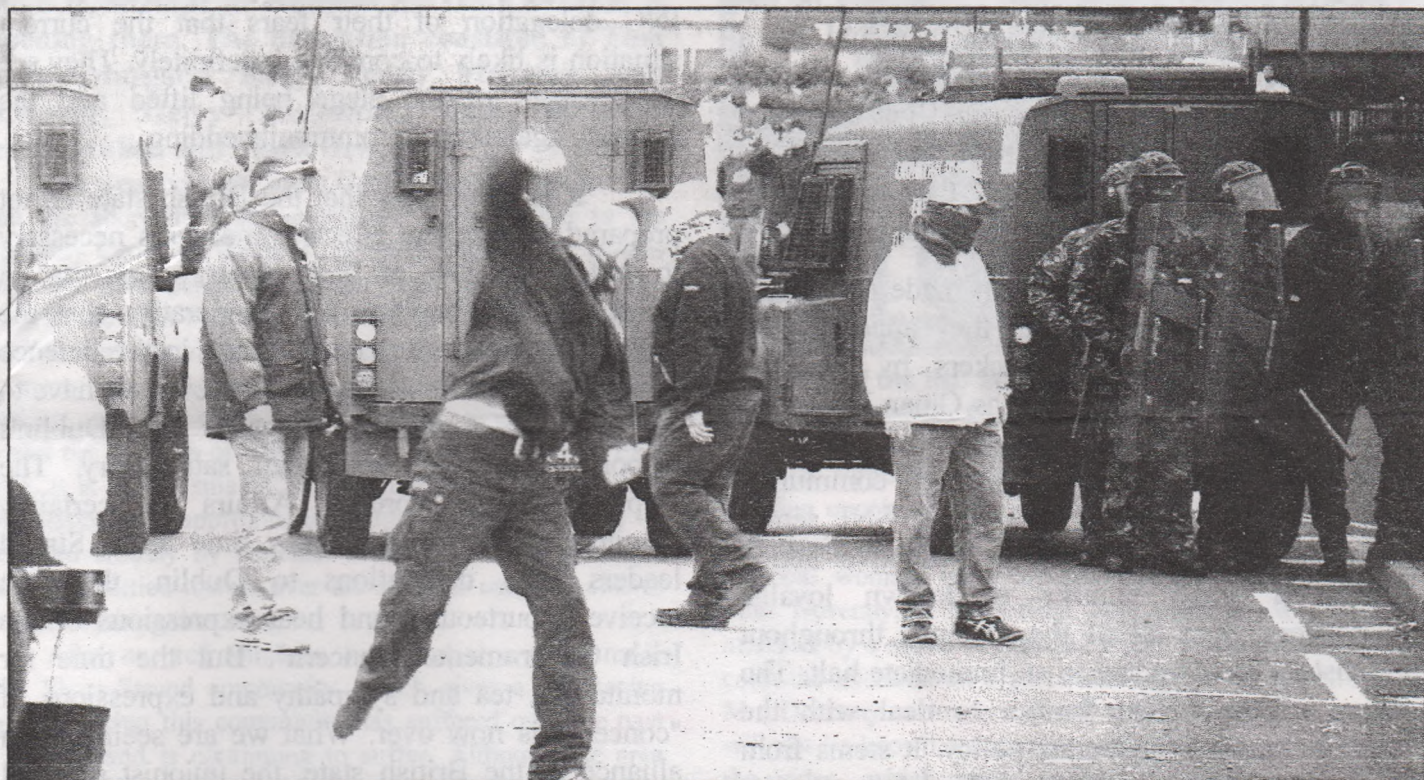




INC NEWS

Winter 2002 / 2003 Comhdháil Náisiúnta na hÉireann PO Box 2814, Dublin 7.



Loyalists attack the Short Strand while the British army stands idly by. – Picture courtesy of the *Andersontown News*

IS THE WAR OVER?

The answer to the above question is constantly being sought from republicans by the media and politicians, north and south. So, is the war over? Well that would seem to depend on who you are and where you live.

Since May of this year, the small nationalist community of Short Strand, situated in mainly unionist East Belfast has been under siege by loyalist paramilitaries and by loyalist mobs. Essential services, such as the doctor's surgery, post office and supermarkets, all of which are located outside of the immediate district, are now off-limits to Short Strand residents due to a boycott campaign backed up by death threats and massive intimidation

In addition to the siege, there are the constant daily and nightly physical attacks, often involving pipe bombs, petrol bombs and shrapnel-laden heavy fireworks. Occasionally, firearms have been used.

The tiny Clondeboy estate inside the Short Strand has been taking the brunt of these attacks. The eight persons of the Irish National Congress delegation which visited the district on October 26 were eyewitnesses to an afternoon attack on Clondeboy, involving a deliberate attempt to firebomb a row of a dozen or so homes that are located by the high security wall that divides Clondeboy from loyalist Cluan Place. Only the prompt intervention of local people, acting as firefighters and braving stones, bottles and other missiles, prevented up to fifty residents being burned out of their homes.

As well as the siege, the threats and the attacks, there is the appalling and unacceptable attitude of the British state towards this situation. The experience of the 3000 Short Strand Residents during this period has been of indifference, outright hostility and sometimes violence directed against their community by the British State and its agencies. It would be a relatively simple matter for the British to curb the activities of the loyalist gangs and get the siege lifted. However they have chosen not to do so. There is widespread suspicion that the British attitude is to do with hidden political agendas.

Not only have the British made no serious efforts to stop this situation, they appear to be actually facilitating the attackers by allowing them access to localities such as Cluan Place; the tiny cul-de-sac from where much of the violence is being launched. Short Strand community leaders have repeatedly told RUC/PSNI senior commanders that if they took effective action against a small number of known loyalist ringleaders, then all of the violence throughout the district would come to an immediate halt. The failure of the Police Service to deal with the loyalist attacks is deliberate policy. It stems from its partisan attitude to the Short Strand community and is tantamount to dereliction of duty, or even near mutiny.

In discussions the INC delegates had with Short Strand activists during the course of the visit, we were told that the violence is being orchestrated with a number of objectives in mind.

Firstly, there is the obvious ethnic cleansing aspect. Loyalists want Catholics out of East Belfast. Nothing new there; simply history repeating itself. There were serious pogroms against the Short Strand in 1920 and again in 1970.

Secondly, there is the police problem. Locals maintain that the PSNI is deliberately not clamping down on loyalist activity in order to create political pressure aimed at stalling police reform. In particular, they are trying to stop the phasing out of the police reserve.

Thirdly and more seriously, many nationalists are of the view that the violence aimed at the Short Strand, is designed to create a crisis to split open the republican movement and to bring down the whole of the present political system set up under the Belfast agreement. It is aimed at the

expulsion of republicans from the political process. This strategy would be achieved over time, by placing unbearable pressure on the Short Strand, in the hope of breaking republican restraint and discipline in the face of blatant provocation.

Short Strand community leaders told the INC delegation of their fears that the current situation is likely to continue indefinitely. They see no prospect of the siege being lifted and the violence against their community ending.

It is quiet clear that the British state is not prepared to take the effective measures necessary to protect the lives of "*her majesty's subjects*" in Short Strand. Therefore it is imperative that the Irish government must take a stand in the defence of its citizens in Short Strand. However we have to say that the evidence suggests that Dublin's response has been less than satisfactory. The Department of Foreign Affairs is certainly monitoring the situation. Any time Short Strand leaders send deputations to Dublin, they are received courteously and hear expressions of the Irish Governments "concern". But the time for monitoring, tea and sympathy and expressions of "concern" is now over. What we are seeing is an alliance of the British state, the unionist political establishment and loyalist gangs engaged in an attempted coup d'Etat. In these circumstances, the sovereign Irish state must stop playing the role of junior partner to the British. We would argue that Dublin has to speak out clearly and openly take the side of the residents of Belfast's Short Strand; Irish citizens who wish to live in peace with their neighbours, but who find themselves under constant attack from enemies who seek the destruction of their small community.

The Agreement requires all parties "*to use any influence they may have, to achieve the decommissioning of all paramilitary arms within two years following endorsement in referendums North and South of the agreement and in the context of the overall settlement*". While the ongoing loyalist attacks on nationalists in Short Strand and other vulnerable areas continue unabated with the British state standing idly by, it is highly unlikely that we are going to see any further acts of decommissioning in the near future, let alone the complete disbandment of the PIRA. Indeed, in the context of recent events, it looks like unionism is trying to use its influence to goad the PIRA back to war. Ah, the Orange State, it hasn't gone away you know!

VISIT OF INC DELEGATION TO SHORT STRAND

On Saturday, 26 October 2002 a delegation of eight members of the Irish National Congress travelled to Short Strand, Belfast on a fact-finding mission to attempt to establish the truth of what is happening there. The delegation consisted of Tom Cooper, Margaret Kelly, Paddy Maguire, Ann McCloskey, Gerry McGowan, Paul McGuill, Michael Mullen and Mark Urwin.

We were collected from Central Station, Belfast and driven the short distance across the River Lagan to the Community Centre in the heart of Short Strand. Our guides for the day were Gerry Montgomery and Joe O'Donnell (no relation to the Sinn Fein councillor whom we met later in the day). We were provided with soup and sandwiches, which were most welcome. Then, with the aid of a large wall map of Belfast we were given an idea of the geography of the area and the location of Short Strand in the context of East Belfast. It is a very small Catholic / nationalist enclave with a population of approximately 3,000 people which is surrounded entirely by Unionist areas. The Mountpottinger Road PSNI station towers over the area, its cameras able to capture everything that occurs.

After our refreshments, we watched a video made by the Short Strand community, which gives a frightening insight into what this community has suffered over the past five months and is continuing to suffer. Although the area endured much throughout the Troubles, they never had to suffer sustained attacks on a daily basis before May of this year. Community leaders in Short Strand had developed a community interface network with Loyalist community workers, which was used when trouble was erupting in interface areas. Using telephone contacts community leaders on both sides could attempt to control the people involved and quell any trouble before things got out of hand. However, on 11 May 2002 this vital communication link was unilaterally closed down from the Loyalist side -the assumption being that Loyalist paramilitaries wanted to initiate attacks on Short Strand and didn't want inter-community co-operation getting in their way. Indeed, that very night the attacks began and have continued ever since. They were particularly fierce during the months of May, June, July and August.

The video showed Loyalist attacks on homes in Short Strand using bricks, bottles, roof tiles, petrol bombs, bolts, ball bearings, fireworks and pipe bombs. If it wasn't for the brave and vigilant actions of the Short Strand community, lives would surely have been lost by now and homes burned down. We saw local people braving an onslaught of missiles while dousing fires caused by petrol bombs with their own hoses connected to standpipes. This video gives the lie to the media's portrayal of these events as 'tit for tat'. They are carefully planned attacks, which provoke defensive retaliation from Short Strand. The most shocking aspect of the video, however, was the reaction of the PSNI / RIR to these events. When the attacks are reported by the residents of Short Strand, the security forces direct their response at Catholic residents rather than at the



Members of the INC Short Strand delegation with guides Gerry Montgomery and Joe O'Donnell

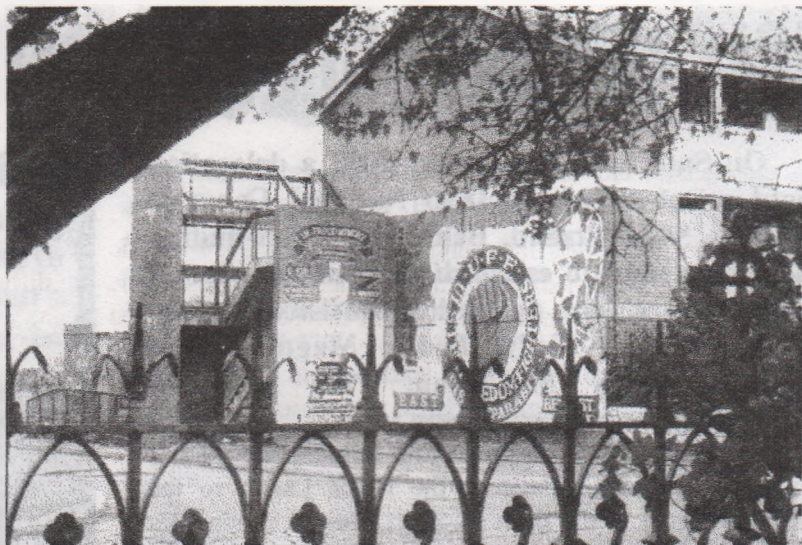
Loyalist perpetrators. The video even shows PSNI officers chatting openly with Loyalists as they direct the attacks and their complete inaction in the face of an attack on the funeral of local woman, Mrs. O'Neill, was particularly shocking. Paul Devenny, a local Sinn Fein member, was viciously attacked by a squad of riot-clad PSNI officers while trying to calm the situation on a particular night. This attack has left Mr. Devenny seriously injured and his long-term prognosis will not be known for another year. We were all shocked by the video, which raised some very important questions, which will be touched upon later.

Having watched the video, we were taken on a walking tour of the area. We walked along Bryson Street which has a large 'peace fence,' towards the Newtownards Road. We were unable to actually walk on the Newtownards Road because our guides would not have been safe. The doctor's surgery at the corner of Bryson Street and Newtownards Road is now more or less out of bounds to the residents of Short Strand because of the danger involved. Even if they take a chance and visit the surgery, they cannot fill their prescriptions in the local pharmacy, which is on the Newtownards Road and must go to a pharmacy in the city. We walked into the grounds of St. Mathew's Catholic Church. The building has recently been sandblasted and is a very beautiful edifice. However, it is already being defaced by paint bombs thrown by Loyalists from the Newtownards Road. The two entrances from the Newtownards Road are now permanently closed with razor wire strung along the boundary. These measures are unfortunately necessary as evidenced by the attack on Mrs. O'Neill's funeral. From the church grounds we followed a pathway, which passed by some pensioners' bungalows which are screened from the Newtownards Road by a double row of trees. These bungalows have been attacked repeatedly and all the roofs are severely damaged. Galvanised sheeting covers the roof tiles and the windows have grilles on them. A fire hose is permanently unrolled and ready to use.

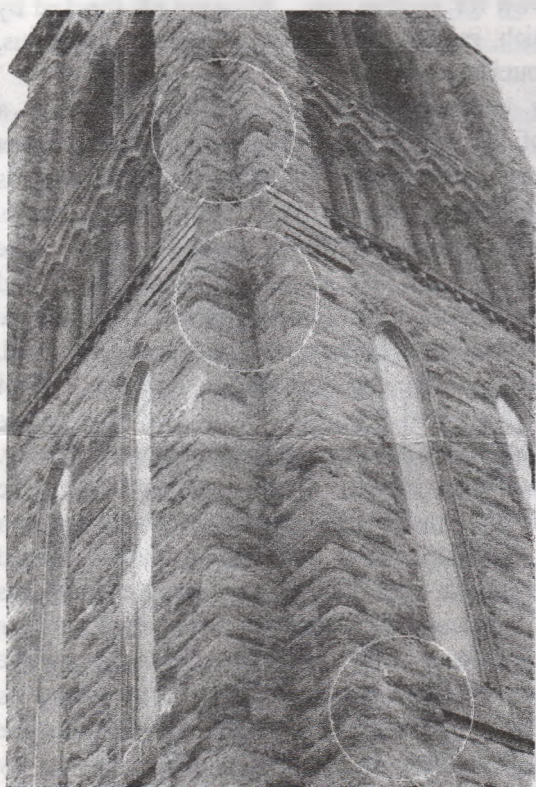
We then proceeded to what has become the worst flashpoint -the Clandeboy estate. When we arrived the Loyalists were actually attacking the area from the adjacent



The Clandeboye estate. The houses in this area have brightly painted sheets of wood propped up in front of their doors and windows to prevent breakages.



The neighbours in Newtownards Road. The two entrances from the Newtownards Road are now permanently closed with razor wire strung along the boundary.



St. Mathew's Catholic Church. The building has recently been sandblasted and is a very beautiful edifice. However, it is already being defaced by paint bombs thrown by Loyalists from the Newtownards Road.



The Clandeboye estate. A high fence separates it from the adjacent Cluan Place, but attacks can still take place.



The pensioners' bungalows, which have been attacked repeatedly, all the roofs are severely damaged. Galvanised sheeting covers the roof tiles and the windows have grilles on them.

Cluan Place. A high fence separates the two estates but attacks can still take place. The houses in this area have brightly painted sheets of wood propped up in front of their windows to prevent breakages. We were met by an onslaught of stones, bottles, tiles, bolts, golf balls and petrol bombs. Some youths retaliated from Clandeboyne Gardens with bottles and stones to try to subdue the attack. As smoke billowed, local people, including our guides turned on the hoses and extinguished the petrol bombs and doused the roofs in order to prevent a fire. The local residents informed us that this is a daily and nightly occurrence. One little five-year-old girl had asked her mother anxiously if Santa Claus will be able to come to her because he is likely to be attacked with fireworks. An elderly resident, Rita Fitzsimmons, who very kindly provided us with tea and sandwiches, told us that she has been living in Clandeboyne estate for 22 years and has never witnessed anything like the attacks and intimidation of the past five months. She epitomised the good-humoured fortitude of the Short Strand community as she showed us her collection of missiles thrown by Loyalists during the previous week, including pieces of pipe bombs. Two PSNI jeeps arrived. One drove off again fairly quickly while the second one remained. Locals began shouting at the officers to do something about the attack and to go to Cluan Place to stop it. We met with Joe O'Donnell, Sinn Fein councillor for the area at this point who told us that Cluan Place is a cul-de-sac of 22 houses, only five of which are occupied at present. The residents of Short Strand believe that the former residents of Cluan Place were taken out and accommodated in hotels in order to make way for Loyalist paramilitaries to use the street as a launching pad for attacks on Clandeboyne estate. Because Cluan Place is a cul-de-sac it would be a very easy matter for the PSNI to close off the single entrance / exit and make arrests. Incredibly, the Loyalist attack continued as we stood there. The local residents became extremely annoyed when petrol bombs and fireworks were launched and they exhorted the PSNI officers in the jeep to 'do something'. The reaction of the PSNI was to switch on their blue flashing light for about one minute.

It was then time to head back for our train. Our guides walked us back along Albertbridge Road and Mountpottinger Road. We met with a woman in Mountpottinger Road who has had her front windows broken ten times since last May by Loyalist gangs. She also found a bullet lodged in the brickwork next to her front door. As we spoke to her we noticed about a dozen British Army jeeps and one Armoured Personnel Carrier parked on the other side of the road and wondered why they were not attempting to stop the attack emanating from Cluan Place. At Central Station we left our guides to an uncertain night and future. Despite the resilience of the Short Strand community, the long-term effects of these daily attacks and fear of attack is devastating. We were told that people are 'living on their nerves', can never relax, get little sleep and some children are on Valium.

Questions arising from the INC's visit are centred on the security force inaction in the face of a Loyalist attack witnessed by our own eyes. This amounts to collusion with the Loyalist paramilitaries. Why are the PSNI officers not prepared to intervene? Apparently, one of the excuses they

have given to residents over the past months is that they are unable to do anything because they are understaffed. Is there an overall game plan?

The PSNI have already benefited as the full-time Reserve, as announced recently by the Chief Constable, Hugh Orde, will now be retained, using security issues as an excuse. It was recommended by Patten that the full-time Reserve be stood down. Local people told us that there is no difference between the RUC and the PSNI -they remain just as unacceptable. Nothing has changed but the name. The residents of Short Strand also believe that these attacks are an attempt to force the IRA to retaliate. David Trimble visited Cluan Place recently and, holding up one golf ball as evidence, claimed that IRA was orchestrating sectarian violence. It seems that the Catholic / nationalist community of Short Strand are being used as pawns in the Unionist political game. The security forces and Loyalist paramilitaries are willing participants.



A fire hose permanently unrolled and ready to use.



Under attack from loyalists in Cluan Place youths from Clandeboyne Gardens retaliate with bottles and stones to try to subdue the attack.



Residents plead with the PSNI to 'do something'. The reaction of the PSNI was to switch on their blue flashing light for about one minute.

UNIONISTS UUP THE ANTE

The latest instalment in the tragic farce, which passes for devolution in the north, came on the 4th October 2002 with the fourth suspension of the Belfast agreement's institutions in under three years. It might be useful at this point to outline the litany of unionist procrastination, evasion and delay, which has led us into this cul de sac.

- Dec. '93: UUP refuses to enter into talks with Sinn Féin until there was a cease-fire.
- Aug. '94: After the IRA cease-fire the UUP refused to enter into talks until it was declared permanent.
- Oct. '94: Unionists refused to participate in the forum for peace and reconciliation and refused to enter into talks with the Dublin Government until articles 2 & 3 were removed.
- Sept. '95: After more than a year on cease-fire, the new unionist leader, David Trimble, demanded IRA decommissioning before talks.
- April '98: Unionists only entered into talks and agreed the Belfast agreement after enormous pressure from the British, American and Irish governments.
- July '99: Seamus Mallon resigns as deputy first minister after the UUP refuses to nominate ministers to the executive.
- Nov. '99: 20 months after the agreement the UUP reluctantly nominate ministers to the executive and set up all Ireland bodies.
- Feb. '00: Less than two months later the institutions of the agreement are suspended at the behest of the UUP, they were only restored three months later in May '00 after Trimble narrowly won a leadership contest against the Rev. Martin Smith.
- July '01: Trimble resigns as first minister as part of an ultimatum on decommissioning. in Aug. '01 the institutions are suspended for 1 day to buy more time for negotiations, only to be suspended for a third time at the end of Sept. '01.
- Oct. '01: DUP and UUP ministers resign from executive forcing the PIRA to decommission at the end of the month following this the institutions are restored in Nov.
- Oct. '02: Despite a second unilateral act of PIRA decommissioning in April the institutions are suspended for a fourth time due to UUP ultimatums for PIRA disbandment.

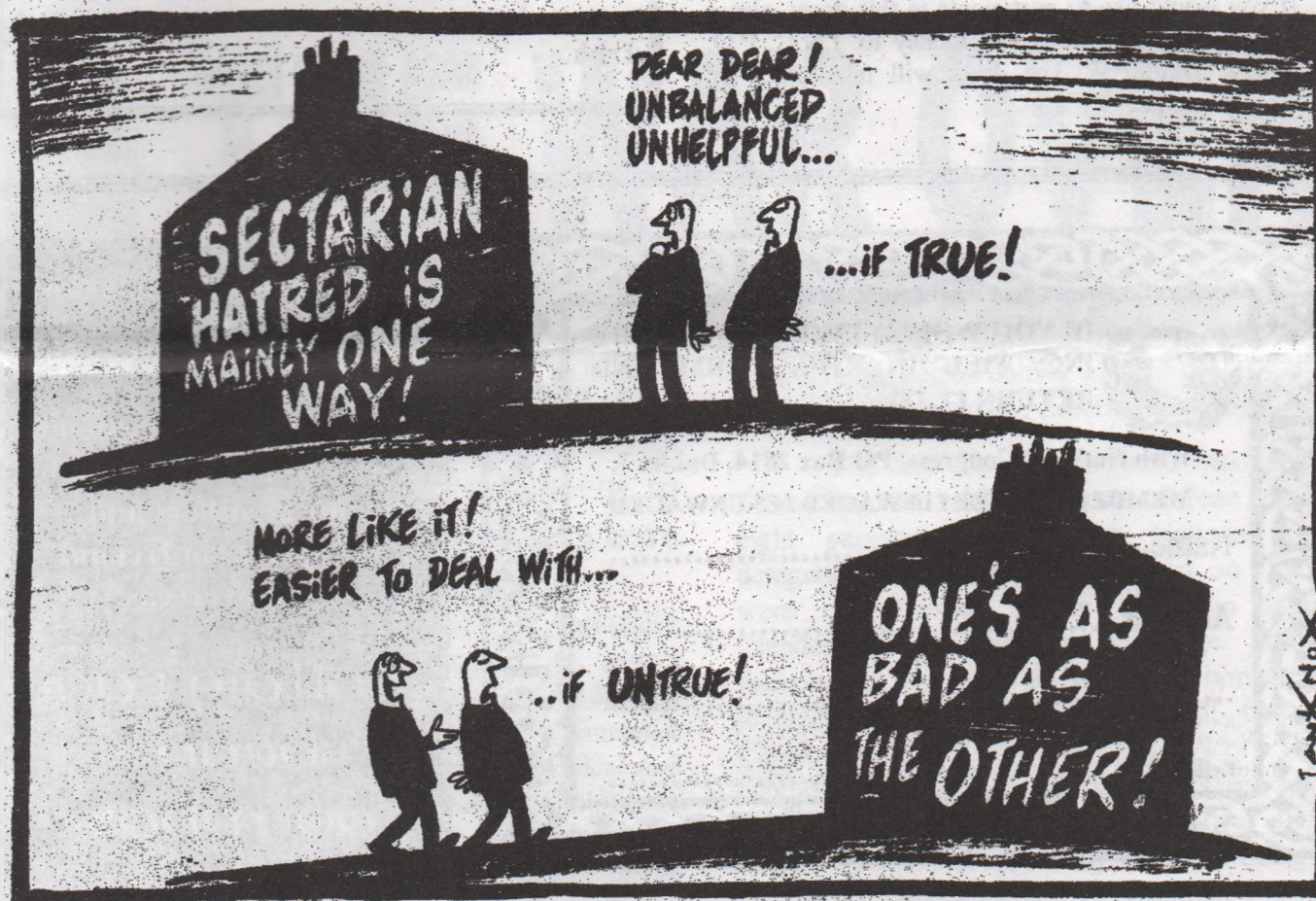
Unionism's response to the peace process has been a dangerous game of brinkmanship with an escalating series of demands and ultimatums reminiscent of the nursery rhyme 'soldier soldier will you marry me.' The reasons for this policy are various, a desire to postpone and minimise the duration of any power sharing with Catholics, the hope that an unending sequence of political crisis will split

republicans between hawks and doves and also due to the intrinsic dynamics of unionism whereby any reformist group can only move as fast as its slowest Neanderthal member for fear of being branded a 'Lundy'. In reality this carefully choreographed 'crisis' is nothing more than a desperate attempt to save the UUP from electoral extermination at the hands of the DUP in the next assembly election. In order to justify Trimble's intransigent stance while maintaining his hard man image vis a vis the DUP the phantom menace of potential paper cuts inflicted by Castlereagh and Stormont documents and Colombian fact finding must be exaggerated into Watergate and the Bay of Pigs. Meanwhile the real crisis of unrelenting loyalist violence and political inertia can be ignored by the pro British media and political elites.

Since the 1997 cease-fire loyalists have killed 61 people, have made over 700 pipe bombs, drove hundreds of families from their homes in Belfast, South Antrim and North Armagh and continued to smuggle guns and explosives. In November 2001 British figures found that Loyalists were responsible for 620 out of 840 violent incidents in 2001. What has been the British and UUP's response to this onslaught? condemnation? ultimatums? No, the Tory Northern Ireland spokesperson met the Loyalist Commission that February and the Northern Secretary John Reid met the Commission in July 2002, David Burnside and Fred Cobain of the UUP met the UDA inner Council in August 2001, while Trimble met the Loyalist Commission in April 2002 and stood as a character witness for Thomas Morrow who was convicted of sectarian rioting in August! Let us be clear, this is brazen hypocrisy and double standards, can you imagine the reaction if the SDLP or Dublin government behaved in such a way, yet time and again the pro British media and politicians exaggerate alleged nationalist threats while ignoring real loyalist violence and expect republicans not only to unilaterally disarm but to disband as well.

Diplomatically there is only one course of action to take when faced with such brinkmanship and intransigence, a strategy of absolute reciprocity. If your opponent compromises you should also be flexible but if he is intransigent you should respond with resolute determination. If he demands you join the police board you demand the disbandment of special branch, if he demands decommissioning you demand the disbandment of the RIR, and if he demands republican disbandment you demand British withdrawal.

The history of devolution over the last three years has reinforced our scepticism regarding the Belfast agreement. Unionism has shown itself too politically immature to be entrusted with executive responsibility, what the North needs is a period of joint sovereignty to demonstrate to Unionism that there is no turning back on the road to progress. There should be no appeasement of insatiable and intransigent unionist demands and no unilateral concessions without generous British reciprocity.



Summer Raffle Results

The winners in the summer raffle were:

1st Prize (Great Southern Hotels weekend break for two):

P. Fahey, Co. Tyrone (Ticket No. 1939)

2nd Prize (Summer food Hamper):

N. Comiskey, Co. Dublin (Ticket No. 0980)

3rd Prize (Bottle of Spirits):

F. Watson, Co. Roscommon (Ticket No. 5189)

Congratulations to the winners and a heartfelt thanks you to all members and supporters who subscribed. As usual the response was magnificent.

INC Christmas Raffle

The prizes for this years raffle are:

1. A Christmas hamper, to the value of €150.
2. A Christmas cake.
3. A bottle of spirits.

With this newsletter you will receive a booklet of (6) raffle tickets. (A misprint on the tickets values the 1st prize at €350, this should read €150.) One booklet is €5. If you would like to participate in this draw, please send your completed stubs and money to: I.N.C. P.O. box 2814, Dublin 7. The draw will take place on Saturday, December 21st.

INC TELEPHONE NUMBERS

If you need to contact the INC by telephone, you may do so through the following numbers:

061 44 07 54 / 087 62 87 065

Both numbers have playback, so if your call is not answered immediately, you may leave a message and, if necessary, the INC will return your call.

WRITE FOR INC NEWS


With a view to stimulating debate, the INC News invites its readership to submit articles concerning the future of Irish republicanism. Articles should be no longer than 1,500 words and posted / emailed to the address printed below.

Send your letters / articles to:

Irish National Congress, P.O. Box 2814, Dublin 7.
or

e-mail us at: inc32cne@eircom.net

NB: Letters should be typed or clearly written – that means BLOCK CAPITALS. The INC accepts letters and articles in both English and Irish.



IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO JOIN THE INC, FILL IN THIS FORM AND RETURN IT TO:

Irish National Congress, PO Box 2814, Dublin 7.

MEMBERSHIP FEE €10 WAGED / €5 UNWAGED

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Irish National Congress
Comhdháil Náisiúnta na hÉireann

We would like to extend
seasons greetings to all
our members and
supporters in Ireland
and overseas

nollaig faoi
shéan is
faoi mhaíse