

Sinn Fein endorse Police Service of Northern Ireland and MI5 operations

Steve James
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Sinn Fein's special convention on January 28 gave its backing to the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and the Northern Ireland criminal justice system.

The 900 or so delegates and 2,000 observers voted by 95 percent to "participate in local policing structures in the interests of justice," and mandated the appointment of Sinn Fein representatives to the Northern Ireland Policing Board and District Policing Boards.

The decision, opposed only by Sinn Fein's youth wing with a mere 20 votes, gives the Sinn Fein executive the right to participate in the North's policing structures without further reference to the party's membership. It follows a campaign by the leadership of the benefits of a Sinn Fein Minister of Justice, with control over the PSNI.

It means that the last obstacle, on the nationalist side, to reviving power-sharing in Northern Ireland between the nationalist Sinn Fein and the pro-British Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), has been removed.

The vote's significance was immediately grasped on both sides of the Atlantic as it removes the last vestige of equivocation over Sinn Fein's support for the Northern Ireland capitalist state.

The London *Times* noted, "Irish republicans have served notice that they will work with British sovereignty in Ulster for what they obviously hope will only be a transitional period but which could and should last for many years to come." Outgoing US Special Envoy to Northern Ireland Mitchell Reiss commended the leadership of Gerry Adams and called for the full implementation of the St. Andrews Agreement, designed to restore power sharing. Reiss also demanded that unionists support the new agreement.

Further endorsement of Sinn Fein from top police and intelligence echelons came from the so-called Independent Monitoring Commission (IMC), whose members include a former CIA deputy director and a former deputy director of the Metropolitan Police.

The IMC stressed that, following its decision to disarm, the IRA has ceased all training, intelligence gathering and disbanded its paramilitary structures. "We are clear that the leadership of Sinn Fein and the republican movement as a whole remains firm in its commitment to the political strategy and continues to give appropriate instructions to the membership of the movement."

British Prime Minister Tony Blair, with Ireland's Taoiseach Bertie Ahern in tow, promptly announced that new elections for the Stormont Assembly would be held on March 7 "for the explicit

purposes of endorsing the St. Andrew's agreement and of electing the assembly that will form a power-sharing executive on March 26."

The Northern Ireland Assembly set up as part of the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, which set out to end the longstanding war in the North by bringing Sinn Fein and the IRA into the framework of capitalist rule, has been suspended since 2002.

Following the suspension, the British government placed maximum pressure on Sinn Fein, partly in response to DUP demands, to abandon all extra-parliamentary activity.

In 2005, the murder of Catholic Robert McCartney and the raid on Belfast's Northern Bank were utilised to press Sinn Fein towards its decision later that year to disarm the IRA and suspend all its activities. Nevertheless, subsequent efforts to revive the assembly have stumbled over Sinn Fein's reservations over supporting the PSNI—the partially reformed replacement for the notorious Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), which played such a key role in British imperialism's occupation of the North. The PSNI is formally committed to recruiting as many Catholics as Protestants.

In the St. Andrews Agreement of October 2006, orchestrated by Blair and the US government, a framework was established to finally bring Sinn Fein and the DUP together. The new agreement set out a timetable for elections, pledged human rights and equality legislation, along with promises of a cash bonus in the form of a spending review. In return, local control of the PSNI should be agreed, with the intention of this being implemented by 2008.

As a further sweetener to former IRA activists, the government abolished the Assets Recovery Agency. Commentators noted that this would undoubtedly assist the Sinn Fein leadership in convincing former IRA units—particularly in border areas of South Armagh, where a lot of money has been made from smuggling—of the correctness of their policy.

In the weeks leading up to the Sinn Fein vote, two events revealed the real character of the Northern Ireland state to which Sinn Fein is now wedded.

The first was the publication of a report by Northern Ireland's Police Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan. The Ombudsman role was established along with the Good Friday Agreement, with the intention of establishing some level of public confidence in the police complaints system. In 2003, O'Loan was asked by Raymond McCord to investigate complaints surrounding the circumstances in which his son, also Raymond McCord, had been

killed.

O'Loan's report was devastating. It revealed that in one corner of North Belfast and Newtonabbey serious evidence existed to link at least 10 murders, 10 attempted murders and a host of other criminal activities to an informant of the RUC Special Branch. Both Catholics and Protestants were targeted. Called "Informant 1" in O'Loan's report, Mark Haddock, a known member of the paramilitary Ulster Volunteer Force, was named in the Irish parliament by Labour Party leader Pat Rabbitte.

Between 1991 and as late as 2003, alongside his murderous activities, Haddock is alleged to have provided hundreds of pieces of information to Special Branch. In return, and as part of a sustained effort to control a loyalist paramilitary Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) unit, Haddock received around £80,000, was repeatedly given assistance by Special Branch to keep him out of jail, allowed to keep a handgun, and assisted in his effort to remove rivals in the local drug trade.

"As a consequence of the practices of Special Branch," notes O'Loan, "the UVF particularly, in North Belfast and Newtonabbey were consolidated and strengthened."

It can be assumed that such Special Branch practices covered every area of Northern Ireland. O'Loan notes that as a result of her report, 24 percent of police informants have been discharged, either as criminals or for not providing any information. O'Loan did not comment on the corollary to this—that 76 percent of informants remain active.

In another significant development, Annex E of the St. Andrews Agreement also allowed for MI5 to take overall charge of national security arrangements in Northern Ireland, while continuing to run agents, in close collaboration with the PSNI.

MI5, the internal arm of the British intelligence services, has long played a bloody role in Northern Ireland. Throughout the dirty war, MI5's agents and informants were at some level implicated in a number of the most notorious incidents, including the Kincora Boys Home scandal, the murder of civil rights lawyer Pat Finucane, the killing of Francis Notarantonio and the Omagh bombing, to name but a few.

Although there was much inter-agency feuding, MI5 had close working relations with RUC Special Branch, the British Army's covert units, such as the Force Research Unit, and had a high level of insight and control over the conduct and trajectory of Britain's counterinsurgency operations.

In recent years, the multiple murderer and deputy head of the IRA's internal security, Freddie Scappaticci, was exposed as an MI5 agent, as was the IRA's leading international and US contact Denis Donaldson. No serious commentator on Irish politics considers that the full extent of MI5 infiltration of all paramilitary groups, including the top levels of the IRA, has yet been fully exposed.

MI5 has repeatedly put every obstacle in the path of investigators and lawyers trying to unearth the truth, for example, of the events of Bloody Sunday, January 30, 1972, when 13 civil rights demonstrators were shot dead by the British Army.

Recently allegations have emerged that loyalist killer Torrens Knight was an MI5 agent. Knight was one of a squad of Ulster Defence Association gunmen responsible for the deaths of eight

Protestants and Catholics in Greysteel in 1993.

While the British Army watchtowers and fortresses have largely been dismantled, a new headquarters is being built for MI5 in Palace Barracks, outside Belfast. According the *Sunday Tribune*, reports indicate that MI5 is actively recruiting members of the former RUC Special Branch disgraced in the O'Loan report.

Of MI5's UK-wide budget, fully one third remains allocated to operations in Northern Ireland, although the new building is part of a UK-wide escalation of its role. According to the *Belfast Telegraph*, MI5 is developing a networked 10-building infrastructure for its 2,850 staff, including regional stations in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Opposing Annex E, in November the constitutional nationalist Social Democratic Labour Party tabled an amendment to the Northern Ireland Bill, based on the St. Andrew's Agreement, which would have provided the Police Ombudsman with powers to investigate joint operations between the PSNI and MI5.

For their part, Sinn Fein claimed to "reject any role for MI5 in Ireland or in civic policing."

In response, last month, the Blair government assured Sinn Fein that MI5 in Ireland would be a "stand-alone" body, that security arrangements would be overseen by a Liberal Democrat peer, and that a liaison group would be set up between the PSNI and MI5. No PSNI officers would be seconded to, or under the control of, MI5.

Presented with this worthless assurance from the government that launched a bloodbath in Iraq on a fabricated pretext, Sinn Fein's policing and justice spokesman, Gerry Kelly, was ecstatic. He proclaimed that Blair's statement ensured that "MI5 have no part in policing in the North.... We have a PSNI which is not signed up to MI5 and which will hold them to account."



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