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## All-party talks must include Sinn Fein

All-party talks  
Democrat reporter

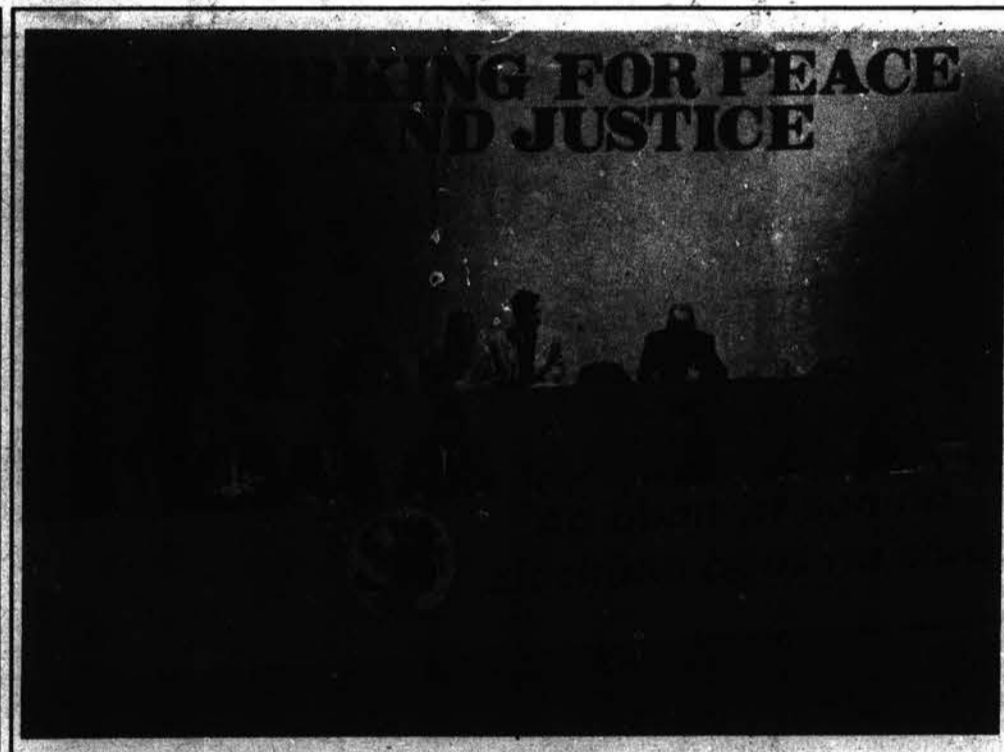
**T**he British government's response to Sinn Fein's announcement that it is willing to sign up to the Mitchell principles — so long as everyone else does — has not been enthusiastic.

Although few, including the republican leadership, would have expected the British to welcome Sinn Fein into talks on June 10 in the absence of another IRA ceasefire, Major and Mayhew's reaction was nevertheless little short of begrudging.

It is to be hoped that they are not simply fine tuning their earlier strategy of formulating their 'next precondition'.

It is worth remembering exactly what Sinn Fein is prepared to agree to. The Mitchell Commission report sought the full commitment of all involved parties to:

- democratic and exclusively peaceful means of resolving political issues
- the total disarmament



□ Talks without Sinn Fein 'not worth a penny candle'.

of all paramilitary organisations

- renounce for themselves, and to oppose any effort by others, to use force or threaten to use force, to influence the outcome of all-party negotiations
- agree to abide by the terms of any agreement reached in all-party negotiations and to resort to democratic and entirely peaceful methods in trying to alter any aspect of that outcome with which they

might disagree, and urge that 'punishment' killings and beatings stop and take effective steps to prevent such actions.

Although none of the above are remarkable, given the political developments that have taken place within Sinn Fein over recent years, the party's acceptance of the Mitchell conditions must be seen as its clearest commitment to the securing of a settlement by political means.

Indeed, Adams made

known that Sinn Fein was prepared to sign up to Mitchell back in January when Major decided to ignore Mitchell's main points in favour of a passing reference to the possible usefulness of an election as a confidence-building measure, provided such a mechanism was broadly acceptable.

It was not, and within weeks the IRA ceasefire shattered into fragments of splintered glass, twisted metal and

broken bodies that was Canary Wharf.

There can be no doubt that a renewal of the IRA ceasefire is both desirable and necessary if the current peace process is to stand any real chance of progressing the political agenda of Irish nationalists.

As a former adviser of the Irish Tanaiste put it, talks without Sinn Fein are 'not worth a penny candle'.

In addition, any talks that do take place must address the issues of prisoners, consensual policing, general demilitarisation and democratic rights, in addition to the key constitutional questions.

The British government must begin to show a willingness to embrace the process constructively if we are not to arrive at another impasse further down the road.

It is, therefore critical that decommissioning does not re-emerge as a crude means to exclude Sinn Fein.

In this respect at least, Major's hint in a recent *Irish Times* article that the issue of decommission-

ing could be addressed at the beginning of the talks "without blocking negotiations" is to be welcomed. The possible introduction of a fourth strand of talks, as suggested by John Hulme, could prove a useful and acceptable mechanism.

Unionists will continue to rail against any such moves and maximum unity between Sinn Fein, the SDLP and the Irish government will be essential throughout the forthcoming period, as will the efforts and mobilisation of support in both America and Britain.

Unionism is no longer the monolith it once was. Just saying no is no longer an option. Trimble and Paisley will undoubtedly try everything in their diminished — though not insignificant — power to put a block on a process that will inevitably lead to a further weakening of their grip on the life of the Six-County statelet. So be it.

The tide of history is not marching their way. The task ahead is to ensure that this remains so.







Without understanding the past, one cannot comprehend the present or shape the future



# Seeking historical beacons in the 'Celtic twilight'

MAKE no apologies for a sudden urge to indulge in what some will doubtless call a trip into the 'Celtic twilight'. I have frequently made the point that without understanding the past, one cannot comprehend the present nor shape the future. This applies to the distant past as well as more recent events. To paraphrase Karl Marx, ancient history can hang like a nightmare on the minds of the living just as much as any other period of history.

For example, ancient Jewish history and culture certainly hangs like a nightmare on the minds of modern Christians as much as it does on the worlds of Judaism and Islam.

In my youth, when I was a more avid reader of *The Bible* than I am now, I was always intrigued by a line from *Maccabees 2* — one of the books of the *Apocrypha* of the *Old Testament*. The story of Maccabees is the story of the Israelites' struggle to free themselves from the empire of the Syrian kings and reclaim their independence. It refers to a battle between Israelites and Celts at Babylon in the time of Sennacherib.

In 175 BC Antiochos VI Epi-

phanes, descendant of one of the generals of Alexander the Great, succeeded to the kingdom and empire of Syria. Judea was part of that empire and he treated it harshly. He ordered the looting of the temple in Jerusalem, erecting an altar to Zeus there, and set forth some decrees to Hellenise the Jews, trying to destroy their language and culture. We seem to have heard it all before.

Insurrection broke out led by Mattathias of the Hasmonaeans and his five sons: John, Simon, Judas, Eleazar and Jonathan. It is this struggle that is told in the books of Maccabees. Maccabees 2 is an epitome of the five books of the history of Judas Maccabaeus — the name means 'Hammer' — written by the Hellenised Jew, Jason of Cyrene sometime about 124 BC.

It was not until 141 BC that Simon Maccabees achieved a troubled independence for Israel which lasted 75 years until the Romans marched in. But the war between the Syrians and Israelites had its high points. One of them was when Judas Maccabaeus defeated a Syrian army at Modin and liberated Jerusalem. The occasion

was marked when he rebuilt the temple destroyed by Antiochos, and instigated a Jewish feast of dedication called Chanukkah.

Before the battle, while Judah was rallying his troops, he addressed his men to encourage them to fight. There were only 6,000 Israelite 'freedom fighters' opposing four or five times that number commanded by the Syrian general Nicanor. The reference is 2 *Maccabees 8, v 19-20*. And this is what caused my surprise and confusion as a youth.

**WHAT**, I asked myself, was a Celtic army doing at Babylon? Of course, it springs to mind that Galatia, on the central plain of Turkey, was once a Celtic country, established by the Celts in their furthest eastern movement in 278 BC and Paul of Tarsus, in his famous epistle, was writing to a bunch of Celts.

But the reference says the battle took place in Sennacherib's time. Sennacherib was king of Assyria in 705 BC. He is even mentioned in the *Book of Kings* (*Kings 2, chapter 18, v 13*). Now this is far too early a date to put the Celts in Babylon

— or is it?

We certainly know that from the 4th century BC, war bands of Celts hired themselves out as mercenaries, especially to the Hellenic kingdoms. Celtic cavalry pulled the Spartan chestnuts out of the fire at the battle of Mantinea in 362 BC when

**What, I asked myself, was a Celtic army doing in Babylon?**

Sparta was fighting Thebes. And they certainly fought for the Syrian kings from the 3rd Century BC.

Stephanus of Byzantium, for example, tells us that among the Celtic mercenaries in Syria's army fighting the Israelites during the Maccabees period, were contingents from the Senones of Cisalpine Gaul. The name means 'venerable

ones' for the Gaulish *sen*, which means old, is the same as *sen* in Irish and *hen* in Welsh. All that visibly remains of the Senones is their chief town in northern Italy — Senigalia, or Senones Gallia — just north of Ancona.

Could the *Old Testament* have been in error? Not if you hear Ian Kyle Paisley tell it.

Could Jason of Cyrene have truly been talking about an earlier Celtic army who were in Babylon at the time of Sennacherib in the late 8th century? Certainly some archaeological sites in eastern Europe do testify to the fact that the Celts were in the area by the 7th or 6th centuries, but I think we should have heard more evidence if there had been a Celtic army in Babylon at this time. Besides, the reference to the Macedonians is a give-away. I think we are talking of a battle in the 3rd century when the Syrian kings were fighting the Macedonians as well as the Israelites.

**B**EARING IN mind where the Celts were at this time, one could now go back to the story of the arrival in Ireland of the sons of Milesius Easpáine — Latin for the Spanish Soldier — better known in Irish as Míl and sometimes as Golamh or Galam. The story is one of the great myths of the invasions of Ireland given in the *Leabhar Gabhála* whose earliest surviving texts we have in the 12th Century *Book of Leinster*. Now just how much of a myth in this story?

Myths are usually stories based on real events.

What do we know of Míl? We know that he was an Iberian Celt. Well, there were plenty of Iberian Celts about in the ancient world. Iberian Celts fought for Sparta as well as for Carthage. We are told that Míl's proper name was Gollamh and in some texts this is given as Galamh — now that sounds just the sort of name a leader of Celtic war bands would and did use — 'spear-hand'.

We are told that he went to Scythia. Certainly by the 7th century BC, the Celts were settled along the borders of the area which ancient writers allotted to the Scythians. Indeed, some Celts had settled well into Scythian territory, even along the Dniester River and southern Poland. No problem about an Iberian Celt and his war band making that trip.

We are told that Míl was made a commander in the Scythian king's army and wound up marrying his daughter, a lady named Seang. He had two sons by her — Donn and Aireach. Seang died and Míl fell out of favour with the king who planned to kill him.

So Míl gathered his sons and his war band and made his way to Egypt. It was a big war-band for we are told he made the voyage in 60 ships. He took service with the Pharaoh, a pharaoh called Nectanebus, becoming an officer in his army and marrying his daughter, Scota.

After a while, having fought with Persians and Ethiopians, Míl grew restless. He heard that his own country,

Celtiberia, was being attacked by Carthaginians and so he gathered his war band and sailed home. The story of how Míl, his wife Scota, and his many sons and their followers, went to Ireland is well known. Míl died on the journey but his wife Scota landed in Ireland and was killed by the Dé Danaans in Kerry, where she is said to be buried. His sons were victorious and settled in Ireland. We are told that their progeny became the Gaels of Ireland.

Now this has been dismissed over the years as no more than a myth. That the Egyptian connection was no more than a Christian monk, centuries later, trying to make some nice Biblical connection. Is this just pseudo history or is there something more to it?

There were many wandering Celtic war-bands in the centuries BC and that fact that Míl was a Celtiberian, that he should serve in the armed forces of the king of Scythia and then those of the Egyptian Pharaoh is, historically, entirely acceptable.

If the story were written by a Christian monk merely trying to make a Biblical point, why choose the name Nectanebus as that of the Egyptian Pharaoh, and father of Míl's wife Scota?

There were two Pharaohs of Egypt named Nectanebus. The first reigned in 380-362 BC and the second from 360-343 BC. If someone was making a Biblical point, then the Israelite bondage in Egypt would be the linking period but that took place one thousand years before the reign of either Nectanebus and the name of Rameses I or II would have been more likely to be used.

But Nectanebus fits our story very well. Firstly the Persians of King Cambyses (525-522 BC) had invaded Egypt. Nectanebus I had thrown out the Persians in 380 BC, restored Egyptian independence, fighting both Ethiopians and Persians — exactly as in our story of Míl. Both Nectanebus I and II recruited mercenaries to help them reform Egypt and rebuild the sites such as Karnak, Luxor and Sakara.

It was, indeed, during the reign of Nectanebus II that Carthage, the capital of a Phoenician empire, began to extend its trading links in Iberia (Spain) and assert its power over the Celtiberians. At the same time Darius III of Persia invaded Egypt and ruled there from 335-332 BC, when Alexander of Macedonia conquered Egypt.

When Alexander died in Babylon it is recorded that an embassy of Celts arrived in the city.

Another piece of evidence putting the story of Míl at this period is archaeological evidence that places the appearance of a Celtic La Tène culture being introduced at this time. It could well be that Míl was a real person. The story of his adventures and the settlement of his war-band in Ireland came to be one of the great creation myths of the Irish nation. It is amazing what glimmers of historical light flicker when you feel your way through the 'Celtic Twilight'.