

FORUM
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Dublin: drug epidemic worsens

By Jeanette Cullen

Since the major influx of heroin into Inner City Dublin in the early 1980s, some 20+ years ago, little has changed. Consecutive governments have yet to admit that Dublin has a major drug problem. The reality is that one service provider, namely the Merchants Quay Project, catered for 2,702 people who presented themselves during 2002. Of these over 2,000 were male and above the age of 18.

When the problem began, drug-users statistically were shown to be in the 18-19 age group. This age profile has changed to as young as 12 years of age starting on a drug career to people in their late 30s starting to use drugs for the first time.

While treatment services have changed, with more concentration on community based drug teams and programmes, the reality is that there remains a constant struggle for funding to cater for these programmes. There is also an intense need to further fund intervention and education at all levels. The need for community service provision is growing rapidly while the resources to underwrite costs are constantly being restricted.

Local community drug teams rely heavily on the local Drugs Task Force and the local Health Board to underwrite the costs of providing such community services. The constraints in which the funding providers operate ultimately affect the communities in most need of financial support.

According to statistics, the South Inner City has the highest number of drug users, HIV cases and AIDS patients in Europe per head of population. The impact on families goes without saying. It is not uncommon for one family to bury more than one child. It is actually more likely to find a grandparent raising a child due to the loss of his/her parents to drugs. In the early 80s in one of the Inner City secondary schools, of the first-year students, which comprised thirty students, seven remain alive today. The deaths were due to overdoses and AIDS.

Treatment

The reality is that a person entering a programme of recovery needs the following supports:

- Physical
- Psychological
- Emotional

Unless the individual is willing to address their problems on these three levels, recovery will never be complete. In most cases, the individual opts for a Methadone Programme, which helps him/her stabilise from heroin or cocaine. Methadone itself is a drug, and can be seen as a more addictive drug than heroin. While individuals can and so stabilise, they are often left on the treatment for indefinite periods of time rather than having a specific time-bound in which the individual knows the end point of their treatment.

'In the early 80s in one of the Inner City secondary schools, of the first-year students, which comprised thirty students, seven remain alive today. The deaths were due to overdoses and AIDS.'

Consequently, cross-addiction from heroin to methadone would appear to be inadvertently encouraged.

This situation arises because there are not sufficient treatment services available together with close evaluation of individuals to measure their progress or lack of same. Therefore,

methadone gives a false sense of real treatment.

For the user him/herself, it is not just a question of stabilising but also of dealing with the emotional retardation resulting directly from drug abuse, together with acknowledging the impact they have had on their families, friends and communities. While continuing on methadone 'treatment' this type of emotional recovery cannot take place.

Without proper acknowledgement from government that the drug problem in Dublin has reached epidemic proportions, attempts to address the problem will remain under funded and poorly planned. This naturally has a knock-on impact on local community drug teams.

Likewise, drug-awareness needs to become part of the National Education Curriculum from primary school upwards, especially as the age for starting drug abuse has gotten younger over the years. Children need to be made aware of the reality and the horror of drug addiction if we are to protect them.

Jeanette Cullen is a community worker in the South Inner City. She is currently Community Welfare Officer with the Connolly Information Centre.

Tribunal points to rampant Garda corruption

By Malcolm Kerins

Whether it's illegal payments to politicians, the flouting of the tax laws by the wealthy or the Catholic Church covering up its many sex scandals, Ireland has become a place where corruption is seemingly endemic in political, business and religious life. Through all this, An Garda Síochána remained virtually immune to allegations of corruption. But over recent months, the Gardaí's public façade has begun to crumble, exposing an organisation that seems to be rotten to the core.

The Morris tribunal promised to be sensational but the opening statements, made in November 2002, sent shock-waves throughout all sections of Irish society. Claims that three members of An Garda Síochána - Detective Sergeant Noel McMahon, Detective Sergeant John White and Superintendent Kevin Lennon - were involved in the bombing of Strabane courthouse and the planting of "subversive

paraphernalia" in order to gain promotion seemed beyond belief. But even more damning was the attempt to frame both Frank McBrearty Senior and Junior with a crime, in which the Gardaí have since been implicated, namely the murder of Richie Barron in October of 1996. These revelations have sent a number of Gardaí scrambling to save themselves with many giving contradictory evidence about beatings in custody and the forging of statements. It is this contradictory evidence which exposes the Mafia-style corruption that exists in Donegal. But the question has to be asked: Is this corruption localised or does it exist throughout An Garda Síochána as a whole?

The reaction of Garda Commissioner Pat Byrne would not fill one with confidence that the truth will be discovered. Reports have appeared in the media recently suggesting that Mr. Byrne has claimed privilege and is refusing to hand over documentation in his possession to the Morris Tribunal. This documentation is said to relate to allegations concerning hoax bomb explosive finds in the Donegal area. The papers are said to include intelligence reports from alleged IRA informers, including Ms. Adrienne McGlinchey (who was run by Detective Garda McMahon). Ms. McGlinchey claims to have planted explosives at the behest of Gardaí in order to secure their promotions within the force.

What is Commissioner Byrne trying to

hide? And what has changed since June 2001 when Mr. Byrne said, 'You can be assured of one thing, that all aspects will be pursued by me. I take this very seriously'. Perhaps someone should remind Commissioner Byrne that he will be judged more by his actions than his words.

It would be a mistake, however, to think that all the problems the Gardaí are having

eral lack of co-operation" from the Gardaí involved. P.J. Stone, of the Garda Representative Association, has expressed confidence in the internal investigation, which probably makes him the only person in the state confident of a just outcome. It's a pity, therefore, the membership of his association are doing their best to impede the investigation.

While both the allegations of corruption in Donegal and the Garda reaction to the May Day protest are extraordinary, there are more sinister consequences to be considered. Since the foundation of this state, the judiciary has regarded evidence given by members of An Garda Síochána as being above reproach. But if members of the Gardaí are capable of planting explosives to gain promotion, surely they are also capable of perjuring themselves in court to achieve a desired result?

This isn't just supposition. Over recent years there have been several occasions when Garda evidence has been called into question.

In the case of Colm Murphy, charged with offences relating to the Omagh bomb, Justice Barr sitting in the Special Criminal Court, had cause to describe Garda evidence as "outrageous" and found that Gardaí were guilty of "persistent lying on oath". Despite this, Colm Murphy was convicted. The same judge was also critical of Gardaí in the case of Paul Ward who was charged with the murder of journalist, Veronica Guerin. His conviction was later overturned.

It is very disturbing that both of these men were convicted despite major shortfalls in the prosecutions' cases. It seems to imply that the judiciary is turning a blind eye to perjury. Cases like these reveal the unfair nature of the non-jury Special Criminal Court, where even to this day, Republican activists are still being imprisoned on the evidence of senior Gardaí without the need of corroborating evidence.

The entire judicial system and police force needs to be reformed and the rights of suspects guaranteed. Even the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, accepts that there is public concern about allegations of corruption. This year is the 80th anniversary of the establishment of An Garda Síochána. How will it be marked? If the Morris Tribunal is anything to go by, the state might be best advised not to mark the occasion at all.



May 2002: Gardaí baton anti-capitalist protesters in Dublin

are centred on Donegal. On May 6 2002, a Reclaim The Streets demonstration was held in Dublin. This small group, of mainly young people, marched into Dame Street where they were set upon by up to 150 baton-wielding Gardaí. The result was that 12 of the protesters needed hospital treatment. In scenes reminiscent of RUC behaviour in the north, Gardaí removed their identification tags, which suggests a premeditated nature to their actions, before proceeding to reclaim the streets themselves by indiscriminately beating people. For the Gardaí, the most embarrassing aspect of all this is that they acted in full view of television cameras. The footage, subsequently shown by RTE, caused massive public outrage.

As a result, the Garda Complaints Board chairperson, Gordon Holmes, was tasked with investigating the events of May 6th. Out of 150 Gardaí present at the protest who were contacted by the board, only 25 responded and none could identify any other officers present that day. Such a display of arrogance by those supposed to uphold the law is hard to believe. Even when shown video evidence clearing showing individual officers beating people, the Gardaí chose not to co-operate with the investigation. This clearly shows the high standing of the Garda Complaints Board within the force. Gordon Holmes was forced to publicly comment about the "gen-

Hunger strike in England

Two Republican prisoners - John Paul Hannon from Co. Fermanagh and James McCormack from Co. Louth - went on hunger strike over the Christmas period in protest at their ill-treatment at the hands of the British government.

The two men, along with a number of other Republican prisoners, are being held in Belmarsh Prison in London. The prison is notorious for its harsh conditions and has been repeatedly condemned by Amnesty International for its treatment of prisoners.

Conditions in the prison have been steadily worsening in recent years, and the situation came to a head over Christmas when the men were denied phone calls or family visits. A hunger strike was called on December 30th and lasted for several days. The prison authorities then backed down and, according to the prisoners' representative, 'the situation was resolved to the prisoners' satisfaction'.

Belmarsh is primarily a remand prison, but also forms part of the 'Dispersal System' - a network of high-security jails used to house Britain's many political prisoners. The Irish prisoners are currently being held in the Special Secure Unit (SSU) - a top-security compound within Belmarsh resembling a prison within a prison. Conditions in the SSU have been described by a former prisoner as akin to 'living in a goldfish bowl'. 'The Unit itself is highly segregated. It has four 'spurs' - basically small corridors lined with cells. Each spur has a single TV - the only source of entertainment. There are no education facilities. You're allowed a radio and a small number of books. That's it.'

The handful of prisoners on each spur are prevented from having any contact with other prisoners in the Unit. Exercise - one hour per day, 'weather permitting' - is taken in a small concrete yard with high metal walls and a caged-in roof. Prisoners are moved from cell to cell each month and cell searches and strip searches are a feature of daily life.

Conditions in Belmarsh SSU have deteriorated even further in recent years, with the World Trade Center attacks being used, rather implausibly, as an excuse for even tighter 'security' restrictions. A number of Middle Eastern immigrants have been interned in the Unit without charge or, indeed, publicity, and prisoners are now regularly locked in their cells for up to twenty-three hours a day.

The '72 state papers...

By Colm Byrne

Undoubtedly the most bizarre of the revelations to come out of the recently released British state papers for 1972 was the British plan to repartition the six counties and forcibly move Catholics and Protestants into new single-religion areas. Even though some commentators have dismissed these plans as 'pub talk', John Taylor, then minister in Stormont, has said that they were 'seriously considered'.

Of even more interest to Republicans is the disclosure that by 1972 an increasing number of British politicians were advocating a united Ireland. One of the most prominent of these was the former Prime Minister, Alec Douglas-Home, who argued that the 'real British interest would best be served by pushing them towards a united Ireland'. His reasons were hardly altruistic - he simply felt that 'our history is one long story of trouble with the Irish.'

When one considers the impotent and pacified Provisional Republican leadership of today, which causes the British no trouble - either political or military - one fully realises the extent of the defeat of Irish Republicanism in recent years. Long gone are the days when senior British politicians felt under sufficient pressure to advocate a united Ireland.

Probably the most fascinating revelation to come out of the state papers is the official British account of secret meetings held in June 1972 near the Co. Donegal border between Daithi O Conaill, Gerry Adams and two British representatives, Frank Steele and Philip Woodfield. Woodfield's subsequent report to the British government gives us an interesting insight into how the British viewed the strength of the Republican Movement at that time. It is worth recalling that 1972 was the year when the IRA was inflicting more damage on the British army than it had ever managed before or since. One would think therefore that the Republican position going into negotiations was very strong. However, according to Woodfield, Adams came across as desperate for a ceasefire and intimated that he did not like life 'on the run'. Throughout the meeting, Adams referred to Woodfield as 'sir'.

'Leadership' such as this can only be described as pathetic. The cardinal sin in any negotiations is to appear weak and desperate for a settlement. The attitude and demeanour of Adams can only have provid-

ed the British with renewed determination. No wonder Woodfield asked that Sean MacStiofain continue not to be present at future meetings - the British must have considered MacStiofain and his insistence on a British withdrawal a lot more difficult to deal with than the 'respectable and respectful' Adams.

It has to be said though that what passed for political leadership in the 26 counties in 1972 doesn't come out of the papers looking any more capable. In the week following the Bloody Sunday massacre when Irish public opinion was united as never before in its outrage, and when Taoiseach Jack Lynch should have been at his most resolute, the transcripts of a telephone conversation he held with the British PM show him to be totally inept. Unbelievably, considering the week's events, Heath actually managed to put Lynch on the defensive by pointing out to him that Lynch had supported (and indeed called for) the banning of Civil Rights' marches. Worse still, Lynch went on to agree with Heath that the march in Derry was 'provocative.' That an Irish Taoiseach suggested that Irish people marching peacefully in their own city and calling for basic civil rights is somehow provocative is astounding.

The extensive links between MI5 and Free State army intelligence are also well documented in the state papers. Apparently, at the same time as the British army was shooting dead Civil Rights marchers, the Free State army's intelligence section, G2, was, on a daily basis, giving valuable information to their British counterparts. Of course, the revelation of close links between the security services in Dublin and London will come as no surprise to those following the McKevitt case in the Special Criminal Court, centering on the Walter Mitty-like shenanigans of MI5 agent Dave Rupert.

The parallels between 1972 and Adams' later handling of the Good Friday Agreement negotiations - when the Provisional leadership traded every Republican principle in return for a few well-paid jobs in Stormont - are unmistakable. While age and inexperience might be a reason for Adams' lamentable performance in 1972, no such excuse can be used for the 1990s. Added together with the ineptness of the 26 county politicians and the treachery of the intelligence services, it is hardly a surprise that opposition to British rule in Ireland has remained weak.

A new prisoners' organization - **Cogús** - has been established to represent and campaign for Republican prisoners in English and Irish gaols. Cogús can be contacted through the New Republican Forum (see back page for details).

Remembering Frank...

The present political stalemate in the North has not come as any surprise to those who were critical of the Good Friday Agreement in the first place. When Republicans saw that to implement the Agreement would require a series of compromises that would undermine the very principles of Republicanism itself, they warned of such events. The problem with compromise is that any step taken will not be a step far enough for one's enemy. Britain understood from an early stage that they could not militarily defeat a risen people in the North. They looked to Frank Kitson to devise a new strategy. That strategy was to recruit local agents and pseudo-gangs to do their dirty work for them. These agents worked outside and inside the Republican movement. Today we are familiar with code names like "Steak knife", which shows how effective these people really were.

Another part of the strategy was to construct a cease-fire and engage in talks, which in turn would be so drawn out that it would cause serious problems for the Republican Movement. It was planned that if the talks continued for a protracted period, the IRA would lose cohesion and problems of discipline and disillusionment would set in, weakening the organization even more. Individuals would become engaged in criminal behaviour and encouraged to do so. The organisation would be forced to take action against these individuals, thus acting like pseudo-gangs on behalf of their enemy. From a propaganda point of view, this would be the icing on the cake for the British. They could use these shootings and beatings to portray the freedom struggle as verging on the criminal and also as an excuse to prolong the talking, so that the vicious circle would continue. The feuding between the various loyalist groups and the internal divisions in the Provos are indications of how effective the 'divide and conquer' counter insurgency policy has been to date. Stormont having been suspended and direct rule back in place, the only thing required of the British is to sit back while loyalists and Provos shoot themselves.

These internal struggles do not cause any great unease in the corridors of power. After all, they were well planned for from the very beginning of the 'peace agreement'. So when one examines the current state of affairs we should remember Frank Kitson and his counter insurgency policy. It's certainly working better than the Good Friday Agreement.

Democracy in action?

By Brian Moore

According to a number of opinion polls published in recent weeks, the Irish people are overwhelmingly opposed to an American invasion of Iraq. Less than 25% of the population would support an American attack that lacked explicit UN backing. More significantly, over 60% would oppose any attack regardless of the UN's position. There is nothing ambiguous about these figures - the Irish people, it is clear, are opposed to war. Unfortunately for democracy, the Irish government is not.

According to figures released by the Department of Foreign Affairs, 523 foreign military aircraft landed at Irish airports between January and November 2002. Most are believed to have been US aircraft en route to the Middle East. Numbers have increased dramatically since then, and Shannon airport has now become a significant staging post for the US military build-up in the region. Up to 27 US planes are using the airport every week, with up to one thousand troops passing through per day. The aircraft passing through Shannon include F16 fighter jets and C130 Hercules transporters, but the majority are less conspicuously military, consisting mainly of chartered civilian airliners used to ferry troops and equipment to the region.

In the past, republicans have often been accused by Southern politicians of ignoring the will of the Irish people, 'choosing' war when the majority desired peace. In allying itself with the US regime, the Dublin government has not only ignored the popular will, exposing the sham of Irish democracy, but has done so entirely illegally. Irish participation in the US war effort is being conducted on an 'unofficial' basis, and is therefore in direct contravention of the Southern constitution. Article 28 of the constitution states that 'War shall not be declared and the state shall not participate in any war save with the assent of Dail Eireann.' Unsurprisingly given the popular mood, the issue has never been placed before the Dail.

The Americans too seem happy to maintain a low profile for their presence on Irish soil. Observers have noted that a number of the civilian airliners being used to ferry US troops had, in a previous incarnation, been chartered by Aer Lingus, and still sport the green and blue livery of the national carrier. An unlikely coincidence perhaps, but more probably a cynical ploy to reduce the conspicuousness of the American troop carriers.

Some commentators have questioned the implications for Irish neutrality of the American military presence at Shannon.

Such discussions merely beg the question, as Irish neutrality has in reality been dead in the water for some time. The issue does merit serious consideration however.

Ireland has long prided itself on being a 'neutral' nation, aloof from the squalid world of international military alliances. This image has been carefully cultivated by the political establishment, both at home and abroad. Our recent election to the UN Security Council was based to a large extent on the perception of Ireland as an independent, disinterested arbiter in international affairs. Unfortunately, this perception is false. Irish 'neutrality' is in fact a product of the dark art of political misrepresentation - a triumph of image over substance.

What was, to some extent, true of Irish foreign policy in the decades following the Second World War - when the country took a consistently anti-imperialist stance in the UN General Assembly - is true no longer. Ireland has become a 'Western' nation in the worst sense of the term - a nation which has allied its interests with those of the major imperialist powers.

A useful and domestically popular pretence, the façade of neutrality has now become almost impossible to maintain. Fianna Fail admitted as much when they took Ireland - against the will of the people, and in direct violation of their own 1997 election manifesto - into NATO's 'Partnership for Peace'. The impunity with which they did so revealed both the ineffectiveness of the Irish media as a political watchdog, and the contempt of the Irish elite for the democratic process. This contempt is evident again in the Irish government's covert support for the American war effort.

The situation in Ireland is by no means unique in this regard. Opinion polls in Britain consistently show a significant majority opposed to war against Iraq. In spite of this, Tony Blair has committed tens of thousands of British troops to the American expedition. This pattern is being repeated across Europe. Mass anti-war demonstrations in Spain, Germany and Italy back opinion polls showing overwhelming opposition to America's stance, a position not reflected in government policy. Only France has offered any significant opposition to US plans, and more cynical observers suspect that French objections have more to do with concern about the future of Iraqi oil contracts than humanitarian motives.

Those who assert that Ireland is a 'democracy' need look no further than Shannon airport. There, among the fighter jets, they will see 'democracy' in action.

Interview with Republican prisoners

The following interview was conducted by the New Republican Forum with a spokesperson for the republican POWs in Portlaoise prison

Q1. Can you explain the background to the IRA prisoners' statement of October 20th, 2002? (A full copy of this statement is reprinted on page 11.)

Over a twelve-month period, prior to October 2002, a number of veteran republicans from across Ireland in conjunction with some younger prisoners carried out a wide-ranging inquiry into the overall state of the organisation. During the course of the inquiry, several veteran republicans brought a large body of evidence to the prisoners' attention. This evidence related to corruption within the higher levels of the RIRA and it exposed the fact that the organisation was being transformed into a financial enterprise for the benefit of a select few. Arising from this evidence, we called upon the RIRA leadership to 'stand down with ignominy'.

At the outset, we endeavoured to have the matter handled internally. However, the RIRA leadership's initial response, when faced with our demand for their resignations, was to intimidate the families and friends of several republicans. This was nothing more than a pathetic attempt to silence all republicans who were questioning this leadership's conduct and the conduct of those around them. As a tactic it failed to achieve what it intended. When it became apparent that the RIRA leadership was stubbornly refusing to stand down, we felt we were left with no option but to publicly withdraw our allegiance from them.

Following the release of our statement, further evidence emerged regarding the RIRA leadership's complicity in other more sinister forms of anti-republican behaviour. These disturbing revelations have vindicated our initial decision to release our statement. The internal inquiry also highlighted the RIRA leadership's maladministration of the organisation. Their reckless approach to recruitment; their fraternisation with criminal elements; their failure and inability to formulate a coherent long-term military-political strategy and their refusal to maintain contact with prisoners in Ireland and England were just some of the criticisms which were cited.

It was a combination of the leadership's attempt to transform the organisation into a criminal enterprise for the financial benefit of a corrupt few and their collective dereliction of duty which ultimately led to the statement being released. We could not stand by and watch the organisation being dragged through the gutter.

Q2. How has the statement been received?

The vast majority of republican activists throughout Ireland who remain opposed to the Belfast Agreement supported the statement, along with all sentenced IRA prisoners in English prisons. Recently many Volunteers resigned from the organisation in disgust at the RIRA leadership's conduct. Thus, the RIRA leadership exists as a leadership in name only as they have no functional organisation

beneath them.

Most of the founding members of the organisation and many veteran republicans also encouraged and welcomed the statement. All agreed that a very principled and difficult stand was taken following the split with the Provisionals. And many felt it was sad to witness the organisation falling into the wrong hands. It was widely agreed that the statement was imperative and that such a drastic stand needed to be taken. We believe the statement has left the

'Many of the individuals who reconstituted the IRA agreed that if the campaign showed clear signs of being ground to a halt, it would be terminated rather than continued in an ineffective or irregular manner'

RIRA leadership isolated and without any vestige of credibility. How else can one describe an Army leadership which has lost the support of the vast majority of its prisoners and grassroots members?

Q3. Is the split irreversible?

Yes, the split is irreversible. There is absolutely no possibility of a rapprochement. Through their conduct, the RIRA leadership has besmirched the name of

Irish republicanism. We have withdrawn our allegiance from them. We are no longer affiliated to them. This will remain the case. As we commented in our statement the RIRA leadership's financial motivations far outweigh their political commitment to our struggle. They should not disguise this fact by cynically hiding behind the title of the IRA. If they had a shred of honour they would desist

'Our acceptance of political reality does not entail any ideological concessions'

from using the name of the IRA, stand down and resign from republican politics and go about their business. The IRA exists to resist British rule in Ireland. It is not a mechanism for financial self-aggrandisement.

Q4. Are the republican prisoners in Portlaoise prison affiliated to any organisation at this time?

Some republican prisoners are associated with the New Republican Forum. However all republican prisoners are affiliated to Cogús, a prisoners' support network, which has branches throughout Ireland, England, Scotland and America. Cogús raises funds to assist the dependants of IRA prisoners and intends to campaign around issues

'At all times republicans must remember that the objective of our struggle is the removal of the British presence in Ireland and not the employment of armed struggle at any cost'

like the repatriation of Irish republican POWs from English prisons. It will also highlight the plight of republican prisoners in Maghaberry Prison who are currently being denied political status. Cogús does invaluable work, which is greatly appreciated by all republican prisoners.

Q5. What does the future hold for the (Real) IRA?

The long-term viability of RIRA is most definitely in doubt. The current RIRA leadership is not only financially motivated, they are directionless and incapable of formulating a medium to long term politico-military strategy. They lack any ability to objectively analyse political events as they unfold and are incapable of charting a progressive course which will lead to the advancement of the Irish republican project.

During the course of the inquiry it was brought to our attention that the RIRA leadership is currently fraternising with, and recruiting, known criminal elements. These factors clearly point to the organisation's continuing downward spiral. However, the RIRA leadership, as an option of last resort, may attempt to merge with the CIRA. Indeed, there are indications that tentative moves in this direction are already being made. A handful of RIRA prisoners now share a landing with the CIRA in Portlaoise prison. And both organisations recently held a joint commemoration within the prison.



Portlaoise Gaol, Co. Laois

Unfortunately, there are some genuine, young republicans who currently remain attached to the current RIRA leadership. But hopefully in time, they too will recognise them for what they are: a gang of financially motivated opportunists who are seeking to utilise the title of the IRA in pursuit of their own financial self-interests. One thing is certain. If Irish republicanism is to emerge from its present moribund state, it will not do so under the stewardship of the current RIRA leadership.

Q6. Recent media reports suggest that in the aftermath of the Omagh bombing there was a deal between the Government and the (Real) IRA. Is there any substance to these reports?

We can emphatically state that there was no deal between the Dublin government and the then RIRA leadership in the aftermath of the Omagh tragedy. Any suggestion to the contrary is both inaccurate and mischievous.

Q7. What is the prisoners' analysis of the Belfast Agreement?

Clearly the Belfast Agreement represents Britain's latest attempt to stabilise its rule in Ireland. However it does set a precedent in that, for the first time since 1969, the British State has successfully co-opted Irish republicans into administering British rule in Ireland. Clearly the Agreement falls far short of a democratic resolution of the Irish national question. The deletion of articles 2&3 leaves the British claim of sovereignty over the north uncontested. The unionist veto pervades the Agreement. It sustains and perpetuates British interference in Ireland and acts as anti-democratic impediment to the exercise of national self-determination. The modus operandi of the Stormont Assembly is clearly designed to prolong division among both traditions in the north by encouraging voting along sectarian lines.

The Provisionals have clearly abandoned the revolutionary path and are travelling down the road of constitutional reformism. They have informed their support base that the so-called 'all-Ireland dimension' to the Agreement, namely, the politically toothless cross-border bodies, contain the potential to evolve into an embryonic all-Ireland cabinet. This is not the first time we have heard this 'stepping stone' analogy. Sadly it is without foundation as any attempt to expand the powers or functions of any of the cross-border bodies is subject to a unionist veto within the Stormont Assembly. Furthermore, many of the arguments being put forward

'It is the responsibility of those in positions of leadership to provide a coherent political analysis and chart a realistic course which advances the Irish republican struggle'

'The RIRA leadership exists as a leadership in name only as they have no functional organisation beneath them'

by certain Provisionals relating to future demographic shifts are very dubious as recent census reports have shown.

The Agreement clearly heralds the political and military capitulation of the Provisional IRA. Their acceptance of, and willingness to administer, British rule in Ireland and the decommissioning of their weapons at the behest of the British government is testimony to this fact.

The Agreement has also seen the reform and not disbandment of the detested RUC and its sinister appendage, the Special Branch. Although many advocates of the Agreement portray it as the final resolution of the Irish national question, it represents nothing more than an outright assault upon the Irish republican project. However, the passage of time will see the Belfast Agreement relegated along side the Sunningdale Agreement, Prior's Assembly, and the Anglo-Irish Agreement as flawed political initiatives which failed to normalise British rule in Ireland.

Q8. What does the future hold for the Belfast Agreement?

It is highly probable that the institutions will settle into something approaching normality in the months ahead. Clearly, the Provisionals are about to accept a reformed RUC and are scheduled to take their seats on the NI Policing Board as a trade off for further British Army troop

reduction and the removal of British military installations along the border. This may enhance the facade of a so-called British withdrawal but it cannot disguise the fact that British sovereignty over the north remains undiminished. Indeed, any substantial threat to British rule in Ireland would see a swift redeployment of British Crown forces to Ireland. And any blame for these redeployments will undoubtedly be placed squarely upon those who are leading such resistance. This would seem to be a win-win scenario from a British government perspective.

A statement from the Provisionals regarding disbandment or conveying the fact that the 'war is over' is also inevitable. The DUP may overtake the UUP as the largest unionist party. But notwithstanding their political vitriol, the DUP will moderate its position when faced with the prospect of political power. Remember this is the first generation of unionism since 1972 that is being offered a degree of executive power within the six-county state. From their per-

spective, this represents a very significant political prize. It is also highly probable that unionism will try to shift the goalposts regarding any future constitutional change pertaining to the six counties. They will try to ensure that any future constitutional change requires a weighted majority in both communities instead of a simple majority across the six-counties as a whole.

While the Agreement does contain the potential to deliver short-term stability, it does not represent a democratic resolution of the national question and therefore is incapable of delivering long-term stability. There can be no resolution of the national question while

Continued on page 11

On Another Man's Word...

By Sean Mulligan

It would be an education for anyone to sit in the Special Criminal Court for one day during a trial. Little had changed between my appearing on the 3rd December last and my first appearance there twenty-six years ago. I very much doubt anything has changed with the 'Special' since Robert Emmett stood in the same dock 200 years ago. The wigs and gowns are still present, as is the hostile attitude of the judges towards Republicans.

I had been arrested in July of 2001 on a charge of IRA membership, the only evidence being the word of a Garda Chief Superintendent. This piece of law is part of the unlimited arsenal the Gardai have, courtesy of the Offences Against the State Act 1939/98. I had been held on remand for 18 months in Portlaoise gaol having been denied bail under the Bail Act. Sitting in the dock this time around brought back memories of how the place worked and what I should expect. When

speaking to my legal people, I couldn't help but remark that they kept saying, 'Well you know it's the Special Criminal Court'. Perhaps one of the reasons the place hasn't changed is this sort of attitude. The legal profession should do something about it. Unfortunately they haven't and to be realistic are not going to. This court has been criticized by many international Human Rights organizations, including Amnesty International and the United Nations Committee on Human Rights. It is highly unlikely that the Irish Legal profession would risk falling out of favour over such a human rights issue.

As I sat in the dock looking at the three wigs on the bench staring back at me, I felt like a mouse that had just been spotted by three of the most vicious cats in the alley. Before me were Mr. Justices Johnson, Matthews and Smithwick. I had heard about these three 'gentlemen' and going even by the low standards of the 'Special' these three had a reputation that would be hard to beat. The courtroom was full of uni-

formed and plain clothes Gardai. I could see Chief Superintendents, Superintendents, Inspectors and God knows how many other Gardai. I couldn't help commenting on the fact that it was little wonder some poor old lady couldn't find a Garda when she was being mugged. What was making me uncomfortable in the dock was the smug expressions on their faces, as if they had been talking to the judges and already knew the result. I more or less knew that myself anyway.

I had thought that the trial would be over by the Friday of that week. However to my

me. On one they simply ignored the lies and on the other stated that I was only being kept under surveillance in the station, not held against my will. Why anyone would want to sit in a Garda station if free to go seemed to escape the three fossils on the bench.

For three weeks the state's case went downhill day after day. When Garda witnesses got into difficulties, one of the judges would step in to rescue them. At one stage it got so bad and the atmosphere was so hostile that Hugh Hartnett remarked that he would like to apologize to the court for

whatever he had done or said which had evoked their Lordship's anger'. Despite lasting three weeks not one word of the trial, or what had been disclosed, appeared in any of the newspapers. One Garda witness was challenged about having written notes in her book during lunch so as to cover up lies of a Superintendent, but even something this serious wasn't reported. But as expected, on the 20th December I was found guilty of

IRA membership and given five years on the word of a Garda Chief Superintendent, and we all know what that's worth. If you don't know, then you should spend a day in Green Street during a trial and you won't be long finding out.

Sean Mulligan is a Republican POW in Portlaoise Gaol. In December 2002 he was sentenced to five years imprisonment on a charge of IRA membership. His conviction was based primarily on the stated opinion of a Garda Chief Superintendent.

The 'Special Criminal Court'

'Amnesty International believes that the continuing existence of this Special Court is normalising what is intended under national law to be an exceptional and temporary measure and is contrary to the spirit of international law.'

Amnesty International Report, 1999

'There has been a deplorable failure to subject our police and criminal justice system to the sort of regular, independent reviews that have been a feature of neighbouring jurisdictions. It is at least arguable that we are reaping the consequences of that failure in the current controversies affecting the Garda Síochana.'

Prof. Dermot Walsh, Limerick University

'Steps should be taken to end the jurisdiction of the Special Criminal Court and to ensure that all criminal procedures are brought into compliance with Articles 9 and 14 of the United Nations Covenant on Human Rights.'

UN Human Rights Committee; 69 Session, July 2000

surprise things didn't go just as everyone seemed to think they would. The smiles started to slip from a few faces and as the days went on I saw less and less of the smug expressions. Even the civilized masks covering the faces of the three judges fell off on a few occasions and the hostility they had for my defence counsel was plain for all to see. From day one Hugh Hartnett S.C., my defence barrister, poked holes in the case and made the Garda witnesses squirm in the witness box. They were caught out telling lies. They lost a search warrant and forensic document, admitted that they hadn't kept records of exhibits or notes and one witness admitted that he had shredded documents. The Superintendent in charge was caught lying so that my detention could be extended. I had been released from Section 30 without charge but one Garda told the court that no way was he going to let me leave the Garda station. When the defence made a submission to the court about illegal detention on two different counts, the three judges ruled against

Open Forum welcomes articles on issues of national or international interest.

The views expressed on this page are not necessarily those of the editorial board.

Republicanism - a failed ideology?

Irish Republicanism is a failed ideology. The motivating factor behind five military campaigns in the twentieth century alone, its only legacy is five comprehensive defeats. It has achieved none of its fundamental objectives, and those limited gains which have been made were, in all cases, won by those who had already abandoned the Republican cause. Indeed, it could be argued that all the major advances in Irish society attributed to militant Republicanism could just as easily have been achieved through exclusively parliamentary means.

Today, Republicanism is a political ideology without a political movement. Many of its former proponents have abandoned it for the greener pastures of parliamentary politics or, in some cases, open criminality. The remainder are scattered among a handful of insignificant factions. Its adversaries, meanwhile, have grown in strength. British rule in the North is more secure than ever, and the 'illegitimate assembly' in Dublin remains undisputed master of the twenty-six county state. In short, Irish Republicanism has failed the Irish people.

Or so it would seem. The reality is somewhat different. It is certainly true that, as a force in Irish politics, Republicanism has reached its nadir. As an ideology, however, its vision of a radically different Ireland remains as potent as ever. The very fact that the rhetoric of Republicanism - 'government of the people, by the people, for the people' - has been consistently hijacked by the opponents of Republican rule is testimony to its unflinching popularity. The enemies of Republicanism, at least, are in no doubt as to its potential - witness the eagerness of the Dublin government to stamp out its last vestiges in the South, interneting unprecedented numbers of people in recent years on the basis of unsubstantiated 'membership' charges.

Let us remind ourselves of a few simple facts:

- British rule in Ireland is wrong. The occupation of the North is opposed by the overwhelming majority of the Irish people. It must be ended.

- The six county state remains a cesspit of sectarianism, now formalized in the institution of the Belfast Agreement. It will remain so as long as bigotry is a viable political option, endorsed and underwritten by the resources of the British state.

- The 26 county state remains illegitimate, not by reason of

its origins, but because of its failure to adequately provide for the needs of its citizens. It must be reformed beyond recognition - that is, it must be remade through a Republican revolution.

So, if Republicanism remains a potent ideology, why has it been such a political failure? Why have all Republican military campaigns ended in defeat? Why has the Republican movement been repeatedly betrayed by its own leaders? Why has the movement consistently failed to mobilize mass support in the South when such support was, at times, clearly visible? And above all, why has a secular, non-sectarian ideology failed so completely to win support from working class Protestants in the North?

There are no simple answers to these questions, but the issues they raise, and many others, must be tackled if Republicanism is to have a viable future in Irish politics. The establishment of the New Republican Forum is a first step towards meeting this challenge.

Drawing together political and community activists from across the island, the New Republican Forum is an attempt to lay the foundations for a new and revitalized Republican



movement. Its task will not be easy. One of the major problems facing Republicans today is the fact that Republicanism has lost its credibility as a viable alternative to the status quo. Like the socialism which infuses it, Republicanism has become a 'worthy but unrealizable ideal'. This decline has only been hastened by the willingness of the Sinn Fein party to jettison its Republican principles in return for admittance to the political establishment.

If we are serious about revitalizing Republicanism we must, from the outset, be open and honest with ourselves. A necessary first step in the rebuilding process will be a critical reanalysis of the history of the Republican struggle. The mistakes of the past must be acknowledged in order that they will not be repeated.

In order to facilitate this project, and to stimulate debate among Republicans on the way forward, a primary task of the New Republican Forum is the establishment of independent media outlets like Forum Magazine and its sister website (address below). We encourage all Republicans, and other interested parties, to contribute to this debate. Only by laying a firm and radical foundation for the movement of the future can we ensure that Republicanism escapes its current fate as yet another 'failed ideology'.

Forum Magazine can be e-mailed at:

post_iri2000@yahoo.co.uk

The scourging of Iraq - a new chapter

By Liam Grogan

Just over twelve years ago, in August 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait. Four months later, in January 1991, a US-led coalition made its response. During the seven weeks that the war lasted, 88,000 thousand tons of bombs were dropped. The resulting slaughter killed over 100,000 Iraqis. The US death toll was 137. Iraq's military potential was all but destroyed. By the end of the year, up to fifty thousand Iraqi children had died from cancers caused by the western coalition's use of depleted uranium. Unfortunately, for the Iraqi people, 1991 was only the beginning of their suffering.

As part of the Gulf War settlement, Iraq agreed to bide by the terms of UN resolution 687. This linked the removal of UN-imposed economic sanctions to the destruction of Iraq's nuclear, chemical and biological weapons' programmes. Over the next seven years, UN inspectors carried out their work and by December 1998 they were able to report that Iraq's non-conventional weapon's capability had virtually been eliminated.

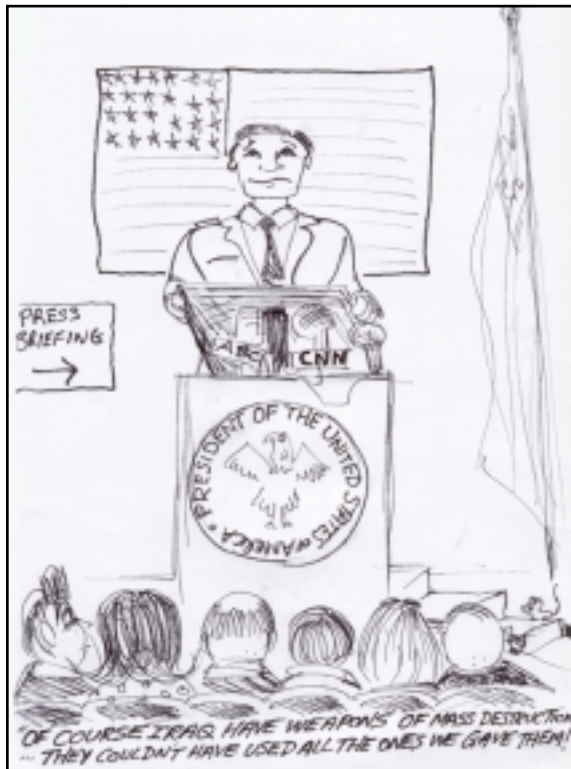
Yet, not only did the sanctions not end, within weeks of this report being published, the US and Britain launched a savage bombardment of Iraq - Operation Desert Fox. This action, taken without any UN mandate - thus breaking international law - resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Iraqi civilians. Not surprisingly, after this, Iraq refused to allow any more inspectors into their country.

However, it has not been US and British bombs that have been responsible for killing most Iraqis over the past decade. This most dubious of honours rests with the economic sanctions. While the sanctions have had little effect on Hussein or his cronies who are able to get what they need through the international black market, according to UNICEF, more than half a million children under the age of five have died from easily preventable diseases. This, while successive American Presidents and British Prime Ministers sickeningly insist that their quarrel is not with the Iraqi people but with its regime.

That Saddam Hussein is a tyrant is not in doubt. In 1980, ten years before he invaded Kuwait, he launched an unprovoked assault on Iran. That war went on to claim one million lives. Hussein has also slaughtered thousands of his own people including using chemical weapons against

the Kurdish population in the north of the country.

On several recent occasions, Bush, Blair and others have used these atrocities as justification for the impending war on Iraq. Of course what they omit to mention is that the vast majority of Saddam Hussein's most heinous crimes were carried out at a time when the Americans and the British were supporting him. In fact, it was British, American, French and other western com-



panies that supplied him with the components and ingredients to potentially manufacture weapons of mass destruction.

The CIA has even admitted that in the 1980s it provided Iraqi forces with satellite reconnaissance of Iranian troop movements so that they could better target the Iranians with chemical weapons. The Americans later turned against the Iraqi regime after Hussein went on a solo run and invaded Kuwait, another American ally. Of course this isn't the only occasion where the US have helped create a monster they later couldn't control. Also in the 1980s, the US provided financial and military aid to a young Saudi Arabian heir who was fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan. His name was Osama Bin Laden.

And it was only in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks on New York and Washington that war with Iraq once again came to dominate global politics. The Bush administration even made a risible attempt, despite the absence of any evidence, to link al-Qa'ida with Saddam Hussein. Adding to the absurdity of this is the fact that

American forces will use Saudi Arabia as a primary base in any war. Yet Saudi Arabia is where 15 of the 19 plane hijackers originated as well as being the home country of Bin Laden himself.

On the 8th of November 2002, in response to huge US pressure, the United Nations passed resolution 1441. This gave the UN a new mandate to go into Iraq and inspect its alleged weapons' programme. So far Iraq has complied with 1441 and since the end of November, UNMOVIC, led by Hans Blix, has been searching government buildings, factories and palaces. No evidence has been found that Iraq has secretly been manufacturing weapons of mass destruction.

Why is it then that the Americans are so keen to ignore the findings of the inspectors and launch an attack? The simple answer is because the weapons of mass destruction argument is a smokescreen. The real reasons America wants to go into Iraq are because Iraq has the second largest reserves of oil in the world and America wants to make sure its access to this oil is guaranteed in the future; secondly, America wants to show other countries around the world that it will not tolerate disobedience; and finally, for President Bush, a war would be welcome as domestically it would keep the focus away from his continuing attacks on health, education and social welfare.

And while all this is going on, what is 'neutral' Ireland doing? Shamefully, the government is adding to this tragedy by turning Shannon airport into a US air base. Every day, over a thousand US soldiers are passing through on their way to the Persian Gulf. This is happening despite the fact that the Irish people are overwhelmingly opposed to military action being taken against Iraq. An MRBI poll in *The Irish Times* showed that the majority against war was two to one. An even more recent radio poll in the Shannon area found that 81% of people are opposed to Shannon airport being used as a stop-off for US troops on the way to the Gulf. It is obviously the case therefore that when the will of the Irish people opposes the will of President Bush, the Irish government will opt to follow the line taken by their political masters in Washington. Sadly, however, it will be the Iraqi people who pay the price for this subservience.

Liam Grogan is a Republican POW in Portlaoise Gaol.

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British interference in Ireland continues. Irish history has shown that as long as the British government remains in Ireland, political resistance is inevitable.

Q9. What realistic strategic options are open to republicans opposed to British rule in Ireland?

At this time it is important that republicans accept political reality regardless of how unpalatable it may be. It is obvious that there is no support for armed struggle in Ireland at this time. And without popular support any armed campaign against British rule is doomed to failure. We believe it is the moral responsibility of the republican leadership to terminate any campaign when it becomes obvious that its continuance is futile. Indeed, following the split with the Provisionals, many of the individuals who reconstituted the IRA agreed that if the campaign showed clear signs of being ground to a halt, it would be terminated rather than continued in an ineffective or irregular manner.

Many republicans also believe that it is immoral to

jeopardise the lives of non-combatants and risk the lives and liberty of IRA volunteers as part of a non-existent campaign which has been reduced to an attempted operation every couple of months. This is even more so when a corrupt and discredited leadership is directing such a campaign. Our acceptance of political reality does not entail any ideological concessions. We continue to remain steadfastly opposed to the Belfast Agreement. However, in an environment where armed struggle is not a viable option it is our duty to resist British rule in Ireland by all other means at our disposal.

At all times republicans must remember that the objective of our struggle is the removal of the British presence in Ireland and not the employment of armed struggle at any cost. This is not the first time that Irish republicanism has found itself in a situation where difficult political decisions need to be made. The Fenians were forced to accept this fait accompli in the 1860s and 1880s; and the IRA was forced to terminate its campaign in the aftermath of 1916, 1923, in the 1940s and following the border campaign of 1956-62. In 1962, the then IRA leadership recognised that the continuation of the border campaign was not feasible without the sup-

Prisoners' Statement

The following is a copy of the full text of the statement released by the republican POWs in Portlaoise Gaol on October 20th, 2002.

On Friday, September 27, in a written communication to the Army leadership, the IRA unit in Portlaoise prison took the unprecedented step of calling upon the current Army leadership to stand down with ignominy.

We will not demean our struggle or provide succour to our enemies by revealing the comprehensive catalogue of evidence which has exposed this leadership. However, we do feel duty-bound to state that this Army leadership's financial motivations far outweigh their political commitment to our struggle at this time.

IRA prisoners find this morally and politically unacceptable. We believe that the current Army leadership has forfeited all moral authority to lead the IRA.

To date, the leadership has failed to respond to our demand. Thus, we feel we are left with no option but to withdraw our allegiance from this Army leadership.

We would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to our republican principles and reiterate our steadfast opposition to the Belfast Agreement and British rule in Ireland.

Furthermore, in order to dispel recent, mischievous leaks to the media, we would like to state that no IRA prisoners' representative has entered into negotiations with any government regarding the early release of political prisoners.

**PRO,
IRA Unit,
Portlaoise Prison.**

'For those at the forefront of political struggle, there is often a temptation or even a general tacit agreement not to discuss large and uncomfortable facts'

port of the nationalist community. In ordering its units 'to dump arms' the IRA Army Council stated that: 'Foremost among the factors motivating this course of action has been the attitude of the general public'. That particular IRA leadership analysed the objective political situation which existed at the time. They did not shy away from difficult decisions. Indeed, they fulfilled their duty in providing leadership when difficult decisions had to be made. At no time did their order 'to dump arms' entail any ideological concessions. It amounted to no more than an acceptance of political reality.

For those at the forefront of political struggle, there is often a temptation or even a general tacit agreement not to discuss large and uncomfortable facts. No activist wants to stand accused of defeatism or betrayal. But nor should any republican activist remain silent while a discredited and strategically bankrupt leadership remains blindly wedded to a fundamentally flawed and futile strategy which has led Irish republicanism into a political cul-de-sac. It is the responsibility of those in positions of leadership to

provide a coherent political analysis and chart a realistic course which advances the Irish republican struggle. A failure to fulfil this responsibility amounts to a dereliction of duty which if allowed to persist without redress will have fatal consequences for the political development of the struggle.

For all genuine Irish republicans who remain committed to the democratic ideals of our struggle, the future poses an almost Herculean task. However, it is essential that we place our analysis of the Agreement before the people. We must also continually highlight the limitations of the Agreement by exposing its anti-democratic obstruction of Irish national self-determination. We must develop and improve our performance in the arena of publicity and propaganda. It is imperative that we raise peoples' consciousness and expose the political hypocrisy and lies of our opponents. Much work needs to be done.

The New Republican Forum

The New Republican Forum is a coalition of political and community activists, founded to challenge the political status quo in Ireland by providing a radical Republican alternative to the mainstream political establishment.

The New Republican Forum:

- Stands for the reunification of Ireland and opposes all aspects of British interference in Irish affairs.
- Opposes the Belfast Agreement, which subverts the Irish people's inalienable right to self-determination.
- Stands for the creation of a just society in Ireland, based on principles of equality, social justice and genuine democracy, underpinned by a comprehensive charter of inalienable human rights.
- Supports the promotion and development of Irish culture.
- Opposes the resurgence of imperialism as a political ideology, led by the United States, its allies and client regimes.
- Supports all oppressed peoples struggling for national liberation.
- Opposes any attempt by the Dublin government to aid or assist any Western military alliance.

Our aims are:

- To establish a credible Republican opposition to British rule in Ireland.
- To critically reassess and analyse the history of the Republican struggle in Ireland, and by so doing, chart a course for the future of the Republican movement.
- To establish, support and coordinate the activities of Republican, community-based and other progressive organisations, forging a basis for a new national movement.
- To liaise with other progressive forces, nationally and internationally, including anti-capitalist groups, trade unionists and environmental movements, along with national liberation movements worldwide, to further the cause of anti-imperialism.
- To establish a range of independent media outlets providing Irish people with alternative sources of information on political and social issues.

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