

# Sinn Fein leader in U.S. to promote peace

by William Jones

Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams warned that the mood in Ireland is growing less and less hopeful, as promised peace talks are moving nowhere fast, in a speech at Georgetown University on Sept. 14. Adams was in Washington for meetings with Clinton administration officials, in an effort to revive the flagging peace talks. "The optimism that was there one year ago has made way for, I won't say dismay, but at least disappointment," he said. "One would have thought 13 months would have been enough, but we haven't even started talking properly."

Adams explained that although there had been no hostilities during the last period, the British Army remains in Northern Ireland and Irish republican prisoners remain in the same miserable conditions in prison. In addition, he added, "the permanent state of emergency that has been in effect for 70 years was renewed in the last six months." Sinn Fein is calling for "fundamental change," Adams said. "We need total demilitarization," he insisted, i.e., the British Army should start leaving and the Unionists should also be disarmed. "The British establishment wants a settlement, but on their own terms. They want now to lower expectations and reduce the gains."

Ireland's Prime Minister John Bruton abruptly cancelled a crucial meeting set for Sept. 6 with British Prime Minister John Major, because of difficulties over a formula for all-party peace talks and the disarming of Irish Republican Army. Both sides agree that all-party talks should be held, involving representatives of the IRA and pro-British Protestant guerrillas. But Britain says that the IRA must hand in its weapons first. However, the IRA is not prepared to disarm unilaterally. "We need total demilitarization," Adams said. "There must be a release of prisoners, decommissioning of all weapons, an end to discrimination."

Intensive negotiations are ongoing with the White House, which has played a decisive role in setting the Irish peace process into motion. On Sept. 7, Britain sent a senior Northern Ireland minister, Michael Ancram, to spell out its side of the dispute to U.S. officials. Ancram said that Britain was anxious to ensure that the Clinton administration knew London's version of how the peace talks fell apart at the last minute. On Sept. 5, Sinn Fein chief strategist Martin McGuinness, who has held a series of preliminary talks with Ancram, began a five-day trip to the United States, to lobby support for Sinn Fein's policy of a united Ireland.

Adams stressed that the real problem in Ireland was not

the Irish parties, but the British. He noted that while there were still many Irish republicans in British prisons, there were no British soldiers in prison, despite the fact that there have been over 400 civilians killed by British forces. In fact, the only British soldier to have been imprisoned for murdering a civilian has since been released and returned to his unit. "I would like to see the British leave and Ireland reunited," Adams said, "but I prefer to argue for a negotiated agreement on the things we agree upon."

## An agreement is possible

At Georgetown, Adams expressed optimism about being able to reach an agreement with the Unionists. "The Unionists are only loyal to the Union because they see it as securing the status quo," he said. "This is not a religious conflict. . . . The Unionist faction has to be a part of the process. We should bank on accommodation in order to bring both of the factions home."

Adams related how the Irish republicans had been inspired during the 1960s by the civil rights struggle in the United States. "One man—one vote. This is what we were calling for. Now we must have a healing process, a system based on equality," he said. "If the British provided us a negotiating table, we would be able to reach an agreement with the Unionists."

Adams had met earlier in the day with National Security Adviser Anthony Lake and Vice President Al Gore. Adams praised the role of President Clinton in securing the gains that had been made in the peace process. Adams explained how British TV had never been permitted to show him or to air his voice. Only when he appeared on the evening news in the United States was that ban lifted in Britain. "The engagement by President Clinton has sent an encouraging signal to Ireland," he said. "And President Clinton has promised that as long as he is President, he will be working to move the process forward."

Clinton's economic adviser on Northern Ireland, George Mitchell, is ready to help mediate the dispute. "We will play whatever role the parties themselves feel can be most useful," Mitchell told Reuters on Sept. 7. "We do not want or intend to try to take over the process or inject ourselves in any unwanted or counter-productive way."

During the question period, one student with a British accent argued that as long as the IRA has weapons, the British troops are justified in remaining. "But they will always make excuses to remain. They even tried to do that in this country once upon a time," Adams said.

The United States has committed to sparking the economic development of Ireland as the basis for a lasting peace. But this policy is threatened by Republicans in Congress who, intent on eliminating every element of a dirigist economic policy, are pushing to abolish the U.S. Commerce Department, which has played a key role in putting into place such an economic program for Ireland.