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To Cherish a Just and Lasting Peace

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Abstract

In the opening line of the diary that he kept during the first three weeks of his hunger strike, republican prisoner Bobby Sands, who died after fifty-five days on strike, wrote: "I am standing on the threshold of another trembling world." This system has created a unionist one party state that has rejected basic principles of democracy, justice, and equality. Throughout the development of our peace strategy and the talks process, republicans pursued the peace process in the context of our republican analysis of the situation and with a solid strategy to meet all of the difficulties head on. In August 1994, Irish America, nationalist Ireland, and Sinn Fein succeeded in creating the conditions for the first complete cessation of IRA military operations. Through our peace strategy and the talks process, Sinn Fein has, like never before, succeeded in putting the republican analysis right at the heart of Irish politics. The success of the unionists' tactical go-slow approach, as well as the decision not to establish a separate equality department but instead to place at the "center" the exclusion of inward investment from the all Ireland business, and the trade body and the debacle around tourism, gave rise to serious concerns as we entered this critical phase in the peace process.

TO CHERISH A JUST AND LASTING PEACE

Gerry Adams*

INTRODUCTION

In the opening line of the diary that he kept during the first three weeks of his hunger strike, republican prisoner Bobby Sands, who died after fifty-five days on strike, wrote: "I am standing on the threshold of another trembling world."¹ We in Ireland also stand on the threshold of a new beginning—of a new world that holds enormous potential for all Irish people.

History occasionally grants each of us a unique opportunity to contribute to the future well-being of our family, friends, and neighbors, and of children yet to be born. The people of Ireland are at a defining point in our history and everything depends on how we respond to the opportunities and difficulties that lie before us.

Sinn Féin's peace strategy and the many political and personal risks that we have taken, along with the efforts of nationalists, the Irish government, Irish America, the U.S. government, and most recently the Blair government in London, have brought about a situation that only a few short years ago would have been unthinkable. This process has been a difficult one, but Irish republicans have demonstrated repeatedly our capacity to overcome adversity and advance our struggle for freedom and justice against enormous odds.

I. CREATING THE PEACE PROCESS

In May 1987, Sinn Féin put forward a discussion document entitled *A Scenario for Peace*. This document stated that: "Sinn Féin seeks to create conditions which will lead to a permanent cessation of hostilities, an end to our long war and the development of a peaceful, united and independent Irish society. Such objectives will only be achieved when a British government adopts a strategy for decolonisation."²

Our peace strategy is the dynamic that led to the Irish peace

* Leader of Sinn Féin.

1. BOBBY SANDS, *THE DIARY OF BOBBY SANDS* 7 (1981).

2. SINN FÉIN ARD CHOMHAIRLE, *A SCENARIO FOR PEACE* 5 (1989). *Ard Chomhairle* is the Sinn Féin National Executive Committee.

initiative and then to the IRA cease fire in August 1994. It is the dynamic that transformed the political focus of all the players and opened up the possibility for an end to the centuries old conflict in our country. The basic tenets of this strategy, which we mapped out over a decade ago, are the following: to seek to engage politically our political opponents; to bring about the exercise of the right to national self-determination by the Irish people as a whole; to establish a peace process to bring this about; and to win international support for these positions.

Sinn Féin's political objective is a united Ireland free of British interference. Everything that we do is intended to advance that entirely legitimate and realizable goal. We see a thirty-two county republic as the best way to eradicate the range of political, social, economic, and other inequalities that effect the people of this island. "Self-determination is universally accepted to mean a nation's right to exercise the political freedom to determine its own social, economic and cultural development without external influence and without partial or total disruption of the national unity or territorial integrity."³ We want to see an end to the union, but British government policy and unionism are opposed to its end. No party other than Sinn Féin has a strategy to achieve this goal.

Sinn Féin is a radical party, a party of innovation, with new policies and new voices. We have demonstrated a capacity and a willingness to create and to adapt to changing circumstances. We are willing to suffer the discomforts of change for a better future. We have a political vision for the future founded on the belief that the gap between the potential of Ireland today and the reality that is Ireland today can be closed.

II. *PARTITION: A FAILED LEGACY*

In 1922, the six northeastern counties of Ireland were partitioned from the rest of the island by the British government, against the will of the Irish people and under threat of war. This partition resulted in the creation of a sectarian state in which nationalists have always been treated as second class citizens. Inequality has been a core part of the ethos of the statelet.

The Irish people have spent over seventy-five years under a

3. SINN FÉIN, *TOWARDS A LASTING PEACE IN IRELAND* 3 (1995) [hereinafter *TOWARDS A LASTING PEACE*].

system of oppression, injustice, and inequality—a system that has been a failure. This system has created a unionist one party state that has rejected basic principles of democracy, justice, and equality. The responsibility for this lies primarily with the British government, a government that, ironically, has placed human rights in other countries at the top of its international agenda.

The oppression of nationalists in this state has led to a cycle of repression, conflict, resistance, and further repression. The root cause of that conflict has been partition and the denial of the right of the Irish people to national self-determination. In 1988, in *Pathway to Peace*, I summarized the effects of partition:

Partition and the British connection distorts our politics, sets restrictions on our economic growth, and dictates our social outlook and our cultural values. Partition divides our people not just in the six counties but between the six counties and the twenty six counties.

Partition saps our national morale and diverts our energies as a nation and as well as the 'carnival of reaction' which it established and maintains in the six counties, partition has a real and in-depth effect on the affairs of the rest of the island.

Most nationalists see the cause of the conflict in Ireland as a result of this British policy and the unionist veto. They want to live in peace with their unionist neighbors and many, though not all, understand the difficulties faced by unionists. They resent deeply the denial of nationalist rights and the influence exerted by the unionist political leaders. They also feel that partition and the development of two different political realities on this island has compounded their difficulties. "British policy in Ireland has manifestly failed, . . . partition has failed and the days of unionist rule are gone forever There can be no going back to the failed policies and structures of the past."

III. SINN FÉIN'S PEACE STRATEGY

In developing our peace strategy, Sinn Féin recognized that progress required honest dialogue between the participants, good faith in seeking agreement, and Irish republicans becoming agents for change and working to manage that change peacefully and democratically, and in the interests of all our people. It meant understanding that conflict arises out of injustice

and that an end to conflict requires tackling and removing the causes of injustice. This concept places a particular and heavy responsibility on governments.

In our view, a successful process of negotiation that will lead to a settlement requires a number of essential elements: it must tackle the many causes that lie at the heart of that conflict; it requires a good faith engagement on all sides; it must be inclusive, with all parties treated as equals and their mandates respected; all issues need to be on the agenda, with nothing agreed upon until everything is agreed upon; there can be no pre-conditions; no one can have a veto; there can be no attempt to predetermine the outcome or to preclude any outcome to the negotiations; and the negotiations should be conducted within a time-frame, which will provide a dynamic and momentum.

Throughout the development of our peace strategy and the talks process, republicans pursued the peace process in the context of our republican analysis of the situation and with a solid strategy to meet all of the difficulties head on. The republican objective was to explore genuinely the possibilities of a just settlement. Central to our peace strategy is the development of a credible and effective way of achieving political change through peaceful and democratic means.

Sinn Féin wants to demolish physical, psychological, and political barriers that divide the people of this island. These barriers are very much the legacy of our past, of continued British jurisdiction in Ireland, and of partition. The peace process is about tearing down these barriers. It is about creating a new dispensation on this island in the new millennium that raises our common humanity above the prejudices and divisions of our past. "Peace is not simply the absence of war or conflict. It is the existence of conditions of justice and equality which eradicate the causes of war and conflict. It is the existence of conditions in which the absence of war or conflict is self sustaining."⁴

In Sinn Féin's *Towards a Lasting Peace*, published in 1991, we argued for the creation of a peace process and identified the measures necessary for it to succeed. During the inter-party discussions with John Hume's SDLP party in 1988, we both agreed that the Irish people, as a whole, have a right to national self-determination. We also strongly affirmed that an internal six

4. TOWARDS A LASTING PEACE, *supra* note 3, at 2.

county settlement is not a solution and that the real question is how to end the British jurisdiction in Ireland in a manner that leaves behind a stable and peaceful Ireland. We further agreed that every effort must be made to get the agreement of northern protestants and unionists to the constitutional, financial, and political arrangements needed to replace partition and that the civil and religious liberties of northern protestants must be guaranteed and protected.

While these talks resulted in some progress, they failed to achieve their objective of agreeing to a common nationalist position. After the end of the inter-party discussions, however, John Hume and I continued to talk. Subsequently, in 1993 the "Hume/Adams" initiative emerged. We set as our goal "the creation of a peace process which would involve all parties."⁵ Our initiative called for a move away from conflict and towards a process of national reconciliation, accepted that national self-determination was a matter for the Irish people through agreement, and indicated that the search for peace was "our primary challenge."⁶

Discussions were also taking place between Sinn Féin and the Irish government led by then Taoiseach (Irish Prime Minister) Albert Reynolds. As a result of the emergence of the "Hume/Adams" initiative, its popularity and the hope that it held for the future, the peace process was publicly kick started. Around this time, there emerged in the United States a number of senior and influential political and economic figures who believed the United States could play a helpful role in the search for peace in Ireland. This Irish-America lobby successfully engaged then U.S. presidential hopeful Bill Clinton who, after becoming President, kept his word and gave me a visa, opening the door for a more pro-active U.S. role in the peace process.

In August 1994, Irish America, nationalist Ireland, and Sinn Féin succeeded in creating the conditions for the first complete cessation of IRA military operations. This was an enormous and courageous step that injected a critical dynamic into the peace process.

Regrettably, John Major's Conservative Government, which was allied to unionism, worked hard to undermine the process

5. Joint statement of John Hume & Gerry Adams, Sept. 25, 1993.

6. *Id.*

and particularly its Irish republican element. These reactionary elements were frightened by the potential for change that the process represented, but among them were those who then, and even today, sought a military and political victory where none was possible. Their obstructionist approach led to the breakdown of the first IRA cessation in February 1996.

IV. *THE NEGOTIATION PROCESS*

Despite the breakdown of the first IRA cessation, we in Sinn Féin did not give up. We persevered and remained focused on what needed to be done to reconstruct the peace process. This determined approach, along with the election of Bertie Ahern in the South as Taoiseach and of Tony Blair as the British Prime Minister, succeeded in creating the conditions for a second IRA cessation in July 1997.

In September 1997, we affirmed our commitment to the Mitchell Principles of non-violence and joined the negotiations at Stormont. Throughout the talks process we participated constructively in the work of the liaison sub-committee on decommissioning. From December 1997 to February 1998, we worked tirelessly to keep the process on track in the face of a concerted loyalist murder campaign that saw eleven nationalists killed and almost 100 wounded by attempted murders.

For republicans, the substantive issues that needed to be addressed by the process were those that were part of our effort to bring an end to British jurisdiction and those matters that were central to the conflict resolution process and to the equality agenda. We were aware of the many flaws built into the talks process, including having to deal with civil servants and securocrats who would resist change at all costs. Moreover, we were not naive about the possible outcome of the talks. We recognized that a united Ireland was never on the British government's agenda for these talks, but it was and is on our agenda. Our goal for the talks was to negotiate an agenda for change.

We set ourselves to the task of working with former foes to build a bridge out of conflict, to end the failures of the past, and to right the many wrongs in the society that we all share. Specifically, we argued for fundamental constitutional and political change, a demilitarization of the situation including the release of all political prisoners, and the immediate implementation of

the equality agenda. Without equality there can be no agreement. These matters must be seen as a package and should not be taken individually or separate from the whole. Nationalists demand a comprehensive root and branch approach to all of these issues.

We have always insisted that it is our collective responsibility to create a dynamic for change that is stronger than the resistance to such change. We have argued that the movement away from today's inequality, division, and conflict must be a transition. We believe that progress can be achieved through a rolling process that builds a bridge into the future.

V. A BRIDGE TO THE FUTURE—THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT

On April 10, 1998, a step forward was taken. The Good Friday Agreement (or "Agreement") was the result of many years of hard work and months of difficult negotiations. It was painstakingly and exhaustively put together. We sought to tackle honestly and openly all of those issues that gave rise to the conflict, as well as those matters that are symptoms and the legacy of that conflict. The Agreement was the best deal that the participants in the negotiations could reach. No one got everything they wanted, but we secured enough to give the Agreement a fair wind. It is not a peace settlement, but is the basis for progress towards one. The Good Friday Agreement is a charter for change.

Again, the Agreement is not a peace settlement, nor does it purport to be one. Rather, it is an important staging post for the peace process that can, like others before it in recent years, create the conditions for further movement in that direction. Sinn Féin believes that the Agreement itself has not resolved the causes of conflict, but has mapped out a political and institutional framework within which many of the causes of conflict can and must be addressed. The Agreement is, therefore, not a settlement, but is a basis for advancement. It marks the beginning of a transitional period towards Irish reunification, but only if all those who express an interest in that objective, especially the powerful and the influential, move beyond rhetoric to build a real dynamic for national and democratic change. It was never

and will never be enough to say that the nationalist nightmare has ended when it quite clearly has not.

Republicans had recognized that a united Ireland was not attainable through these negotiations. This was the case not just because of unionist opposition, but because out of all the participants in the process only Sinn Féin was advocating and promoting that objective. The parameters set by the two governments also mitigated against reunification at this stage. Sinn Féin also indicated that an alliance between Irish political parties and opinion, and the pursuit of objectives that serve the interests and well-being of the Irish nation and seek to normalize the relationships between the people of Ireland and the people of Britain, are of central importance to Irish nationalists. We are also safe in the knowledge that Sinn Féin's objective of national independence is the national democratic desire of the overwhelming majority of the population of this island.

During the talks, we set ourselves to the task of weakening the British link while defending the right of Irish people to national self-determination. It is in this context that we constantly measure the gains and losses contained in the Good Friday Agreement.

Sinn Féin sought maximum change to British constitutional legislation and no changes to the Irish constitutional position that would dilute the definition of the nation, the rights of Irish citizens, or the imperative to reunite the country. We fought for and achieved the repeal of the Government of Ireland Act, which underpinned the union, and insisted that other relevant legislation, including the Act of Union and the Northern Ireland Constitution Act of 1973, must also be altered, repealed, or rendered inoperable by any new act. The union has been weakened by a clause limiting the life of the union to the will of a majority in the northern state.

The bald fact is that while the union has been weakened, partition remains. Sinn Féin believes, however, that partition and all its negative ramifications can be further weakened by the dynamic operation of the all Ireland bodies, which are a critical part of the Agreement.

During the talks, our intention was to remove the unionist veto from all institutions. 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 a result of our role in the talks process, the room for unionist abuse has been significantly narrowed. Safeguards have been built in and unionists will not have a veto over the North/South bodies.

Throughout the talks, Sinn Féin was at the forefront in fighting for the release of political prisoners, a new police service, the transformation of the judicial system, and the whole equality and rights agenda, including employment equality, the Irish language, and the issues of symbols and emblems.

Sinn Féin believes that parts of the Agreement are ambiguous and contradictory, but republicans have examined it in the context of our peace strategy and struggle. Our goals and principles have not changed, but our strategic objectives and tactics are constantly reviewed and rooted in objective reality. Through our peace strategy and the talks process, Sinn Fein has, like never before, succeeded in putting the republican analysis right at the heart of Irish politics. This has, in turn, changed the Irish political landscape. Never again can the question of partition be relegated to the sidelines of Irish political life.

It cannot be stressed enough that none of the recent developments or the potential for change stemming from the current situation would have been a reality if the IRA had not shown the great courage in taking the initiative for peace in August 1994.

VI. PEACE IN IRELAND—OUR FUTURE AS EQUALS

Most importantly for nationalists, what the Good Friday Agreement does is recognize that the status quo in the six county state is no longer an option and that change must be fundamental and comprehensive. The Agreement and the ensuing referenda endorsed a wide ranging agenda for political, social, economic, and cultural change. Sinn Féin is aware that the Agreement is not acceptable as a settlement even in these areas. It clearly does not go as far as nationalists and republicans would like. The Agreement does, however, provide a clear standard by which the British government's actions can be measured and is a significant challenge to unionists who, during the talks, still insisted that there was no structural discrimination, only disadvantage. The days of unionist domination are gone forever. Union-

ists are, however, still trying to block political institutions that would begin the process of turning the promise of the Agreement into the reality of a new approach based on inclusivity and equality, involving all of Ireland's structures. While we do not have a level playing field as result of the Agreement, we do have a visible playing field with the issue of equality up in lights and with the clear potential for these changes to take place if people can be held to the positions outlined.

Human rights, policing, justice, equality, decommissioning, and demilitarization are all issues that can and will be dealt with, and the Agreement makes provisions for addressing each of these matters. Sinn Féin intends to see that all of this happens. Unionist nervousness will not blind us to the enormity of the task and to what has to be done in the time ahead. Sinn Féin is clear about the core political values that lie at the center of new relationships. There is a common need to recognize the integrity of the other, to be at peace with one another, to understand the ways that we have hurt one another, to be patient with one another, to find our common ground, and to celebrate our differences as equals.

Sinn Féin believes that inequality and social exclusion are the enemies of peace. We need a partnership based on equality that will empower and improve the quality of life of all citizens by being open, inclusive, and democratic. In the search for a just settlement, parity of esteem, equality of treatment, and full human rights protection must be guaranteed; these are rights, not privileges.

Nationalists in the North of Ireland have been denied many of their rights. Cultural rights have been systematically trampled upon, national and economic rights have been denied, rights of democratic participation have been withheld, individual rights have not only been curtailed, but have been curtailed in a discriminatory and frequently brutal fashion. In the words of the late human rights lawyer Paddy McGrory, the communal experience has been that of "living in an alien and hostile environment . . . in their own land."

Equality should now be at the heart of the British government's decision making and it must underlie the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. It cannot simply be an illusion, it must be a fact. There must be clear goals and timetables.

It must be felt in every community in this state and in the daily lives of our citizens. Freedom is much more than the right to vote. It is the right to fulfillment, the right to equality, the right to meaningful employment, the right not to be forced to emigrate, and the right not to be poor.

Sinn Féin is very clear that equality is not a threat to unionists. It means civil and political rights for unionists as well as nationalists and republicans.

VII. POST AGREEMENT

Since the Good Friday Agreement, we have continued to use our influence positively to effect its full implementation. We secured our party's support for the Agreement and the two referenda. Despite the risk of a destabilizing effect on our republican constituency, we sought and secured our party's support to amend our constitution removing a seventy-five year ban on members taking seats in a northern assembly in order to allow us to participate fully in the new institutions established in accordance with the terms of the Agreement.

Prior to U.S. President Clinton's visit to Belfast in September 1998, we took a series of initiatives, in conjunction with the British and Irish governments, to help move the situation out of the political vacuum caused by the failure to implement the first stage of the Agreement. On September 1, I reiterated Sinn Féin's commitment to making conflict a thing of the past, emphasizing that inclusive and honest dialogue is the only way forward for this country, and unequivocally set out our belief that the violence that we have seen must be, for all of us, a thing of the past. Martin McGuinness was nominated as Sinn Féin's representative to work with the Decommissioning body. All of these moves were welcomed by the two governments, as well as by U.S. President Clinton. The Ulster Unionist leader David Trimble, however, adapted a begrudging, negative approach and the potential of the initiatives was seriously diluted.

In order to block progress, unionists once again retreated into the sterile politics of demanding decommissioning of IRA weapons as a precondition of Sinn Féin joining the Executive. There is, however, no such pre-condition anywhere in the Agreement. This demand has been a tactical device employed by the unionists to slow down and even to halt progress. Throughout

the talks process and right up to the writing of this piece in January 1999, the unionist political leadership has remained wedded to a failed and unworkable status quo, thereby preventing change. Inertia in the process only serves the strategic interests of unionism.

During the ten months since the Agreement was signed, unionists have sought to minimize the intent and potential of the Agreement, to exclude Sinn Féin members from our rightful positions on the Executive and to reshape the Agreement in a way that spells the continuation of inequality and exclusion for nationalists. We also witnessed a period of rapid deterioration in the situation with the killing of a Belfast man named Brian Service and a number of attempted sectarian murders by loyalists; RUC generated riots in Silverbridge, Lurgan, and Tyrone; an increase in sectarian attacks on Catholic homes across the entire six counties; an increase in RUC and British army raids including raids on eight homes in the Ballymurphy area of West Belfast; an increase in arrests of republicans; intensified British military activity in Tyrone and South Armagh; and the targeting of young nationalists by the RUC seeking to blackmail them into becoming state informers. In addition, there has been ongoing daily intimidation by loyalists of nationalist residents on the Garvaghy Road. These are all worrisome signs that the old agenda prevails.

While Sinn Féin appreciates that David Trimble has problems within his own constituency, it is becoming clear that he sees the impasse and his refusal to implement the next stage of the Agreement as an opportunity for unionists to rewrite the Good Friday Agreement by skillfully utilizing the divisions within unionism in an attempt to renegotiate the Agreement. He is introducing new demands and conditions designed to exclude Sinn Féin, despite our electoral mandate and to dilute the inclusivity and equality that underlies the Agreement.

Unionists are currently reverting to their age old formula, as described by Jack Bennett in his introduction to *Freedom—the Wolfe Tone Way*: “Instead of forming a cordial union with their fellow Irish men to run their own country for themselves in their own interests, they find themselves the prisoners of a fossilized politico-religious sectarianism which is entrenched and institutionalised as an integral part of the imperial administrative system in the six counties.”

The Good Friday Agreement is not, however, solely a unionist agreement. It is the collective product of inclusive negotiations. It is premised on a willingness to accept our political opponents on their own terms, as they are, rather than as how we want them to be. The Agreement cannot be retrospectively rewritten on the basis of unionist demands, pre-conditions, or vetoes. There is, therefore, a collective duty owed by all of us who negotiated and endorsed the Agreement to defend and to ensure its implementation. The British and Irish governments, in their overseeing roles have a particular responsibility to ensure that the Agreement is implemented in full. They are primarily responsible for ensuring that the provisions of the Agreement are implemented under the terms and within the time frames set out. The test for both governments and for the Agreement itself is whether these democratic rights will be defended and acted upon.

One thing is certain, that the conclusion of the very lengthy pre-Christmas negotiations, during which the number of departments for the Executive and the number of all-Ireland policy and implementation bodies were agreed upon, cleared the way for the establishment of the Executive and the other institutions. While some progress was achieved with the final agreement on the ten departments, and we now have six all Ireland policy and implementation bodies, some of which are significant, Sinn Féin retains considerable reservations about the outcome of these negotiations and about some aspects of how they were conducted.

The success of the unionists' tactical go-slow approach, as well as the decision not to establish a separate equality department but instead to place at the "center" the exclusion of inward investment from the all Ireland business, and the trade body and the debacle around tourism, gave rise to serious concerns as we entered this critical phase in the peace process. That is why Sinn Féin entered into the recent negotiations. For us, the priority was strategic and political. We wanted to ensure that the legislative timetable required by the two governments was adhered to, we wanted to ensure that the UUP did not succeed in achieving its short term aim of limiting the potential of all Ireland aspects of the Agreement, and we wanted to clear away the "undergrowth" and to move towards the formation of the Executive with the unionists, SDLP, and Sinn Féin membership.

The position on this is now a matter of implementation,

not interpretation, unless the two governments acquiesce to the unionist game plan and abandon the Good Friday Agreement. Therefore, the next steps are clearly visible. The Executive must be set up and the all Ireland ministerial council must be established. There can be no further equivocation on this issue. The Good Friday Agreement is very clear on both the time frame and the chronology for the establishment of these institutions.

Under Executive Authority in Strand One, it is stated:

Executive authority to be discharged on behalf of the Assembly by a First Minister and Deputy First Minister and up to ten Ministers with departmental responsibilities. . . . Following the election of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, the posts of Ministers will be allocated to parties on the basis of the d'Hondt system by reference to the number of seats each party has in the Assembly.⁷

David Trimble and Seamus Mallon were elected to their positions in June of 1998. Tactical delays by the unionists have stretched the meaning of the word "following" beyond recognition, both to their discredit and to the erosion of confidence in the peace process. This same section of the Agreement goes on to state that "[t]he Ministers will constitute an Executive Committee, which will be convened, and presided over, by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister."⁸ It also states:

The Assembly will meet first for the purpose of organisation, without legislative or executive powers, to resolve its standing orders and working practices and make preparations for the effective functioning of the Assembly, the British-Irish Council and the North/South Ministerial Council and associated implementation bodies. In this transitional period, those members of the Assembly serving as shadow Ministers shall affirm their commitment to non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means and their opposition to any use or threat of force by others for any political purpose; to work in good faith to bring the new arrangements into being; and to observe the spirit of the Pledge of Office applying to appointed Ministers.⁹

7. Agreement Reached in the Multi-Party Negotiations, Apr. 10, 1998, Strand One, Democratic Institutions in Northern Ireland, Executive Authority ¶¶ 14, 16 [hereinafter *Belfast Agreement*].

8. *Id.* ¶ 17.

9. *Id.*, Strand One, Democratic Institutions in Northern Ireland, Transitional Arrangements ¶ 35.

The unionists have successfully resisted establishing the shadow bodies and have succeeded in forcing the governments to negotiate the all Ireland policy and implementation bodies outside the structure outlined in the Agreement.

The people of Ireland are democratically entitled to see the structure agreed to on Good Friday and endorsed in subsequent referenda established without further delay. Under the terms of the Agreement, Sinn Féin is democratically entitled to Executive office and to seats on the All Ireland Ministerial Council. These are mandatory provisions of the Agreement and are not subject to the discretion of Mr. Trimble. David Trimble cannot choose the elements of the Agreement with which unionism is comfortable and ignore the others. He cannot overrule, for his own purposes, the votes of the majority of the people of Ireland. He cannot unilaterally rewrite the Agreement or assert a veto over its implementation.

David Trimble, to date, has successfully exercised a veto that he has used to drive a coach and horse through the letter and the spirit of the Agreement. He is deliberately seeking to delay its implementation. Indeed, there are an increasing number of republicans and nationalists that are beginning to take the view that Mr. Trimble is seeking the collapse of the Agreement. They believe that he wants to create a new negotiation process that would produce another different agreement that would exclude Sinn Féin and the thousands of people who voted for us. Mr. Trimble's use of the decommissioning issue is probably the most obvious example. There is nothing in the Agreement that requires decommissioning before Sinn Féin or the other parties with the required mandate can take up ministerial positions, which are the entitlement of their respective electorates.

VIII. *THE NEXT STEP*

What is now, at the time of writing, people's concern and priority is that the peace process continues, that the guns are not in use, that the Agreement is built upon, and that we continue on the road to a lasting peace settlement. The establishment of the political institutions agreed to on Good Friday is the next specified and essential step in taking the agenda forward—the next staging post that can change the political context in which all of the unresolved issues can be addressed.

The Sinn Féin leadership and our party is totally committed to pursuing our objectives and our peace strategy. We will both promote the republican agenda and defend our mandate in the positive and constructive manner that has marked our contribution to the search for a lasting peace.

As this century draws to a close and the new Millennium draws near, the clamor for freedom echoes all around us. The talks process has not settled centuries of British interference in Ireland. Major issues still remain unresolved. As Irish republicans, we believe that Britain's involvement in our country has been disastrous for us and for them as well. We were bequeathed conflict and death; we were bequeathed division. Britain has never had any right to be in Ireland, and Britain will never have any right to be in Ireland. The British government can, however, play a positive role before leaving by trying to redress some of its wrongs and create the conditions for a peaceful transition to a just settlement through the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement.

Irish Poet Laureat Seamus Heaney described this new situation several years ago as "a space in which hope can grow." It is our responsibility to widen that space, to deepen it, and to nurture that hope. To make peace a reality is the challenge facing all of us. We must work to build a peaceful future together through dialogue, through accommodation, and through a healing process—a process of national reconciliation.

For our part we do not seek to forget or to ignore the hurt, but we need to learn the lessons of the past so as not to recriminate. As William Butler Yeats said, "[w]e need not feel the bitterness of the past to discover its meaning for the present and future."

Failure is inconceivable. There is no room for intransigence or self-interest. We must build a new beginning. We need to be persistent and pragmatic and we need to make friends with our enemies and opponents.

For republicans, the last thirty years of struggle has encompassed a number of phases—from the days of the civil rights movement and the popular mass uprisings of the early 1970s, to periods of intense armed conflict, the prison struggles—including the hunger strikes—into electoralism and the Sinn Féin peace strategy.

There will be many difficulties ahead for all of us, but we must look forward with confidence and optimism. This is a watershed moment in our history, one that we cannot allow to slip away. It must be seized with both hands. The decisions and actions of the next few months will determine whether we move forward. History has placed a challenge at all our doors. We must succeed, for all our people and for the generations yet to be born. In his second inaugural address, U.S. President Abraham Lincoln eloquently expressed this concept, stating:

With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.

It is our responsibility, along with others, to make this happen in Ireland.