



**THE GOOD FRIDAY
AGREEMENT**

**CAPITALISM, POVERTY, IMPERIALISM AND THE
POLICE STATE**

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THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT - CAPITALISM, POVERTY, IMPERIALISM AND THE POLICE STATE.

On the afternoon of Good Friday, April 10th 1998, the main political parties in the Six Counties reached an agreement that would become one of the most significant landmarks in Irish history.

Its conclusion was brought about by many weeks of negotiation and brokered by an occupying force which was bolstered by the support of other imperialist nations.

They said then, 25 years ago, that this Agreement was the start of a new era for the people of Ireland. That it was a day that 'we should treasure'; that it would hasten 'the end of violence'; and 'create new opportunities' for the Irish people.

"We, the participants in the multi-party negotiations," it read, "believe the agreement that we have negotiated offers a truly historic opportunity for a new beginning..."

If only someone had stopped for a moment to ask, 'a new beginning for who?'

Over 70% of those who voted during the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) referendum voted to support what they viewed as an end to violence. A sizeable minority however, voted against it, with many Republicans at the time, and even more since, taking up an anti-agreement position.

They believed that the Agreement would not bring about our liberation, now or in the future, and that it would only create an 'internal settlement', failing to resolve the core issues of occupation and capitalism; kicking the proverbial can down the road.

How then has that view stood against the test of time?

A CAPITALIST DREAM

Within years of the GFA being signed, global foreign direct investment had its eyes firmly on the prize - the Six Counties were ripe with opportunity and big business could be assured that whatever 'investment' they pumped in, they would pump sizeable amounts more right back out again.

Mark O'Connell, chair of OCO Global, a trade and investment advisory firm set up in Belfast shortly after the GFA was signed, said that when he set up business in Belfast in the years after the signing of the Agreement, there was "a palpable sense of business confidence" that as a region the Six Counties "was about to take off economically".

And that it did. Marks business recently published an economic analysis indicating that the Six Counties 'Gross Domestic Product', a measure of value of goods and services within the state, has more than doubled from £19.8bn in 1998 to £43.7bn in 2020.

Also doubling, was the amount of tourists flowing into the now burgeoning economy. Passengers through airports in the Six Counties stood at 4.4 million in 1998, doubling to 8.8 million by 2019, with overseas visitors increasing from 1.3 to 3 million, whereas cruise ship visitors swelled to 280,000 in 2019 compared to just 1,050 in 1998.

One of the other most notable changes has been the growth of the private sector and a reduction in the region's traditional support for public sector jobs. Stormont political parties, as part of the 2014 'Stormont House Agreement', have gone as far as setting aside £700 million in order to make over 20,000 public sector workers redundant.

ENDEMIC POVERTY

25 years of the Good Friday Agreement, littered with political instability, and yet, business and foreign direct investment is doing quite well. Strange then, as OCO Global's Mark O'Connell himself says, "Clearly, not everyone has felt these benefits...and we have far too many communities still living in deprivation." The communities that Mark is referring to are the vast majority of those resident in the state.

The Six Counties, Belfast in particular, is now a popular getaway destination; its city centre is teeming with packed restaurants, busy bars and fancy hotels. But scratch just a little beneath the surface and all is not what it seems. This "veneer of prosperity" as it was called by PriceWaterhouseCoopers, one of the 'big four accounting firms', is a facade, behind which lies 330,000 people, almost one fifth of the population in the state, now living in poverty.

66% of homes in the Six Counties are in receipt of 'state benefits', a figure that stands in stark contrast to the £43.7 billion moving through the economy in 2020. Someone is doing very well it would seem, but it isn't the more than 100,000 children now living in poverty.

Those children are subject to the daily horrors of deprivation, with the most deprived areas in the Six Counties having a suicide rate almost twice that of the least deprived areas. Indeed, more have died from suicide since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement than those who died as a direct result of the conflict in the preceding three decades.

Neoliberal capitalist economics, wholly adopted as the ideological bedrock of the Six Counties economy by the five main political parties, has devastated communities. The evidence is overwhelming, in that a significant correlation exists between social and environmental conditions and the prevalence of mental disorders. Mental illness is now recognised as one of the biggest causes of individual distress and misery in our societies and cities, comparable to poverty and unemployment.

This, combined with the complete failure to deal with the trauma and horrors of war means that when it comes to the Six Counties, mental health problems are the single largest cause of ill health and disability. Experiences of unequal-

ity, social isolation, feelings of alienation and dissociation, and even the basic assumptions and ideology of neoliberalism and materialism are significant drivers of this.

Not content with the cost of poverty on the public purse, multiple British governments have sought to twist the knife while it was in, and have for 13 years now implemented various 'austerity' measures against the popular will of the people. This has affected some more than others, with women bearing the biggest cost. It is estimated that austerity since 2010 will have cost women a total of £79bn, against £13bn for men. By 2020, men will have borne just 14% of the total burden of welfare cuts across Britain and occupied Ireland, compared with 86% for women. These austerity measures were adopted almost wholesale by Six Counties political parties and implemented by Stormont MLA's.

Things get worse, given that the Six Counties is, per capita, the most dangerous place in Europe for women, with more domestic violence killings than anywhere else.

IMPERIALISM

The role of the Six County state when it comes to the production of tools and weapons of war is often overlooked, though a significant portion of the economy is inextricably linked to the occupying military industrial complex.

Thales Group, a multinational company that designs, develops and manufactures equipment for the aerospace, defence and security sectors, was recently awarded a colossal £223 million contract by Britain's 'Ministry of Defence'. That contract will see the development and manufacture of high-explosive anti-tank missiles in Belfast, Ireland, to be packed up and carted off for sale and use in global conflicts. The Thales-'MoD' contract will see several thousand missiles delivered to the British Army from 2023-2026.

Another contract, worth seven times that of the Thales deal, will see Harland and Wolff 'revive the shipbuilding industry' in Belfast. The shipyard famous for building the Titanic will now assemble three new naval vessels for Britain's 'Ministry of Defence'. When complete, these ships will supply munitions, stores and provisions to Britain's aircraft carriers, destroyers and frigates deployed at sea.

Survitec, a producer of inflatables and other materials, will produce equipment for Britain's armed forces as part of a £25 million contract working from a site in Belfast. Spirit Aerosystems, formerly Bombardier, and one of the world's largest manufacturers of aerostructures, including defence platforms, was initially awarded a £30 million contract to produce unmanned drones in Belfast, to be armed with missiles, surveillance and electronic warfare technology.

Deloitte, a well known consulting and financial advisory firm, now has a British 'Defence Team' and an extended global network helping to exploit new technologies, utilising data to improve outcomes and develop 'smarter procurements' for the British military. That company has two significant bases in the Six Counties, both in Belfast, and more recently helped Britain's front line force in occupied Ireland, the PSNI, with recruiting more foot soldiers into the heavily armed force.

Belfast-based Kinsetsu is now utilising its technology on board British war-ships, including their aircraft carriers, for the purpose of beefing up security.

Kyocera AVX, working out of Coleraine in the Six Counties, is a leading supplier of advanced components, developing 'high reliability defence applications' for use in munitions, radars, surveillance, fighter jets, unmanned attack drones, targeting systems and more.

The list is endless, with a plethora of small, medium and large enterprises contributing to Britain's military machine and global imperialism through supply, design and manufacture; including, but not limited to, ADS (Belfast), Angoka (Belfast), ARLS (Bangor), Axis Composites (Newtownabbey), Boyce Precision Engineering (Portadown), Brolis (Larne), Causeway Aero (Lisburn), CCP Gransden (Ballygowan), Collins Aerospace (Kilkeel), DHL (Belfast), ECIT (Queen's University Belfast), Electronic Automation Engineers (Belfast), Microchip (Belfast), Magellan Aerospace (Greyabbey), NI Precision (Lisburn), Rainey Mapal (Lisburn), RW Powder Coatings (Newtownards), Skytek (Belfast), Speedlink International Logistics (Belfast Aldergrove Airport), Spirit Aerosystems (Belfast), Thyssenkrupp (Newtownards), Trimite Global Coatings (Belfast) and Whiskin Precision Engineering (Belfast). These businesses are but a small insight into a much broader network of supply, manufacture and distribution.

'Invest NI', a 'regional' business development agency whose role is to grow the Six Counties economy, states that 'the Defence and Security sector is a growing industry' with air defence and short range missile capability 'at the heart of the industry', with engineering companies involved in the Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning fighter jet, and the Airbus A400M Atlas military transport aircraft.

It is without doubt that a significant proportion of economic output in the Six Counties is inextricably linked to weapons production and the delivery of said weaponry on various military platforms to be used in conflicts across the globe. Mainstream political parties in the Six Counties praise job creation in the aerospace and defence industry and celebrate the 'successes' of high-end manufacturing without a second thought for the countless lives lost through imperialist wars worldwide.

Intelligence systems, weapons, electronics, composites, explosives and other components are daily designed, developed and manufactured in the Six Counties and delivered directly into warzones to be used by military organisations with a long history of human rights violations.

A POLICE STATE

As part of the Good Friday Agreement the 'Independent Commission on Policing...' in the Six Counties was established, intended as a major step in the 'peace process'. Chaired by Conservative politician 'Lord Patten', the former 'Governor of Hong Kong', it was better known as the Patten Commission and by the following year it had produced what became known as the 'Patten Report'.

That report contained 175 symbolic and practical recommendations, including renaming Britain's frontline security force from the RUC to the PSNI. Alongside that was an emphasis on 'community policing and normalisation'. It was, according to the 'Police (NI) Act 2000', particularly important to restore the forces 'legitimacy and public confidence'. The RUC were not disbanded, as was the core Republican demand for many decades, but were retained and rebranded. In essence, the Patten reforms were a massive Public Relations exercise aimed at drilling up support for the fresh lick of paint applied to British policing in Ireland. Almost two and a half decades of the force have shown this to be true.

Discrimination against the Republican, Nationalist and Catholic community more than two decades on is confirmed by the PSNI's own statistics, as they lay out in very public fashion that the force, formerly called the RUC, are twice as likely to arrest and charge a 'Catholic' in the Six Counties than they are a 'Protestant'. This lays bare the very clear bias against one community, from a police force that is overwhelmingly Protestant and Unionist.

These statistics, recorded by the PSNI themselves from 2016 to 2020, show that they have arrested 57,000 'Catholics' and only 31,000 'Protestants'. Of those that they then charged, 27,000 were 'Catholic' and only 15,000 were from the 'Protestant' community. This very clearly shows the bias and bigotry within the PSNI; if you are perceived to be from the 'Catholic' community then they are twice as likely to arrest you, and then you are more likely to be charged.

Over the past ten years, more than 374,000 people have been forcibly stopped and searched by the PSNI – the equivalent of one fifth of the population of the Six Counties, with children as young as 13 years of age being subject to such searches. Whilst the PSNI holds the third highest Stop & Search rate for British

state forces, it had the lowest arrest rate, corresponding to other figures indicating that the powers it utilises are being overused. More than 35,000 of those that they searched were children.

Indeed, there has been a 74% increase in PSNI Stop & Searches since 2005, and the force's refusal to record the community background of those they subject to Stop & Search is no doubt motivated by the desire to mask the sectarian and politically motivated nature of the force. They do not want people to know the religious background of those they stop and search because it would clearly show that they deliberately target Catholics. This is clearly shown in their record of arrests of 'Catholics'.

Over the past 100 years of this state, the length of its existence, we have seen the consistent use of various legislative powers against the mostly Irish nationalist population; from the 'Special Powers' of the 1920's, to the modern 'Justice & Security Act' of the 2020's, this failed little statelet is relentless in its quashing of opposition.

The figures clearly show that they are a tool of the state to keep tabs on the Republican and Nationalist community.

Just like the RUC was retained and rebranded, so too was the much despised 'Special Branch'. Well known for its part in British state collusion and its links to loyalist paramilitaries, RUC Special Branch received the same lick of paint as the RUC itself, and was rebranded and re-formed into what is now known as 'C3 Intelligence Branch'.

C3's responsibilities include intelligence gathering by undercover agents, the infiltration of political organisations for the aim of disruption and gathering intelligence, and the recruitment and running of informers. It is public knowledge that this recruitment includes the use of children as informers, as part of PSNI policy.

Well known amongst Republican political activists in the Six Counties and working hand in glove with C3 Intelligence Branch are the PSNI's 'Tactical Support Group'. The TSG are trained in 'specialist tactics', its duties include search, methods of entry, 'counter terrorism' and surveillance amongst others. TSG patrols support C3 Intelligence Branch, Britain's National Crime Agency and other intelligence agencies including Mi5. They are well known for their use of Stop and Search legislation to harass political and community activists.

These two agencies, C3 and the TSG, provide the basis of a re-branded RUC Special Branch. They use the same tactics and methods as the Special Branch, and for the same purpose. And it is not only the political, tactical and methodical approach to 'policing' that has remained the same, their religious balance stands in stark contrast to the PSNI's broader statistics and that of the Six Counties as a whole. A 2016 'Labour Force Survey' indicated that, of the working age population in the Six Counties, 44% were Catholic and 40% were Protestant.

But according to recent statistics published by the PSNI, their broader religious make-up comprises 67% perceived as 'Protestant' and 32% perceived as 'Catholic'.

Compare this with the C3 Intelligence Branch, a huge 79% of which are Protestant personnel, of which 92% are former RUC officers.

In 2013 the PSNI stated that '...the average length of total Police service for Regular Police who are currently attached to C3 Intelligence is 19 ½ years. There are prerequisites to transfer into C3 Intelligence Branch based on qualifications and other factors. Therefore the 50/50 recruitment since...2001 will not have had a major effect on Community Background in C3 Intelligence Branch'.

Indeed, many years of a 50/50 recruitment policy has done little to impact the makeup of the new Special Branch. It remains almost 80% protestant, a dim representation of a population that is almost 50% Catholic; not that it would matter anyway.

Little wonder then that, employing the same modus operandi, the same political direction and indeed the same workforce, we have the same outcomes.

As the PSNI works to recruit from Republican communities in attempts to shore up their religious figures, you would do well to examine each aspect of the force's human rights record, particularly that of its use of deadly weapons; weapons like the plastic bullet.

Since the introduction of the plastic bullet in the 1970's and until the modern day, hundreds of thousands of them have been fired by British forces on Irish

soil.

It is widely believed that the PSNI maintains a stockpile of over 50,000 plastic bullets at any one time, and since their introduction into the Six Counties, 17 people have been killed, seven of which were children. The plastic bullet, despite the death and injury it has caused, is still in use by the PSNI, with the Stormont government refusing to act toward its removal.

In theory, plastic bullets should be fired at the lower part of a target's body and from a distance of more than 20 meters. But we all know theory doesn't translate into practice and that these deadly bullets are fired at any part of the body including the upper abdomen and the head, and within that range. This has been borne out by the facts over many decades with many succumbing to wounds to the upper body and head by plastic baton rounds fired well within their range guidance.

Indeed, a 1999 report into the use of these deadly weapons during the Drumcree standoff determined that of the 8,165 rounds fired during the crisis, 39% were potentially life-threatening and impacted the upper part of the target's body.

The report, carried out by five of the Six Counties most senior doctors at the time and published in the Journal of Trauma Injury, Infection and Critical care, considered these injuries inflicted to the body from the abdomen up to the head as constituting a risk to life.

The health and medical community have clearly laid out the lethality of these types of weapons and yet, in the face of decades of campaigning, with families torn apart by the pain of the loss of their loved ones, and with countless others permanently maimed and injured, the use of these weapons continues.

The British Government, its puppet assembly in Stormont, the PSNI and so-called 'Policing and Community Safety Partnerships' know exactly where our community stands when it comes to the use of these lethal weapons. Some of them have had decades to take them off the shelves if they wanted to. Instead, they continue to buy them, to store them, to train with them and to shoot them on Irish streets.

The PSNI Commander for West Belfast, Chief Inspector Peter Brannigan, formerly of the RUC, gave an extensive interview to a local media outlet where he detailed his efforts to 'normalise' the PSNI.

Those efforts, he said, should include making the heavily militarised Woodbourne Barracks nicer looking for civilians. It is clear that the senior leadership of the PSNI has a desire to brush the military aesthetic of the force under the proverbial carpet.

What is also clear, is that the PSNI is very heavily involved in court cases and litigation regarding 'legacy' issues, the Sean Graham Bookies massacre and countless others across this state. It aims to protect the RUC and the RUC personnel who were wholly absorbed into the PSNI.

As an RUC officer, Chief Inspector Peter Brannigan knows this, he also knows, I'm sure, many of the main players involved. So when he speaks of 'normalisation', we wonder why this doesn't include the normalisation of justice for those families currently fighting the state and the PSNI.

The actions of this force, when we look beyond the nice new paint on their old grey military jeeps and their heavily armoured cars, is not normal.

The PSNI isn't the only tool in the British armoury when it comes to pacification, it also utilises its legal system and specific legislation designed to curtail many forms of political organising. The existence and use of non-jury 'Diplock Courts' continues, and new measures allow the British state to revoke 'licences' for political ex-prisoners, imprisoning them again on the whim of a British Secretary of State.

Internment still exists, though not formally. The British have learned to utilise the tactic of removing individuals from their families with devastating effect, imprisoning them for long periods as they await court cases, with eventual release subject to stringent bail conditions. In effect, activists spend many long years imprisoned and many more attending court dates, only to find themselves acquitted or released without charge. Masters at political manoeuvring, the British state is using their judicial system in Ireland to devastating effect.

IN CONCLUSION

From the perspective of the British state, you could easily assume that the Good Friday Agreement was designed to achieve, and indeed it did achieve, many things.

The cumulative financial cost is said to have run both the British and Twenty Six County governments an estimated £20 Billion since 1969. The economic cost of the ongoing conflict and the financial losses for the British exchequer are practically unfathomable when considering the broader effect across the Six Counties in terms of lack of foreign direct investment, job creation, taxation and infrastructure development.

Indeed, bringing an end to the conflict would allow the opening up and development of new markets for British businesses. It would also allow those businesses to benefit from a highly educated workforce at significantly lower costs compared to Britain, with significantly reduced overheads. This, combined with increased tax revenue for the British exchequer as a result, would also allow the British state to offset the overall cost of the now £15 Billion per year 'Block Grant' subsidy to the Six County 'Executive'.

Infrastructure development post-conflict would allow the transition of vast amounts of public funds into the hands of private businesses. City Centre development and high rise buildings would flourish alongside the businesses that would occupy them. The housing market would expand and house prices would rise significantly alongside the sale of public housing via neo-liberal Thatcherite housing policies, hastening the end of vast social housing developments and the creation of a mammoth private rental economy and a burgeoning landlord class.

The Republican Movement would be wholly subsumed into the political cul-de-sac they call Stormont, forever caught up in the sectarian carve-up of a failed statelet destined for instability; re-writing the Good Friday Agreement every few years until it effectively no longer existed.

Significant numbers of British troops would now leave the Six Counties alongside their broader military apparatus, though the occupation would continue with a large garrison, a scaled down infrastructure, and a beefed up intelli-

gence network. Enough to pacify the people.

In a masterstroke, the British managed to convince the Republican Movement to hand over the vast bulk of its weaponry and ordnance to the enemy. That arsenal, assembled over many years by IRA Volunteers and at significant cost to life and liberty, was subsequently destroyed by British General John de Chastelain, removing a significant threat to the British presence in Ireland.

The frontline force that those now decommissioned weapons were used to gun down, the PSNI (legally incorporating the RUC), would now be wholly supported by the leadership of that same Movement. Not just in terms of practical advice but in recruitment and intelligence. They too would now criminalise the Republican struggle, calling for information to be passed to the PSNI and supporting both British courts and prison systems in occupied Ireland.

From a British perspective, the Good Friday Agreement had effectively achieved all of its objectives of Ulsterisation, Normalisation and Criminalisation in one fell swoop, and Sinn Féin would no longer stand as a major barrier to those objectives; instead, they would do it for them. A masterstroke in British manoeuvring.

Hook, line and sinker.

From the perspective of the Republican Movement, the Good Friday Agreement represents an abysmal failure to achieve its objectives. Unable to score any meaningful goals, it persists in moving the goal-posts - gone are the cries of 'a Socialist Republic', replaced with calls for 'a New Ireland', whatever exactly that might be; though absent of socialism, that much is clear.

Sinn Féin's tenure as the poster child of post-conflict 'democracy' has been overshadowed by the constant failure of that supposed 'democracy' to remain standing. In the quarter of a century since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, Stormont has collapsed no less than six times, leaving the state with no devolved government for almost ten years in total.

Stormont's supposed 'success' has been shrouded with the prevalence of nepotism and persistent public scandals. A 2014 probe discovered the funnelling of £700,000 of public funds into businesses run by Sinn Féin, alongside bogus claims for party expenses. The Renewable Heat Incentive scheme or 'Cash for

Ash' as it became known, is reported to have cost the public over £500 million pounds. The Red Sky scandal saw the drawing down of public funds into private business for work on public housing which was not completed, and Stormont political parties arranging for contracts to be extended.

These scandals, alongside others, are the hallmark of governance in a failed state. The same failed state that has written into its laws an effective veto for Unionist political parties to stand in the way of any change to the status quo - the 'petition of concern' is a mechanism whereby a block of 30 Stormont members (MLA's) can petition the Assembly requiring a matter to be passed on a 'cross-community' rather than a simple majority basis. In effect, it allows Unionism to block any form of legislation it deems to stand against its needs and desires, granting them an effective veto over governance in the Six Counties.

Indeed, the introduction of legislation supporting the Irish language or underpinning a woman's right to choose in the Six Counties has only been brought about due to the fact that Stormont political parties were not in a position to block legislation due to Stormont instability. In essence, Stormont itself is a roadblock for any kind of progression or advancement in human rights.

25 years of unstable government has not advanced any significant Republican objectives, on the contrary, those who claim to be Republicans in government have thus far rolled back on significant Republican demands. 'A United Ireland by 2016' has been replaced with hopes for a border poll; a new hitch for the Sinn Féin wagon. Such calls ignore the fact that such a poll would have to be supported through Stormont legislation and the Unionist 'petition of concern' veto, as well as the British 'Secretary of State' who can decide if it is in Britain's interests to allow it, before even winning a single vote, never mind a referendum. Such calls see no realistic proposition of such a poll occurring now or in the near future.

Sinn Féin is effectively resigned to persistent public relations campaigns as it constantly jostles the realities of governing an occupation for the occupier whilst trying to shore up its own voter base. A new generation has been born into a so-called 'post-conflict society', absent of the ravages of war. But that generation will experience the horrors of something else not wholly unexpected; unbridled capitalism.

They say that the Good Friday Agreement brought an end to violence - it didn't. It was an attempt by the British state to end the violence directed at its presence in Ireland. The violence of homelessness, mental illness, forced stop & searches, addiction, suicide, plastic bullets, access to healthcare, abject poverty and more was allowed to continue for the rest of us.

25 years of the 'peace process' was an outstanding success for the interests of capital and the British state, and an exceptional failure for the achievement of Republican objectives or any other meaningful outcomes for the rest of us.

Do we condemn subsequent generations over the next quarter century to the same fate or, when we reach the 50th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, will we have used those intervening years to advance new strategies and build new Movements in the fight for Socialism and Liberation in Ireland?

You decide.

Join the fight for a Socialist Republic.





Lasair Dhearg is a growing movement fighting for a 32 County Socialist Republic.

Formed from a small collective of community and political activists in 2017, our primary concern is the economic liberation of the Irish working class and the establishment of a Socialist Republic built upon the principles of the Proclamation of the Irish Republic of 1916 and the Democratic Programme of the first Dáil Éireann.

We believe that Irish sovereignty, equality for all and the economic liberation of the Irish people, can only become a reality upon the establishment of a People's Republic where all power and economic control rests with the Irish people.

“A free Ireland would control it's own destiny... from the plough to the stars.” – James Connolly

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