

Clinton trip marks death knell of British Empire

by William Jones and Edward Spannaus

It was an unprecedented scene. In all the pomp and circumstance that only the halls of Westminster could provide, an American President, Bill Clinton, spoke before an assembly comprising most of the names in *Burke's Peerage* as well as the members of the House of Commons, to outline to them his vision for the post-Cold War world. The ironies of the situation were manifold. Since taking office, President Clinton has been consistently attacked and reviled by the moguls of the British media such as the *London Times's* Lord William Rees-Mogg and the *Sunday Telegraph's* Ambrose Evans-Pritchard. The media hype was, however, only a backdrop to more serious threats to the President from the same British circles.

The President's three-day trip, to England, Northern Ireland, and the Irish Republic, is one of the most important events in Clinton's Presidency, and in the history of Anglo-American relations. The President's message to Parliament was simple: The days of the British Empire, are over. But we can still be friends.

Underscoring the point, Clinton's reception in Northern Ireland and Ireland was nothing short of phenomenal. His presence electrified the country, with some observers on the scene declaring that Clinton's trip surpassed that of John F. Kennedy's visit in its impact. Everyone knows, despite the President's own disclaimers, that he is responsible for bringing the possibility of peace to Northern Ireland after 25 years of troubles.

The Clinton policy

It was clear from the beginning of Clinton's administration that the new American President would change the way U.S. foreign policy was conducted. In almost all important respects, U.S. foreign policy was reversed 180° from the direction of the Bush years. In Bosnia, the Mideast, and

Ireland, the Bush policy, which was well-coordinated with Britain's Margaret Thatcher, was moved from war and conflict, toward a policy of peace and reconciliation. More important, and a prerequisite to the shifts, Clinton broke the Anglo-American "special relationship"—a fact that was more widely acknowledged in Britain than in the United States, where most citizens remain ignorant of Clinton's foreign policy revolution.

This was most evident in the role that President Clinton was taking in relation to the conflict in Northern Ireland. In no other geographic area had British imperial policies been more intense. Northern Ireland was, after all, a part of "the Isles," and a contested area long before Britain possessed an empire.

Clinton's granting of a visa to Sinn Fein's Gerry Adams initiated a process leading to the "ceasefire" in Northern Ireland 15 months ago. Then, administration officials established contacts with the other key figures and parties of Northern Ireland, Ireland, and Britain.

As momentum in the peace process grew, even Britain's Prime Minister John Major was, with great reluctance, brought on board. More recently, however, Major began demanding that the Sinn Fein begin disarming its members before being invited to all-party talks. In the weeks before Clinton's trip, the peace talks were at an impasse, with Britain being rightly accused from all sides of sabotaging the peace process. The Irish government accused the British of "cynical manipulation" of the situation, in trying to blame the government of Ireland and Sinn Fein for the breakdown.

In a last-minute breakthrough, Major and Irish Prime Minister John Bruton agreed to a "twin-track initiative," which will transfer the question of the "decommissioning" of arms in Ireland to an independent commission headed up by Clinton's special envoy, former U.S. Sen. George Mitchell. Simultane-

ously, the two governments would move toward setting up all-party talks to achieve an overall peace agreement.

In response to a question from *EIR*, White House spokesman Mike McCurry said that the last-minute agreement was “by no means a surprise,” because National Security Adviser Tony Lake had been in extensive contact with all the parties over the last few days.

Clinton at Westminster

One of the many ironies of the visit to London was the fact that the President and Hillary Clinton, together with the Queen and Prince Philip, reviewed the First Battalion of the Scot’s Guards, part of a regiment that has rotated units in and out of Northern Ireland for the last 25 years. Because of the President’s peace policy, these troops can now spend more time brushing up on their parade drills, rather than shooting down innocent people on the streets of Londonderry.

Prior to his visit to Buckingham Palace, Clinton addressed a joint session of Parliament. Under the gaze of King George III and a panoply of British monarchs, Clinton held out an olive branch to America’s historic enemy. For all of his praise of the “extraordinary relationship” between the United States and the U.K., he made his own independence from the old “special relationship” clear.

The speech was rife with ironies. In the heart of the country which perfected Venetian balance-of-power manipulations, Clinton spoke of bringing together former adversaries. In the country whose official agencies and private think-tanks and universities never cease promoting ethnic and religious conflicts, Clinton denounced “ethnic hatred, extreme nationalism, and religious fanaticism.” In the country now being denounced by governments as “the center of world terrorism,” Clinton denounced terrorism and “the forces of disintegration.”

Clinton reminded his audience of the history of U.S.-British relations, recalling the War of 1812 when the British laid siege to Washington. “Indeed,” Clinton commented, “the White House still bears the burn marks of that earlier stage in our relationship. And now, whenever we have even the most minor disagreements, I walk out on the Truman Balcony and I look at those burn marks, just to remind myself that I dare not let this relationship get out of hand again.”

Clinton in Ireland

Clinton travelled from London to Dublin and Derry (called Londonderry by the Loyalists). Everywhere he went, he was greeted by enthusiastic throngs. In Belfast, Clinton told the crowd: “If you build for peace, the U.S. will proudly stand with you. Northern Ireland can become a model for tolerance.” The President made reference to the American Civil War and the need after it to achieve reconciliation and forgiveness. During stops in Belfast at a factory and at an industrial park, Clinton stressed the need for peace in order to achieve economic prosperity.

In Derry, the town square was jammed with people,

young and old, waving American flags. Not since Kennedy had a U.S. President received such a greeting in Ireland, and never before in Northern Ireland—President Clinton is the first American President to visit there.

The President cited William Penn, a native of Derry and a Protestant who went from soldier to become a peacemaker. Clinton noted that Penn had founded the city of Philadelphia, where Irish Catholics and Protestants could live together in peace. That same harmony must be established now, but in Northern Ireland, he said.

The President said the most important divisions were no longer racial or religious, but rather the differences between “peacemakers and the enemies of peace, between those who are in the ship of peace and those who would sink it.”

On Dec. 1, the Clintons took the city of Dublin by storm. At least 80,000 people turned out to watch the President light the Christmas tree at City Hall, giving him a hero’s welcome. Waving American flags, the crowd chanted, “We Want Bill”—a cry which has followed him throughout the Irish leg of the trip.

The threat

In London, Clinton’s welcome had been mixed. Although most of the British coverage of the Clinton Westminster speech was polite, there were a few items that indicated the degree of rage among certain unreconstructed Empire layers. Aside from the Hollinger *Daily Telegraph*, the most notable outburst came from the *Daily Mail*’s Simon Heffer, who wrote a “Dear Bill” letter for his column on Nov. 30 entitled, “Please Keep Your Opinions on Your Affairs to Yourself.”

Heffer criticized the President for imagining himself as a peacemaker. “Yesterday you arrived in England and immediately behaved in a way guaranteed to turn the stomachs of most rational Englishmen,” Heffer wrote. “In the most patronizing and proprietorial tone, you praised the prime ministers of Britain and Ireland for having reached a compromise on Tuesday night, that would allow a target date to be set for talks on the future of Northern Ireland. . . . The only inference we could draw was that you would have regarded it as an affront, had a compromise not been reached. In fact, to put it bluntly, it is none of your damned business.

“You are used to acting on behalf of a great power that satisfies its need for superiority by going around the world refereeing the affairs of Third World countries,” Heffer ranted. “Despite one or two appearances to the contrary, Britain is not a Third World country. It is not a colony, or client state, of America.”

One London source told *EIR* on Nov. 30 that the Thatcher-Hollinger-Murdoch crowd will be more opposed to Clinton than ever, after the current trip. They will dig themselves in deeper to a hole of their own making, and their anti-American thrust, as personified by Evans-Pritchard, will harden. This, said the source, will increase the security threat to the President. “The threat to the life of the President is very real,” he warned.