

Commentary on the Northern Ireland Agreement - Using and abusing emergency power legislation with the blessing of Sinn Fin/IRA

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The following commentary was sent to the WSWS by a reader in Northern Ireland.

On the August 31, 1998, the Provisional IRA led by Gerry Adams issued a statement calling on the Real IRA to disband, the Real IRA being former members of the Gerry Adams faction of extreme nationalists in Ireland.

The IRA statement was said by Mo Mowlam, 'to be welcomed, as everything the IRA can do to stop the Real IRA is welcome.' This public recognition by the British government of the role the Sinn Fein/IRA have to play in policing capitalist interests in Northern Ireland is one that highlights the bankruptcy of the Republican project.

As the British government introduce the Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Bill, in the shadow of the Omagh bombing that claimed the lives of 28 innocent men, women and children, it becomes clear that this bill will be directed at those nationalist extremist groups in Northern Ireland who are opposed to the present 'peace' process, and not nationalist extremists such as Sinn Fein/IRA, who continue to murder and maim on a daily basis as they tighten their grip on the nationalist community in Northern Ireland.

The new Criminal Justice Bill will make it possible to confiscate the property of those convicted of being members of paramilitary groups opposed to the 'peace' process, while at the same time Sinn Fein/IRA will be handed £1million a year in pay and expenses for playing their part in stabilising the Northern Ireland economy as a cheap labour market for global capital. In return, Sinn Fein/IRA have taken their seats in the very

same Stormont government whose existence was the 'basis' for 30 years of sectarian murder by nationalists in Northern Ireland.

A more sinister use of the new legislation introduced in the wake of the Omagh tragedy by both governments is to undermine basic democratic principles by extending the new anti-terrorist legislation to deal with ordinary crime. Also, in the longer term, this legislation will be used to oppress those groups opposed to the exploitation of the working classes by an evermore desperate global market that is hungry for cheap labour.

The first signs of the Irish government's determination to use anti-terrorist legislation against ordinary crime came on September 21, when the Garda (Irish Police) Commissioner Pat Byrne said: 'New anti-terrorist powers may be used against ordinary crime.' The Commissioner was speaking at a conference in Dublin on the de-commissioning of paramilitary weapons.

The intention of the Irish government to use the new anti-terrorist legislation introduced in the wake of the Omagh bombing against non-paramilitary groups is not new thinking in the southern Irish state. Since the formation of the state in the 1920s, emergency power legislation has been used to suppress those groups that opposed the political direction of the various governments that were formed, and particularly those groups that pursued a 'Brits Out!' policy.

In the 1920s a special tribunal was set up for the trial of those persons accused of being members of paramilitary organisations. This tribunal had no jury, simply three senior army officers of the newly formed

Free State army. This tribunal has remained in place until the present day, although it is now called the special criminal court and is presided over by three judges.

In recent years a number of non-paramilitary crimes have been tried in the special criminal court, and this has meant that ordinary alleged criminals have been refused the right to trial by jury. In 1997 a referendum in Southern Ireland also removed the right to bail in certain crimes.

The most significant development in 1998 in relation to the use and abuse of emergency power is that it is being implemented with the blessing of Sinn Fein/IRA. They have made no protest against these abuses since taking their place at the table of British imperialism in the new Stormont government.

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See Also:

Northern Ireland's 'peace' built on state repression and paramilitary violence

[12 September 1998]

The Omagh bombing and the dead-end of nationalism

[18 August 1998]



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