milltown cemetery etc. Furthermore, we have a solid

WIGMORE



CHRISTOPHER EWART BIGGS: "Assassinated by the Provos in retaliation for the killing of Peter Clery and for SAS activity in South Armagh."



DAITHI O CONNELL: "His court case in October will be the first indication of the Provo policy on the recognition of courts."



BETTY WILLIAMS: "The peace-women must realise that the simple-minded peace for which they clamour is a chimera."

Ireland state can work and, irrespective of what the Provisionals do, violence will remain."

On sectarian assassinations:

"Nobody has been killed by the IRA because he or she was a Protestant. Any Protestants that

Falls Rd. as occurred on the Shankill Rd. this past week? Yet the authorities mollycoddled the UDA, and the British Army as usual stood idly by. And coincidentally — or was it — during the same week the South's Minister for Justice, Paddy

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"The violence in our society

The Provisionals also went on to claim that Gerry Fitt, Paddy Devlin and Oliver Napier had encouraged the Northern Ireland Office in the belief that the IRA was on its last legs and was negotiating from weakness. This persuaded the British that the truce was dispensable.

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They were keen to emphasise that the door to talks with the British civil servants was still open "if the British come up with something substantial offer, but we insist that without a declaration of intent to withdraw, the war will go on."

Speaking about the recent peace marches, and campaign and the apparently overwhelming desire for peace, they said: "No one desires peace more than we do. Our comrades have been shot down without warning, hundreds of others have been tortured, over a thousand have been jailed, our own lives have been literally torn apart. We have been estranged from our families, we are constantly at risk of being shot. Many of the older Republicans among us have spent their lives in and out of jails. Surely it is us more than anyone else that wants a break from all this torment."

"But what we want is not a mere transient or illusory peace. We want a final peace and one founded on justice. We want it not just for ourselves and the people of Ireland today, but perhaps most of all we want it for the generations to come."

"The violence in our society is not of our making, it is endemic in the Northern Ireland state. That state is inherently sectarian and inherently violent. It cannot exist without repression, discrimination and violence and so long as it exists there will never be peace — irrespective of what the Provisionals do or do not do."

"There were no Provos during the first 50 years of the Northern Ireland state and yet there was violence. There were no Provos in 1966 and yet there were murders. There were no Provos in 1969 and yet there were more murders and hundreds of people got burnt out of their homes and peaceful civil rights demonstrations got violently assaulted."

"The present war began when the British army intervened, not as peace-keepers between two warring sides, but as partisan collaborators with the repressive violent regime of Stormont. It was sought to impose the will of the bigoted unionists they who, under the cover of illusory reforms, on the Nationalist people. And, remember, it was Reginald Maudling and General Farrar Hockley who declared war on us."

"It is the British who are responsible for the violence. They set up this sectarian state without the mandate of a single Irish vote and it has been the British who maintained the state, often

election in 1975 was 54%, which left the SDLP with something substantially short of the remaining 46% — possibly around 36%.

"Also, you must take into account the massive turn-outs at our rallies and demonstrations, such as that outside the GPO to commemorate 1916, the annual marches to Bodinstown and Milltown cemetery, etc. Furthermore, we have a solid bedrock of hard support which ensures our continued survival, and though our "fringe" support may ebb and flow, the significant support remains firm — how else could we have survived these 7 years?"

"But a revolutionary movement does not depend on a popular mandate as a basis for action. Its mandate comes from the justice and correctness of its cause and therein lies the basis for our mandate. The men of 1916 and of 1920 had no mandate from the people and neither do any of the revolutionary movements throughout the world."

"It is interesting to note that many of the liberals both in Ireland and Britain support many of these liberation movements in far flung parts of the world, but when it's within a 1,000 miles of themselves, their liberalism and radicalism becomes surprisingly thin. For instance, the Cosgrave Government recently entertained the representatives of the Palestine Liberation Organisation — they weren't worried apparently about the PLO's lack of popular mandate for its so-called terrorism."

Asked if, in the event of there being a united Ireland, would their concept of "justified mandate" as opposed to popular mandate still hold true?

"No. One of our basis principles is to secure the right of the Irish people to choose their own form of Government and we would always respect that principle."

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If there was some kind of agreed arrangement in Northern Ireland between the SDLP and the Unionists and this agreement was endorsed by referendum in both parts of Ireland, would this not be an assertion of the right of the Irish people to determine their own form of Government and would it, therefore, be acceptable to the Provisionals?

"It would not be acceptable for the evil of partition would still remain."

But if the people opted for partition as a basis of their form of Government, do they not have the right to do so?

"No. We deny the right to secession and, in any event, all this is hypothetical. No arrangement based on the continued existence of the Northern

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On sectarian assassinations: **POL/35/155(2)**
"Nobody has been killed by the IRA because he or she was a Protestant. Any Protestants that were killed by the IRA were identified targets — people who were either engaged in the sectarian campaign against Catholics or involved at a senior level in one of the loyalist para-military groups."

But several innocent Protestants have been murdered and how can this be justified

"The fact is that on several occasions we disarmed Catholic groups involved in the retaliatory campaign, but as the assassination campaign by the Loyalist groups intensified we were simply put in a position of leaving the Catholics defenceless if we stood in the way of organisations wanting to take retaliatory action."

"Why is there always a hue and cry when Protestants get killed and not a whimper when Catholics get knocked off by the dozen?"

How do you feel about the massacre beside the bus in Kingsmills, south Armagh, or about the killings of Tullyvallen Orange Hall?

"Why is there always a hue and cry when Protestants get killed and not a whimper when Catholics get knocked off in their dozens. Are Catholics simply born to be slaughtered? There was no outcry when 8 Catholics were murdered in South Armagh, prior to the Kingsmills incident, yet when there was retaliation, there was an immediate crisis, the SAS was sent in, emergency meetings were called, condemnations poured in from all quarters. But nothing, not even a squeak, when the Catholics were being killed."

Are there any circumstances in which you approve of the killing of innocent Protestants, for instance, in the tit for tat murders?

"All you want is all tit and no tat. You don't care if it's just the Catholics are getting killed, so long as there are no Protestants being killed."

Well the reason I'm asking you about the assassination of innocent Protestants and not of innocent Catholics is that I presume you have some kind of direct influence over the killing of innocent Protestants and presumably no direct influence over the killing of innocent Catholics.

"We don't like seeing any person, innocent or otherwise, being killed but . . ."

And at this stage we seemed to be going around in circles, though apparently with tacit approval of the retaliatory campaign being expressed by the three interviewees. I asked bluntly was this in fact so?

"Look. Sectarianism is alien to the very basis of our creed as Republicans."

On the possible situation that might arise in the event of the British making the declaration of intent to withdraw, what would happen then?

Falls Rd. as occurred on the Shankill Rd. this past week? Yet the authorities mollycoddled the UDA, and the British Army as usual stood idly by. And coincidentally — or was it — during the same week the South's Minister for Justice, Paddy Cooney, brazenly refused in the Dail to ban the UDA and UVF, quite clearly because they don't want to offend the delicate sensibilities of the Loyalists. It is precisely the same mentality which gives rise to howls of uproar whenever innocent Protestant are killed in contrast to the deafening silence when Catholics are mowed down. Last week saw the entire problem in microcosm."

Do you think that you could cope with the famed Loyalist backlash should it come in all its force?

"If the Loyalists thought otherwise, don't you think they would have taken us on a long time ago. The only thing preventing them from all-out slaughter on the Catholic population is their realisation of our strength."

What is the strength of the IRA now?

"We are as strong as we have ever been. We have as much equipment as we could cope with, we have, if anything too many recruits, and our hard-rock support is growing, though, as we mentioned the fringe support ebbs and flows."

"As of this moment we have sufficient equipment and are sufficiently organised to keep the campaign going for two years. Of course, we expect to get more equipment and recruits and support over that period, and our assessment is that we can keep going indefinitely."

How about the organisation in Britain?

"That was certainly damaged by the wave of arrests there, but in the last few months we have been organising there again. We have adopted a new strategy for our English operations and we are ready to start there again with devastating effect should we deem it opportune. However, we don't intend resuming our campaign there unless all contact has been finally broken off with the British civil servants. In that event we would reassess the situation."

"We are determined that we will win this time and spare our children and their children the hardships and sufferings we have had to endure."

Are you suggesting that you would inaugurate a campaign of assassination against members of the British political establishment in the event of a resumption of the campaign there.

"Well, that is one of our options, and we are not going to be more precise about it than that. But we don't see why MPs and cabinet ministers should be immune from the consequences of their political acts."

How about the South of Ireland. Are you considering a military campaign here or are there any circumstances in which you would start a concerted campaign here?

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