

Fourthwrite



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No change as Patten is gutted

What began as a demand to disband the RUC, lock, stock and barrel declined into a campaign to fully implement the Patten report. Now, even that has been refused and the British Government is imposing its own version of policing on the North of Ireland. In reality, there never was any prospect of things being different. Control of policing is not an optional extra for a ruling power - it is a fundamental necessity.

Moreover, in a region where the very legitimacy of the state has long been questioned by a substantial section of the population, the ruling power will only ever permit cautious, meagre reform. The objective will not be to make policing more accountable and democratic. The purpose instead is to consolidate support for the state by having its one-time adversaries endorse any government's first line of defence - its police force.

For this very reason, every British Government has ensured that there has been a unitary police service in Northern Ireland since the island was partitioned. The same authority that controls the political Special Branch and the

paramilitary DMSUs (District Mobile Support Units) also takes charge of traffic safety, domestic violence incidents and regulation of addictive substances. Unlike some continental countries, it becomes almost impossible therefore to support civil order without simultaneously supporting the state.

There is nothing new in the British Government's recent approach to policing. They are ever willing to make cosmetic change just so long as the core elements of their device remains in place. For those old enough to recall the early 1970's, the current manoeuvring with the RUC is all too reminiscent of the abolition of the dreaded "B" Specials and their replacement by the Ulster Defence Regiment. Changes of title, uniform and line-of-command even, yet still the same ethos and practice from those patrolling the streets. Above all else, any new force will remain *de facto* as a buttress of the state.

The debate (debauché more likely) surrounding policing under Stormont is, in many ways, the working out of the Good Friday Agreement in microcosm. Basic to the Accord is the acceptance

that the essential elements of the *status quo* will remain in place. Thereafter, details will emerge and develop as a result of a series of contests between the different political groups working inside the "Big House". Due to the fact that unionism is quite sanguine about a return to direct rule - and can therefore afford to blink last in an impasse - the treaty is being adjusted more towards Mr. Trimble's taste than that of Hume and Adams.

In time these anomalies will have to be resolved. The incongruous situation where political parties hold positions as ministers in the Executive but are unable to endorse the police force will lead to difficulties. Either they must come to terms, officially or otherwise, with the new law enforcement agency or they will be forced to abandon their participation in the administration of the state.

Such decisions will not be easy for the SDLP or Sinn Féin. Evidence to date suggests that they will wrestle with the dilemma for some time but in the end they will make some form of accommodation with the system. That has been the nature of their involvement in the "Process".

Editorial

In the last issue of *Fourthwrite*, we began our editorial by saying that this magazine is published as a contribution to "...freedom of expression and debate." Our commitment to that position remains unchanged in spite of harassment of IRWG members, Anthony McIntyre and Tommy Gorman. What has to be kept in mind is that the culture of censorship runs dangerously deep in Ireland. The right-wing theologians of the 1930's, 1940's and 1950's were only exceeded in their enthusiasm for suppression by the Dublin media of the 1970's, 1980's and 1990's. The people jeering outside the Gorman and McIntyre homes recently, bear an unpleasant resemblance to the Youth Defence mobs roaming parts of the South in the last few years.

As a result of anti-democratic efforts made to silence IRWG members and denigrate their magazine, a campaign is being launched under the slogan "Democracy - A campaign for freedom of political expression". It is hoped that this action will draw widespread support and that it can act as a timely reminder to all political activists in this country that there can be no progressive movement of any significance if the right to express a political expression depends on the approval of either government press officers or menacing vigilantes.

Irish republicanism is not a fixed canon. It is and must be an ideology that adjusts to change. Old ideas have to be challenged and either retained or retired on the basis of well argued considerations. New ideas require an airing and they too have to undergo the most rigorous examination before adapting or adoption or rejection. In this issue, *Fourthwrite* is beginning the search for a new republican programme and policy. As the IRWG has often said before, this is not something that can be obtained tailor-made from the Oracle nor should it be handed down to us on tablets of stone from "wise men on mountain tops".

Radical Irish Republicanism sets itself the task of bringing democracy to this island, so what tasks remain? Is the new republic to be a workers republic? What economic benchmark do republicans set for the citizens? How will republicans adopt an ethical and neutral foreign policy and can a foreign policy be both? How can local communities gain democratic empowerment? What do we propose for the ecology? How do we provide for freedom of political expression? And how might we bring all of this about?

To address these and other questions successfully and meaningfully, it is essential that free speech is a universal right. Not a qualified right but an unfettered one. Whether an opinion is popular or derided it must not be suppressed. Those who believe in this maxim have the responsibility to strive to have it enacted. "Freedom for each is the necessary condition for freedom for all" said Bakunin. Repression of one is repression of all, we might add.

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Irish Republican Writers Group
The Irish Republican Writers Group is a body open to any republican thinker who believes in the unfettered expression of republican ideas.

The purpose is to facilitate discussion and analysis of republican ideas. Of primary interest are those ideas which deal with strategic matters and which address the question 'what is to be done?'

However, this paper is open to all republican ideas and related contributions, regardless of the field - political, cultural, social or economic.

Web: rwg.phoblacht.net

The European Rapid Reaction Force

Should we be part of a European army?

by Tommy McKearney

In the not too distant past, British Army recruiting posters called on young men to join the army and see the World and its people. Anti-militarists at the time, cleverly and accurately wrote in the extra words "and shoot them" at the bottom of the poster's logo. This ironic addition, while faintly amusing, was eerily disturbing. It was in fact, too accurate to be a real joke.

Armies are by their nature designed to kill and destroy because at the end of the day that is their ultimate purpose. Sometimes there is no reasonable alternative to their latent or practised brutality. The greater evil may lie in permitting a wicked regime take control or hold sway. Indeed the readiness of a military machine to ply its trade, might on occasions be enough to dissuade barbarous tyrants from using warfare instead of statesmanship. Justification for armies, there occasionally may be. Ignoring what they are trained to do does not however, excuse anything.

It is essential therefore that everybody on this island consider very carefully what exactly is involved in the creation of a European Rapid Reaction Force (ERRF). Let us be clear also that in spite of every denial, any such body is a European army. There is no such thing as a military machine composed of a confederation of independent, free-thinking groups. Once committed to the concept of ERRF, Ireland will march to the drumbeat.

As Jonathan Eyal, director of studies at the Royal United Services Institute in London, recently wrote in *The Irish Times*;

"Theoretically, national governments continue to be accountable to their parliaments for military affairs. In practice, this arrangement

is a recipe for future political scandals. Europe's military decisions are likely to come as a result of secret compromises between many states. By the time parliaments will be invited to debate a crisis, the decision on what needs to be done would have already have been taken....."

Minister for Foreign Affairs Brian Cowen and Minister of State, Seamus Brennan were actually reported as telling journalists in Belgium that Irish involvement would be; *"approved by the Dail where appropriate"*. In essence, it will not be possible to pick the wars we like and the ones we don't. When Brussels calls, we shall have to rise and do our duty.

"an ethical foreign policy coupled with a commitment to inform the public of its contents must form a central plank in any new programme"

This duty may not be everything we would expect either. It could involve bombing a Chinese embassy, strafing a convoy of elderly refugees crossing a bridge or simply having to ignore - as the British Government did recently - that only 40% of their bombs landed on target. All of which happened in the recent civil war in Kosovo. On the other hand it might mean having to participate in a nasty campaign to maintain the status quo in some part of Europe where the status quo may not be worth maintaining. Alternatively, troops could be sent somewhere to impose the type of "order" that is

best described as pro-business and friendly to the affluent.

There is a powerful dynamic abroad in the world today which seeks to impose a unitary model on us all. Sometimes this phenomenon is referred to as the *New World Order* and on other occasions, *Globalisation*. Almost always, it involves the imposition of a *Pax Americana*. There are certain beneficial aspects to this process - the end of the Cold War and the spread of technology. There are many risks too and the greatest is that a rigid social order will emerge which stratifies the "haves" and the "have nots" on both a national and international basis.

In order to secure and reinforce this process, the currently powerful will organise multi-national military alliances and groupings. Their task will be to carry the rich man's burden and prevent certain uncontrollable conflicts developing out of hand. The Balkans will be policed, as will the material-wealthy parts of Africa and Asia. However, no similar intervention will be visited on Israel or Indonesia. Potentially, this is what is at stake when we permit the Dublin Government enlist us into the ERRF.

The plain truth is that the Irish people were not offered a choice in this matter. The coalition government refused to hold a referendum and because of scant discussion, many people are unaware of the implications of their decision.

Elsewhere in this magazine, there is a call to begin a process of developing a new and potent republicanism. The question of an ethical foreign policy coupled with a commitment to inform the public of its contents must form a central plank in any new programme.

A progressive development is possible

by Paul Bew

This year we are celebrating (or according to taste) execrating the Act of Union of Great Britain and Ireland which is already 200 years old. The Union was deeply flawed right from the start. It was supposed to be accompanied by Catholic Emancipation – full political rights for Catholic Ireland. But this emancipation was delayed for a generation, in fact, and, in the event was only conceded – or so it was perceived – because of fear of a mass revolt in Ireland rather than out of respect for the general justice of the case.

When it looks at this moment in its

history, the British ruling class has a certain cause for regret. In a sense, its abashed silence this year about a key development on the foundations of its own state, honestly reflects a genuine uneasiness. On the other hand, those Ulster Unionists – or at any rate the large Presbyterian section – who always supported Catholic emancipation, have no reason to be quite so embarrassed. They, at least, respected the liberal rhetoric, which accompanied the implementation of the Union. The Agreement of 1998 represents an attempt to give Ireland closure on the poisonous impulses, which flow from this period. Britain no

longer acknowledges a selfish strategic interest. In 1800, it openly stated that this was the prime impulse of policy. This time, in principle, a liberal and progressive development of Irish society is a possibility.

Classical Irish republicanism is based on the conviction that this can not occur while the Union lasts but, for the time being at least, the initiative lies with those who are operating the experiment. Will they botch it as they did 200 years ago?

Paul Bew is Professor of Politics at Queens University Belfast

Freedom of expression in the UUP

by Liam O'Ruairc

The Ulster Unionist Party has an outstanding record regarding freedom of expression. It is of course not the freedom of expression it gave to Nationalists and Republicans that we are talking about, but the freedom of expression and dissent within the UUP. One just has to look at the regular media reports about the divisions within the party. The UUP is constantly debating what is the way forward, members are not afraid to raise embarrassing questions; and David Trimble has to go through regular leadership contests.

This is to be contrasted with the Republican camp. The degree of unanimity within the Provisional movement seems proportional to the degree of dissension within the Unionist camp. Where are the Republican equivalents of Jeffrey Donaldson? Why aren't there Sinn Fein conferences at the Waterfront Hall to vote whether Gerry Adams is to remain President of the party? Where are the heated public arguments on controversial questions?

The truth is that Unionists are far

more democratic among themselves than Republicans are. That doesn't mean that there is absolutely no freedom of expression or that no debates are going on among Republicans, both openly and secretly. It is undeniable that on all kind of questions ranging from abortion to Chechenya, a diversity of views and open serious discussion has been and is taking place. However, on more controversial issues that relate to the future of the Republican movement or its current strategy, freedom of expression and open debate are far more restrained. It seems that for these kind of issues, decisions taken secretly behind the scenes by people democratically unaccountable have primacy over processes of open public deliberations. For example, most major decisions taken by Sinn Fein have been voted only after the IRA Army Council approved of them. Sinn Fein would have never voted to drop abstentionism or take seats in Stormont had the Army Council not agreed to it first. Within Republican organisations, real power has always been in the hands of a secret Army Council accountable to no

one but itself.

As Republicanism has historically been dominated by secret and conspiratorial methods of organisation, it is no wonder that real freedom of expression has been inhibited. The fact that there is a greater degree of debate and freedom of expression within the Ulster Unionist Party is probably because it is not dominated by a secret army which has the final word. Armies are not democratic organisations. In an army, a superior gives an order and you have to obey it, not discuss it; whereas in a party, the party base should have the final word.

A problematic question is how far can we develop freedom of expression and internal democracy within Republicanism while Republicanism hasn't broken with secret military conspiracies? One cannot serve freedom of expression and the Army Council at the same time. If Republicanism is to have a future, it must resolve this dilemma.

Liam O'Ruairc is a member of the IRWG

P.F.I. is privatisation by stealth says Tommy Gorman

When, soon after she took control in Westminster, Maggie Thatcher began her crusade to 'roll back socialism' by selling off major public owned utilities, few could have imagined the speed and extent of change that has occurred during the following twenty years. Gas, water, electricity generation, telephone and transport, all state owned and controlled, have passed into private hands.

The Tories were so anxious to privatise British Rail that they sold off the leasing companies for £700 million less than they were worth, according to a report by the National Audit Office (NAO). Although the total sale raised £1.8 billion for the government the NAO calculates their worth at £2.5 billion. The fact that three parts of the overall system were sold within two years at a profit of £1 billion bears this out. In the midst of all this wheeling and dealing, massive profits were made by a few individuals. Former British Rail manager Sandy Anderson made a profit of around £33 million for himself. This has grown to nearer £50 million because of the rise in the value of shares in the new privatised company

Having cornered and gobbled up these utilities, big business is looking to the health and education systems as potential moneymakers. They were spurred on by a report from the British Government think tank, the Institute for Public Policy Research. It suggested that the administration of the National Health Service could, as an experiment, be handed to commercial firms to determine whether or not they could deliver better value for money than the present set up. Already this process has led to thousands of cleaning, catering and other staff having their jobs transferred to the private sector. And the private sector can only deliver economies by cutting wages and services. This idea follows naturally from and is an extension of the Private Finance Initiative (P.F.I.) whereby private finance companies are given vast sums of taxpayers money to build and own hospitals which are then rented back to the N.H.S

The ill and infirm would no longer be patients but mere customers whose ac-

Brendan Hughes' View

DANCES WITH BUFFALOS

The race to catch up with the great capitalist buffalo, that same great capitalist buffalo that feeds us, clothes us and makes us rich - but not all of us; in fact only a few of us - is infectious. Along the trail to catch the great buffalo we see the hoof prints of those who went before us. Oh the lucky ones they are. They sit smoking their pipes, drinking their brandy. Indifferent to millions of children living in poverty in Europe alone. Indifference makes the race go on - never mind the starving spectators, just don't take your eyes off the prize. Keep your eyes on the pipe and brandy. Keep your eye on the buffalo. Just make sure you get into the dance hall of the rich.

After all, haven't they all done it? Russia, the great bear, for so long the dream of non-buffalo chasers. Enlightened Europe, for so long the intellect of the world, now with its millions of poverty stricken children. Ireland, a bastion of resistance to those trampled in the path of the

buffalo, has caught its own and now chases the tiger.

The problem with chasing the buffalo is that like Lot's wife, you cannot look back on the trail - you must never look back. To do so will show the price that others must pay for you catching the buffalo. The price in terms of human suffering that has paid for the brandy, pipe and log cabin is a costly one. For the trail is littered not with the corpses of buffaloes but with human bodies, blood, sweat and tears. And still those millions live in poverty in Europe alone. Don't look back or you will lose sight of the buffalo, lose sight of the pipe, brandy and log cabin in which you reside warm and comfortable while the poor scrimp and save, out of your vision. Tommy Gorman is right. He forces us non-buffalo chasers to ask has the working class been left behind? So what is the answer? For humanity's sake look back. Come out of your second homes in the country and come back to the people whose blood built them.

cess to treatment would depend on their ability to pay. All decisions within the Health Service would be determined by economics not the Hippocratic Oath. Since cleaning within the NHS was privatised the standard of cleanliness within the hospitals has deteriorated significantly. It is estimated that upwards of 5,000 people died in the past twelve months as a direct result of infections they picked up while in hospital

In Britain the Labour Government has already contracted out the work of three Labour controlled Local Education Authorities (LEAs), Liverpool, Hackney and Islington. For us in this part of Ireland the spectre of PFI has appeared at Stormont. With waiting lists for medical attention growing longer by the day

the minister in charge of health provision stated that Private Finance Initiatives could play an important role in the development of that department. Other ministers have echoed this sentiment. This is a frightening prospect

Will education and health provision in the future be shaped by the needs of big business? How will those deemed to be failures in the schools or the long term ill be treated in this market driven scenario? Almost daily we see on our television screens the consequences of cut-backs in safety standards made after the privatisation of the railways. If our education and health services go off the rails as a result of privatisation and greed the consequences will be infinitely more disastrous for society.

Immigration, Racism and Class

The Working Class must combat racism

by Mags Glennon

The recent phenomenon of immigration to the Republic has created widespread controversy and exposed some nasty home truths about the racist attitudes of both the State and the Irish people.

75,000 people immigrated to the 26 counties in 1998-99. Less than 10,000 of these were asylum seekers. The Department of Enterprise says that 200,000 extra workers will be required over the next seven years to tackle the labour shortage and sustain the current level of economic growth. The government is currently sourcing these in 'white' countries - Germany, Canada, America and New Zealand. Most asylum seekers here are denied the right to work.

Surveys show that 95% of African immigrants in Dublin have been subjected to racial abuse. Publicised racial attacks have become a weekly occurrence. Young people, who have grown up in the relative plenty of the 'Celtic Tiger', are the most racist. A recent newspaper poll indicated that 75% of the population wanted curbs on refugee numbers. Whole rural villages have mounted protests to oppose the accommodation of a handful of refugees in their areas. Only 1% of Irish people actually know even one asylum seeker. Politicians from all the main parties use the rhetoric of 'looking after our own', 'preventing ghettos' and 'scrounging bogus refugees' to grub a few votes - such statements will increase as an election approaches. A recent immigration act provides for internment of failed asylum seekers until they are deported. The police routinely arrest and beat up Africans. Recently a 12 year old Nigerian girl was deported, alone, to Gatwick detention centre in London and her father was savagely beaten and jailed when he

objected.

All the familiar and ugly rumours are trotted out as 'fact' - beggars, scroungers, thieves, spreading disease, taking our houses and women, receiving extra Social Welfare, etc. - and can be heard in almost any social gathering; the middle class ones use more polite language. The one scare not heard is 'they are taking our jobs' - such is the labour shortage that anyone could have two or three badly paid jobs if they wished.

What happens when the economic bubble bursts, built as it is on tax breaks for multinationals? When the world market for computer software collapses? When Irish prosperity is undermined as the Euro continues its crash against the dollar?

Ireland is unique in Western Europe in its lack of an organised political far-right movement. Anti-immigrant and 'pro-working class' rhetoric gained the fascist right 11 million votes in the last European Parliament elections. The strength of fascist youth gangs means whole areas of Eastern Germany are 'foreigner' free. In France the fascist National Front is the party with the largest working class vote. Liberal social democracies such as Denmark and Sweden have seen a massive rise of the right. Austria, similar in size and economy to Ireland, has a fascist party in government. Europe-wide racism has become the focus for working class dissent against rampant free market capitalism and the

far right has grafted its policies onto the legitimate concerns working class people have for their communities, their prosperity and the future of their children.

Official anti-racism in Ireland is peddled by a variety of state sponsored quangoes such as the 'National Committee for Interculturalism'. Grants, funding, jobs and interminable conferences for a notional multicultural sector are presented as somehow 'fighting racism'. In Ireland all the failed policies adopted by liberal anti-racists throughout Europe are being repeated. Anti-racism is viewed as a brand of political correctness or merely a career advancement path for middle class social workers. Two years ago a small but nasty outfit called the Immigration Control Platform attempted to set up a national organisation. Anti-Fascist Action stopped the meeting - severely impeding the future growth of the ICP - resulting in howls of outrage from liberal anti-racists and the press. The fact that racism lays the seedbed for fascism was totally lost on them.

Somewhere during the course of the 20th century the legacy of working class anti-fascism disappeared. In the 1930s it was widely understood that fascism was a war between classes, not between races. The Republican and Socialist heritage that fought the fascist Blueshirts off the streets in Ireland in the '30s was repeated with far greater savagery throughout Europe. Now, as the working class votes the far right into power across the continent, it is the task of all progressive groups and individuals in Ireland to ensure that a politically independent and pro-working class anti-racism prevents this happening here.

Mags Glennon is a left-wing activist based in Dublin City

Website
The IRWG website is updated regularly.
Follow its contents at:
rwg.phoblacht.net

Unable to Deliver

People on death row in the USA get little sympathy from Sinn Fein

by Lin Solomon

Last March in the U.S. state of Texas, Odel Barnes was executed by lethal injection. Odel was an African American male who hadn't quite reached the age of 30. He had been on death row for 9 years having been convicted of 1st degree murder. Death row prisoners are allowed a free choice for their final meal. If the request cannot be granted because the item asked for is too bizarre or cannot be found in the local area a note is appended to the request sheet that reads "Unable to Deliver".

Odel's request for his final meal was a very rare dish - on his sheet he simply wrote "Justice, Equality and World Peace". Predictably the sheet came back with the words - "Unable to Deliver". No one was too surprised in Texas. Odel isn't the only African American on death row in the U.S. African Americans happen to be over-represented there as a matter of course. In New Jersey the Public Defender's Capital Defence Appeals unit recently filed statistics with the Governor of that state showing beyond a shadow of a doubt that if you are black and tried for murder the District Attorney will, more likely than not, press for a death sentence. Conversely, if you are black and happen to be murdered the District Attorney is less likely to prosecute the offender as death sentence eligible than if the victim was white. Race bias in America's prison industrial complex is deep and widespread. Big business interests are too. Marriott Hotels is only one of many transnationals that make big bucks from U.S. prisons - they supply some

of the pre-prepared food for a prison population that has reached the 2 million mark. It's boom time and the bodies of prisoners are now effectively being traded on Wall Street and other stock markets.

Why should any of this matter to Irish republicans? Once upon a time Irish republican leaders might have spoken out in opposition to the death penalty, for ethical and moral as well as historical and political reasons. But now it seems that the republican leadership, like the Texas Department of Corrections, is quite unable to deliver.

Mumia Abu Jamal, an African American male, has been on death row for about 18 years. He was convicted of killing a cop in disputed circumstances during a fracas on the streets in which he was also shot and badly wounded

The first question any journalist or lawyer asks about a suspect caught on a murder rap in the U.S. is 'where?'. For good reason - some states have the death penalty and others do not. Unfortunately for Mumia Abu Jamal the 'where' in his case is the executing state of Pennsylvania. The Irish republican leadership is well aware of the fact that the Congressmen and Senators that Pennsylvania sends to Washington D.C. take careful note of the wishes of that states' large and well organised Irish American community. Look through any list of resolutions supporting Irish nationalist and republican policy positions in the U.S. Congress and the Pennsylvania

names will be there. In Pennsylvania the Irish American vote counts and when it comes to payback time the politicians know it. No doubt some of the one thousand guests at the recent \$500 a head Sinn Fein dinner dance in New York City slipped over from New York's sister state of Pennsylvania.

Mumia Abu Jamal is going through the final legal hurdle before he is murdered by judicial decree. If the Federal judge dismisses the last appeals which argue that Mumia's due process rights were denied at his original trial the campaign passes out of the hands of lawyers and over entirely to mass action. The last remaining hope is to seek a pardon from Pennsylvania's Governor.

Human Rights campaigners working to stay Mumia's execution have twice written to Gerry Adams, president of Sinn Fein, with a plea for him to make a statement calling on the Irish American community in Pennsylvania to pressure their political representatives to get the governor to stay the execution. The campaigners know that the wishes of that community could well prove crucial. If the state were Wyoming it really wouldn't matter very much but in Pennsylvania a statement from Adams would help to open some doors. Yet the plea remains unanswered. When an earlier request was made by phone to the Sinn Fein Press Office the message back was - sorry Sinn Fein will not make a statement as party policy prevents it from interfering in the internal affairs of foreign countries.

Somehow that seems deeply cynical from a movement that plasters its gable ends with anti-racist images and slogans and who in the past has been happy to call for and accept solidarity from foreign nations. But given recent events there are few left now who will be too surprised.

Lin Solomon is a human rights activist in the USA



Clinton assists injustice in Palestine

Renowned journalist and lifelong socialist activist, Eamon McCann points out the reality of President Bill Clinton's claims to be a peacemaker.

by Eamon McCann

It seems at the time of writing Bill Clinton won't be coming to Derry in the course of his third (!) pre-Xmas pilgrimage to save peace in Ireland. What a pity. We might have given a shout against imperialism which would have been heard around the World.

A meeting in Sandino's on November 26th voted by acclamation to ask local mayor Cathal Crumley to make a gesture of solidarity with the people of Palestine by refusing to meet Clinton if he came.

The meeting had just heard activist Zak Hania, from Gaza City, give a first-hand account of the pity and the terror of Palestine today. Asked from the floor what we here could do to help, Zak referred to the United States' role in arming Israel and providing it with diplomatic backing - to the extent of using its veto at the UN to stymie even a formal condemnation of the massacre of Palestine children.

If the mayor of even a middling-sized town like Derry announced an intention to shun Clinton for this reason, the story would be on the front pages of newspapers worldwide.

It's rarely given to a single individual to make a major impact on an issue of global importance. But Mayor Crumley could have done it. And would, we assume, have wanted to do it. Instinctively, absolutely, he'd surely be on the side of the Palestinians in their struggle for freedom and against racist oppression.

But would he have done it?

It's academic now, of course. But

the underlying issue isn't academic at all. The lurking conundrum has to do with whether any pro-Agreement party is in a position to take a stand against the US on anything.

The mainstream media have it that Clinton's third visit here betokens a warm personal concern for Ireland. Every Belfast and Dublin newspaper operates on the assumption that his administration has been a positive force for justice here. If there has been a single leader-article focussing on the contrast between the role ascribed to Clinton in Ireland and the role he has filled elsewhere in the world, we've missed it in Derry.

"In the last two months, the Israelis, with full backing from Clinton and using weaponry supplied by Clinton, have visited a dozen Bloody Sundays upon Palestine"

Some of us set little store by UN resolutions. But they are ritually cited by the big powers to justify action in the international arena. It was the refusal of Saddam Hussein in 1991 to comply with a UN resolution requiring him to withdraw from Kuwait - to take a by no means random example - which provided the "justification" for Operation *Desert Storm*.

That resolution had exactly the same force and weight as UN Resolution 242 which requires the Israelis to withdraw from the territories forcibly occupied in 1967. When Saddam thumbed his nose at the UN, the Western powers, led by the US, assembled an army half a million strong to drive him out. But when Israel treats the UN with contempt, and, far from withdrawing behind its 1967 boundaries, proceeds to build settlements, and to use overwhelming fire-power to slaughter Palestinians who protest at being driven from their homes, the US, under Clinton, responds by replenishing the Israeli arsenals so that they can slaughter some more.

In the last two months, the Israelis, with full backing from Clinton and using weaponry supplied by Clinton, have visited a dozen Bloody Sundays upon Palestine. But there isn't a word said about any of this as Clinton smiles and smiles on Irish politicians, particularly on Northern Nationalist politicians, and contrives a husky sincerity as he explains how moved he has been by tales of suffering from Belfast, Derry, Omagh.

Some Nationalist politicians don't busy themselves about solidarity with the oppressed peoples of the world. Seamus Mallon we can imagine snorting with derision at any suggestion he should put himself out for Palestine. But whatever happened to the anti-imperialism of the Republican Movement when it comes to solidarity with Palestine.

Thing is, you won't keep Clinton's endorsement if you are equipped with a placard complaining at his backing for murder on the West

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Author's Choice

An ideal Christmas present

by Henry McDonald

Since the Good Friday Agreement, a key Sinn Fein strategy has been to portray the settlement as a stepping stone towards a United Ireland. The Provisionals spokesmen have set off a series of green-coloured heat flares aimed at deflecting the republican base from zeroing in on the partitionist core of the 1998 historic compromise. As the republican movement marched en masse towards the Stormont parliament they once vowed to smash their generals shrouded the political battlefield in emerald mists convincing their foot soldiers that they were about to plant the Tricolour in triumph over unionist trenches.

Now the fog that descended over the political landscape producing contradictory interpretations of what the Agreement means is beginning to clear. The fact that Sinn Fein are pursuing David Trimble through the courts in a desperate attempt to overturn his ban on republicans attending North/South Ministerial Council meetings is a measure of their concern that a central truth about the Agreement has finally been exposed. Trimble's ban on Martin McGuinness and Bairbre de Brun is the clearest evidence yet that the unionist veto is alive and well. The First Minister's ability to bar Sinn Fein ministers from what republicans regard as the crucial aspect of the Agreement has re-kindled grassroots suspicions that the accord has underpinned partition and the unionist consent principle. Combined with Peter Mandelson's

ruling that the Union flag must fly over McGuinness' and de Brun's departments, the Trimble ban marks a significant victory for pro-Agreement unionism even if most unionist voters are too stupid to see it that way.

Nationalists might protest that the Agreement belongs to everyone but at its heart the Good Friday deal signified a major compromise on the national question. The Irish government dropped the territorial claim and Sinn Fein agreed to enter a partitionist parliament.

With the smoke and flares of propaganda fading from the post-Agreement battleground, a route map has been provided to show unionists, nationalists and republicans the shape of the new Northern Ireland. Austin Morgan's "The Belfast Agreement: a practical legal analysis" is 595 pages of densely legalistic prose which, if you bear with it, helps you cut through the blur of rhetoric and lies.

Morgan points out in Part 2 of his book, in a segment on constitutional matters, that "the constitutional changes brought about by the Belfast Agreement are characterized predominantly by the end of the territorial claim over Northern Ireland" rather than a weakening of the link with the UK. The author stresses the importance of the May 1998 referendum in Northern Ireland noting that the simultaneous vote in the Republic was merely to change the 1936 Irish Constitution and overturn

Articles 2 and 3. Effectively it was the vote in the north that really counted.

The UK is still the sovereign power over Northern Ireland, as Mandelson's reserve powers on the flags issue bears out. In addition the legislative supremacy of Westminster is reaffirmed in paragraph 33 of Strand One of the Agreement. Another interesting section of Morgan's book deals with the north-south bodies and how Trimble's unionists pruned back the number of areas that were to be dealt with on an all-Ireland basis.

Despite the legal jargon and the tightly packed text, Morgan's analysis would be an ideal Christmas present for republican dissidents such as Ruairi O'Bradaigh or Bernadette Sands-McKevitt. The book will undoubtedly confirm their suspicions that the Agreement has not eroded British sovereignty and indeed it may have given unionists the ability to manage change within the northern state. The book should also be slipped into a few Christmas stockings in sceptical unionist households this year. It might even convince them that their leaders actually achieved something two years ago.

The Belfast Agreement: a practical legal analysis can be purchased on the Internet at; www.austenmorgan.com.

Henry McDonald is Irish editor of The Observer

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Bank and in Gaza. So you don't fetch out the placard when Clinton comes to town. Instead, you reach out your hand.

Thus pockets of anti-imperialism

here and there in the world are neutralised. The notion of international solidarity is humanely, or anyway painlessly, killed off. And the world is a slightly safer place for the capitalist interests which Clinton represents. Which is what it's all about in

the end, really.

As Leonard Cohen says and sings, "It's come to this, It's come to this, And isn't it a long way down..."



Lowering of expectations

Health services are in decline North and South

by Patricia Campbell

As it becomes more apparent that David Trimble owns the peace process the cry of "to hell with your concessions we want our rights" seems to have changed and the word concession is now a respectable term. Now that David Trimble (with the backing of the British establishment) decides the pace and direction of this process we are in no doubt that there is nothing in this process for us. The politicians who defended this process and predicted it would bring about great social and economic change now winge about the British breaking their promises and not honouring their commitments. Who of us would expect anything different from the British establishment? The old war cry "you can't trust the Brits" seems to have changed too. Some

"years of neglect in this area have led to disturbed adolescent's in need of therapeutic interventions to be detained in the archaic, under funded and under developed psychiatric system"

things never change and all the winging about Brits not keeping their promises will certainly not bring about the changes we desperately need.

The process of lowered expectations continues. Bernadette McAliskey described this in a recent speech in New York. She gave an example of workers having to take a wage cut even though somewhere in their heads they feel its time for a pay rise. They get bogged down in their fight to prevent the wage cut and when they win the right to keep their pay static for the next three years. They feel it's a victory because they didn't have a wage cut and everybody forgets that the discussion actually started with people being entitled to more money.

David Carlin of the SWP highlighted this thinking in issue 3 of Fourthwrite. He rightly pointed out that when the Jubilee maternity services were closed in favour of keeping the RVH services open the heated debate and argument which ensued was not about keeping both services opened. The focus was on the closure of a service.

The term demilitarisation is now widely used so if the military presence is removed from places like South Armagh there are those who would dress it up as a victory and forget that the discussion actually began with British withdrawal. Likewise the term reform replaces the term disband in relation to the RUC.

When David Trimble flexed his mus-

cles again and prevented the Health minister Bairbre de Brun from attending her cross border meeting with free state counterpart Micheal Martin. De Brun decided to go ahead with the meeting. The media hailed it as a bold gesture of defiance. The "pan-nationalist" front defying Trimble. The farce of it all did not go unnoticed. While Martin was promoting a cross border health initiative not everybody was deflected from the lacking health service he has responsibility for. A health service in crisis. He was recently threatened with imprisonment by a high court judge because he did not honour a legal obligation to address the needs of a disturbed child in his own jurisdiction.

It has emerged that years of neglect in this area has led to disturbed adolescent's in need of therapeutic interventions to be detained in the archaic, under funded and under developed psychiatric system.

The philosophy of cherishing all our children equally is not one that applies to the disadvantaged and abused children of the state. While Micheal Martin's predecessors contributed state finances to maintaining the British border and placed money in Ansbachers accounts they ignored the children with learning disabilities despite the State's constitutional obligation to provide it. Micheal Martin could argue that he is not responsible for the actions of his predecessors but he can not disguise his own deplorable failure of these children as was highlighted by the high court judge Mr. Justice Peter Kelly.

Not everyone forgets that while the Stormont Health Minister was posing for the photographs to display her bold gesture of defiance, patients were waiting on trolleys for a bed in Craigavon Hospital while South Tyrone hospital lies empty - the same hospital she was forced to close recently. It is time the public woke up to what is going on.

Patricia Campbell is a republican from Co. Tyrone

The Price of Exploitation

Exploitation is rife in Belfast's Black Economy

by Carrie Twomey

It is a parent's nightmare. An underage disco, held upstairs at a local pub, attended by many of the area's teenagers. One weekend, the ceiling collapses, trapping many inside the club. Rumours abound; emergency services arrive in numbers. First it is heard 8 children have died, then that is cut down to four. Thankfully, the injuries were restricted to cuts and bruises and shock. It could have been much worse. What started out in rumour as a possible bomb, with the whole of the roof caving in on all of the young patrons, turned into the upstairs lighting fixtures coming down in the middle of the dance, bringing parts of the ceiling with them. Were it not for the calm and quick-thinking staff, the panic-stricken youngsters could have been hurt much worse.

The exact cause of the accident is still being investigated. Should it be the case that this near tragedy was caused by deliberate negligence or bad workmanship none of us should be too surprised. In West Belfast we have grown accustomed to second class treatment from those who govern our lives: bad housing, few amenities and sub-standard services. Electoral wards within West Belfast have, for decades, been top of the deprivation league tables. Over 10% of the total unemployed for the six counties live in West Belfast. In respect to long term unemployed this figure jumps to over 30%. Out of this sorry mess has sprung an unscrupulous, callous and crooked entrepreneurial class. We now find ourselves exploited by 'our own'. This is West Belfast's dirty little secret. All the talk of the expanding economy and the community

development that is being encouraged and brought to the area is grand and sounds wonderful. What is not so wonderful is how it is being done, and the permanent underclass that it is creating and exploiting.

"Out of this sorry mess has sprung an unscrupulous, callous and crooked entrepreneurial class"

Republican ex-prisoners and former combatants make up a sizeable section of the long-term unemployed. They are, in fact, being paid less than illegal immigrants from Mexico are paid in the States, with the average un-reported wage hovering around £2 per hour on building sites.

People who have unimaginable resources of courage in standing up to the British cower in fear of losing what little income they have to bring home to their families. Ex-prisoners face double handicaps in looking for gainful employment: many who served long sentences have little or no job skills, and those who are skilled still face their prison record stopping most employers from hiring them legitimately. Exploitative employers take advantage of this, to them an unending pool of cheap

labour, with ex-prisoners in the West Belfast area alone topping 20,000 people. They justify their shameful wages by reminding their workers that they are 'doing the double' and with that reminder implicitly threatening to turn them in.

Desperate to keep their job and the added income to keep their families afloat, many of our brave volunteers stay silent and keep their heads down. And who could blame them? What do our Republican politicians do about this situation? They win more contracts for the exploiters, and ensure that the cycle of economic abuse continues to go round and round. After all, at the end of the day, who is it that can do more for the up and coming politician? A penniless ex-prisoner, or a multi-million-pound contractor? When the itch needs to be scratched, the back gets turned. It is time something was done about this ruthless exploitation of our community.

Boycotts of businesses of known exploiters should be carried out. Politicians in the back-pockets of parasitic contractors should be named and shamed. Work stoppages on building sites abusing ex-prisoners should be encouraged and supported by our community. Every opportunity should be taken to expose this exploitation and to hold our Republican leaders accountable for stopping it cold and not backhandedly encouraging and profiting from it.

Ex-prisoners, who withstood the worst the British had to throw at them and came out on the other side deserve better than to be forgotten and cast aside as worthless. They and their families should know they are not alone in this. No one suffered through this war to be beaten in peacetime. If the Democratic Socialist Republic we fought for cannot be brought into reality on the building sites of West Belfast, it is no wonder so many now ask; 'Was it all for nothing?'

Carrie Twomey is a member of the IRWG

Evolution cannot replace revolution

An argument against the transitional theorists

by Paul Little

Any careful examination of the politics that drive the current political process show clearly that those of us who advocate radical social change - Revolution, have been marginalised and demonised consistently as out of date or impractical, backwoods men with no vision. Instead we are told by the pro-agreement republicans/nationalists to buy into the illusionist politics of the Good Friday Agreement. Whenever valid concerns about where the agreement will lead us as a people, from those who advocate evolutionary republicanism/nationalism, the answer is always the same, manjana, manjana!

Those supporters of evolutionary republicanism/nationalism fail on every count to give a plausible explanation as to why 'labour' should wait. The evolutionary republican/nationalist argument is that in reality what they were asking the people to accept was partial exploitation and that was better than the total exploitation of our people, 'half a loaf is better than no loaf'. The IRSP reject this fanciful notion, We believe that it is not in the gift of any-one party and certainly not one that claims to be republican to offer up the Irish working class for either partial or total exploitation. We demand the whole loaf, that is our people's by right.

I believe it is futile to enter the side arguments thrown up by the Good Friday Agreement, a document so duplicitous that not only does it have different meanings for both nationalists and unionists it is also open to differing interpretations within singular identities. The IRSP prefer to look at what we do know about the GFA. It is an international treaty that has brought a number of constitutional changes to the relationship between Ireland and Britain; it legislates for a number of possibili-

ties in the future including that of a singular Irish state.

Whether the Good Friday Agreement will or will not lead to a singular Irish state (united Ireland) in the future is open to debate; what is certain is that it will not deliver at any time in the future the republican goal of an independent socialist republic. True national liberation will come with not only the liberation of the geographical Ireland but with the true freedom of every Irishman and woman. It is the failure to

“supporters of evolutionary republicanism/nationalism fail on every count to give a plausible explanation as to why labour should wait”

achieve this freedom that today's evolutionary republicans/nationalists will and should be judged.

'Look at how much better things are today compared with pre 1994' is the illusion that the pro-agreement republicans/nationalists point to when confronted with the lack of real and meaningful change for our communities. Well lets look at 'how much better things are'; the rich of today are the same people who were rich in 1994, they are the same people who are in control of the economy, of housing and of social welfare. In fact the same people who controlled our lives then control our lives now. What political pro agreement party representative heads up each department is irrelevant as is whether we are governed from Stormont or Westminster - they are still implementing a British

budget and administering British rule in Ireland.

Supporters of the GFA quite rightly point out that we are less likely to be killed than in pre-peace times. The jury on the factuality of that statement is still out. What it should actually say is that we are less likely to be killed by people of another religion. Ask the loyalist working class on the Shankill Road just emerging from a feud that essentially had its cause firmly rooted in the pro-agreement/anti-agreement argument; ask the family of Joseph O'Connor in Ballymurphy or the republicans who dared to speak out against his murder if they feel less likely to be killed. The assassin's *raison d'être* have changed but they are still firing capitalist and imperialist ammunition. For those of us who have always been engaged in a social revolution as well as a liberation struggle evolution has never and can never take the place of revolution. Republican socialism is about revolutionary change for the Irish working class it cannot be represented by those who seek a minimal change for the Irish working class within a capitalist Ireland.

This is an honest political position and analysis that has been misrepresented by pro-agreement republicans/nationalists as anti-peace and anti-negotiation. Nothing can be further from the truth. Revolution can be non-violent. Honest negotiation on the basis of each communities political analysis is a necessary requirement for a durable peace. What has happened in Ireland has not been an honest negotiation; rather the negotiations have been restricted by the capitalist requirements of the ruling classes in Britain, Ireland and America.

Paul Little is a member of the Irish Republican Socialist Party

The road to regroupment

A view of the steps necessary to effect revolution

by John McNulty

If there is a common thread running through the Republican Writers Group, beyond the commitment to an open platform for ideas, it involves a rejection of the politics of accommodation with unionism and imperialism while also rejecting the resurgence of republican militarism as an alternative to revolution.

This position rejects the constitutional road to power enshrined in the Good Friday Agreement. The price of office, administering a sectarian colonial state, is simply the worst form of surrender. The perceived alternative, a campaign of physical force that holds out no prospect of victory would at best prove ineffective while at worst it would discredit itself and strengthen its enemies.

So what else is there? Socialist Democracy argues that there is a central absolutely vital mainspring to the struggle in Ireland that was to the forefront of everyone's consciousness when the struggle was at its height but which has been largely obliterated from consciousness and memory in a period of defeat and decline. That, now almost invisible, element is mass and class struggle.

At the most vital points in the struggle broad resistance movements were built with the central purpose of constructing mass campaigns and bringing them onto the streets. Desperate attempts were made to direct these movements towards building support amongst the southern working class and drawing in the working class movement on a global basis.

Such is the depth of decline that it seems sheer fantasy even to speak of such movements. Yet we have to understand that mass movements will be born again and that our central task is to help in their rebirth and to distil lessons of the past struggle.

If we do not learn from our history we will be doomed to repeat it.

At his trial following the failure of the Russian revolution of 1905 Leon Trotsky explained the function of the revolutionary. It was not to prepare a revolution but to prepare for revolution. The ebb and flow of the mass movement is not in our hands. We cannot make the next revolutionary wave happen. Rather we organise in the knowledge that the current situation will not meet the needs of working people and that they will inevitably turn again to revolution. We have to take this task of preparation seriously. It will help deter-

“we have to understand that mass movements will be born again”

mine the character and effectiveness of the next revolutionary wave and may well shorten the period of defeat and demoralisation arising from the republican collapse. The way to do this is to place ourselves where the battle for ideas and the movement of the working class intersect - that is by defining the essential tasks that a working-class movement must undertake. There is little doubt what these tasks are:

- 1.. Opposing the Good Friday Agreement.
- 2.. Opposing Social Partnership between the trade union leaderships and the bosses.

There are some indications that we are at the end of the beginning. It is becoming clear that the claims made by the Republican leadership about the promise of the Good Friday Agreement are no longer accepted by a section of the nationalist working class in the North. Sup-

port for the GFA is still enormous, but much of it is from the standpoint of despair and the lack of alternative rather than belief in the promise of reform. At the same time there is a wave of strike action in the 26 counties and some movement towards left unity.

The Republican Writers Group faces a specific challenge. If the era of militarism smothered political development and differentiation then the decline of militarism places an obligation on everyone to develop policy. It is no longer enough to simply assert a democratic right to an opinion and to promote an endless range of opinions. This is even more so now when this democratic right has come under threat. The group needs to narrow down the focus to the search for an alternative. To develop that alternative it has to look to class action and to the socialist movement. Quite simply there is nowhere else for it to turn. The socialist movement in Ireland is weak but it represents a long and rich history and tradition both nationally and internationally.

It has always been far more aware of the class factors that have made the republican embrace of the nationalist family such a disaster and the idea of common cause between Irish capitalism and the working class such an illusion. There is much for the Republican Writers Group to learn there but they also bring the history and concerns of the working-class republican base - a concern with the reality of repression and discrimination and a willingness to oppose imperialism and the state and embrace revolution. There is much for the left to learn also and a pooling of ideas and experiences would be a milestone on the road to revolution.

John McNulty is a member of Socialist Democracy

HOPE AGAINST HOPELESSNESS

Fourthwrite speaks with relatives of a political prisoner

by Anthony McIntyre

The Republican Sinn Fein centre on Belfast's Falls Road looks very much like what Sinn Fein centres looked like years ago. An absence of airs and graces; no suits or suave talkers. There was none of the city-centre shop-front look of the Sinn Fein office just down the road at Sevastopol Street. Right-wing corporate American money has not yet reached RSF. It is unlikely that it will. 'What do you want to eat?' I was asked as one of the office staff phoned the local chip shop. 'Keep the pasties separate from the chips and put the fish in a different bag' the unfortunate chippie worker was informed. I declined the hospitable offer as I had eaten already. But the thought struck me that this was no \$1,000 dollars a plate venture and there were no tuxedos in sight.

Sitting facing me were Ann and Michelle, the wife and sister of Tommy Crossan who is at present in Maghaberry prison fighting for recognition as a political prisoner. They had agreed to be interviewed by the Republican Writers Group. It was hardly a surprise - members of the group had stood with them on picket lines supporting Tommy's demands. Republican Sinn Fein allowed their offices to be used for the interview. What party officials floated in and out as the interview was in progress made no attempt to shape it or tinge it with the RSF perspective. No sign of a Stalinist adherence to a party line there. People were free to say what they liked. A welcome ventilation in a wider republican enclosure where alternative thoughts are considered a contagious disease. I am not a supporter of Republican Sinn Fein but I liked the place and those in it all the same. They were the type of people I felt I could easily have been 'on the blanket' with. Rugged, ready and de-

cent. Whereas, Sevastopol Street republicans, for the most part these days, look and behave more like prison governors.

Ann and Michelle must have felt likewise. They expressed no support for Republican Sinn Fein's politics but felt that the party was pulling its weight in relation to the prison issue. Sinn Fein for its part had ignored both Tommy's family and the prison problem. When asked if they had benefited from the supposed inclusiveness of the Good Friday Agreement they responded with a very definite 'no'. They had experienced no change. Michelle was more direct. 'People measure it in their own daily lives. Before it, there were husbands and brothers in jail. After it, there are still husbands and brothers in jail. Where is the "good" in the Good Friday Agreement?'

Ann said:

If Sinn Fein's prisoners were still in we would have plenty of support. Now I find my house hit with eggs in the early hours of the morning. Tommy's car was also done. No other house was hit. I sent my kids up to The St James Forum which is supposed to deal with this type of problem but I got no response. If I had been a Sinn Fein supporter I would have been treated differently. Some people have even stopped speaking to me because of the stand I have taken. Tommy is my husband and I shall support him. I don't follow the politics of it all. I am not calling on anybody to support anything other than my husband and people like him. What they believe politically is up to them. Republican Sinn Fein is the only party doing something about Tommy's situation and because they opened an office which I go to, as it helps my husband, some Sinn Fein supporters

have stopped speaking to me.

I put it to her that this was hardly in the spirit of the Good Friday Agreement - such people had no trouble talking to the Unionists.

The Agreement will not work because of bitterness. There is far too much of it. But I have no interest in politics. I don't advocate one form of Agreement or another. I just stand by my husband.

Michelle spoke of a similar experience in Poleglass where she lives. She referred to being demonised. Some Sinn Fein supporters allege that she must be a supporter of those who bombed Omagh. 'In their minds there only two categories - Sinn Fein or Omagh bombers. No wives, families, mothers or sisters. Family is family as far as I am concerned. I don't argue for bombs or anything of the sort.'

When asked do they not feel isolated from every one, that people just could not care any more and are just glad that it all seems to be over, the two women point out that it is not just republicans who offer support and sympathy. Others have expressed concern. Indeed, if the support the white line pickets get from passing motorists is an index of wider sympathy then the relatives of Tommy Crossan are by no means being left to stand alone. The two women also point out that despite the vindictive attitudes of some, many close to Sinn Fein are also sympathetic but are afraid to speak out. Such claims are always hard to substantiate but the Writers Group has found that some on the white line picket were 'growled at' by members of Sinn Fein for having participated in the protest. So at the very least, within Sinn Fein there are

elements who are intent on making it hard for those who might wish to express solidarity with Tommy Crossan's plight.

In Michelle's mind there are those within Sinn Fein who are used to having the respect of many within the nationalist community. But it was a respect gained by their support for the type of activity which led to Tommy Crossan being sent to jail.

These people are frightened that this respect will no longer be there if too many people take up the cause of Tommy and others. And for this reason they are desperate to push it off stage. Although Gerry Adams put a pound coin in one of the collection buckets and said he supported the demands, he won't do anything about it.

Clearly, there are problems for Sinn Fein in all of this. Many grassroots members, while not sympathetic to the Continuity IRA or any IRA other than the Provisional one, are nevertheless even more hostile to the British brutalising or criminalising republican prisoners whatever their hue. Danny Morrison in a recent article called for the British government to wise up and stop its tactics of confronting prisoners if it wished to avoid a catastrophe.

With the protest clearly growing in size, what impact does the family think it has made? Michelle feels that it has helped alert people to the fact that there remains a problem in the prisons; that the Good Friday Agreement has not solved all that it promised to.

And for those close to republicans still inside their major fear has not been addressed at all. Ann said of her husband:

I fear for Tommy's safety; he has been scalded by loyalists and received stitches as a result of an attack by a non-political prisoner. Now with Adair in there we are more worried than before. Tommy is so isolated in a top security prison. Top security yet they can attack him

any time they feel like it. It is just like a time bomb in there waiting to explode.

If the main republican political party is indifferent to their plight has the family not gone to the many ex-prisoner groups which are subsidiaries of Sinn Fein? Staffed by many who underwent experiences similar to Tommy, a kindred spirit would surely be found there? The family know little about these groups. No one from any of them has made contact or offered advice. Could it be that the groups are unaware of the family's needs? Hardly, respond the women. At a recent film about the history of Long Kesh, showing in the Kennedy Centre, those holding a picket at the entrance in support of the prisoners were allegedly glared at by Gerry Kelly.

Ann, at this point seems resigned to the fatalistic belief that no help will come from any quarter other than that of ordinary people and bodies like Republican Sinn Fein who have no new masters in the political establishment to please and are therefore not embarrassed by identifying with Tommy Crossan and his comrades.

Ann Crossan's struggle to maintain family cohesion and self-identity at a time when her children are moving rapidly through the various phases of their development is admirable and should be reinforced through a more benign prison system. Whatever the British state may think of Tommy Crossan it can hardly justify even to itself a punitive approach to his family. The Crossans as a family unit cannot see their father at the one time due to restrictive prison rules. And as if this were not enough, Ann and Michelle now fear that new harassment measures are about to be introduced. Reports coming out of the prison refer to visitors having to submit a photograph and agree to be fingerprinted in order to receive a visit. A new form of electronic ID.

Tommy Crossan's imprisonment has disrupted their lives. Ann speaks of her young son as if the future is

marked out for him independent of the family's control or wishes. He is growing up in an area in which some are intent on victimising the family because of the political activities of the father. The child can no longer concentrate and has difficulties settling in school. The children have been threatened along with their mother in and around the visiting area of Maghaberry prison by loyalists. Ann claims her Limerick accent does not help as it is like a green flag to an orange bull. On one occasion her car just avoided being rammed by loyalists as she left the prison. 'The prison staff are all too eager to identify us to loyalist visitors'. Not much had changed, I concluded, since my days in prison. It was often said amongst republican prisoners that we were only in jail to keep the screws off the streets. If so, society should find a much more humane way of dealing with its screw problem so that ordinary people can get on with their lives.

The interview draws to a close. For myself it was a lesson in understanding. I had been taken back over the years to the era of the H Block struggle. Only this time I stood with those protesting on the outside rather than in the cells and wings of H Block 4. I could see the mixture of tiredness and determination on their faces. My mind drifted back over other women who had made the long journey. A sort of pilgrimage in pursuit of progress which wore them down and shortened their lives. Women, who have a special resting place in the minds of those who either knew them or were witness to their struggle. The mothers of friends such as Laurence McKeown and Jackie and Micky McMullan who tried so hard yet never lived to see their sons emerge from a penal Hades.

The battle of hope against hopelessness must be settled in favour of the former. Our people should not suffer this. In a world where those who deserve more receive less your voice may make a difference. Make sure it is heard.



Democracy

A campaign for freedom of expression

"Those who do nothing are inviting shame as well as violence. Those who act boldly are recognising right as well as reality"

J.F. Kennedy, Report to the American People on Civil Rights, 11 June 1963.

In the aftermath of the picketing of IRWG homes, many people advanced many reasons for why it is best to remain silent in the face of intimidation and harassment of commentators and writers. Some felt that to do so might upset the delicate political balance in Stormont. Others used torturous logic to say that it might imply support for the Real IRA. On the other hand, many brave and decent individuals have come out to defend the right to freedom of political expression and debate. It is an important issue and one that may well indicate what shape the North of Ireland will take in the years to come. The blunt fact is that there are no undeserving poor, no undeserving murder victims and no situation made better by denying the truth. Photocopy and sign the petition below and send it to *Fourthwrite*.

The call for freedom of expression

We, the undersigned, wish to express our concern at the involvement of Sinn Fein in the physical intimidation and political suppression of political opponents.

The facts are these;

Following the killing of Joe O'Connor, a member of the Real IRA, on the 13th of October 2000, members of the Irish Republican Writers Group were called in by the dead man's family. They investigated and issued a statement asserting that they believed that the Provisional IRA were responsible for the killing.

Since then the writers, Tony McIntyre and Tommy Gorman, have been subject to a tirade of abuse in the Sinn Fein press. Their homes have been picketed and they have been physically intimidated.

In his statement in the American paper *The Irish Voice* on 25th October 2000 Gerry Adams of Sinn Fein said that the two writers were fellow travellers of the Real IRA. This was untrue and put them in considerable physical danger.

We call on the leadership of Sinn Fein to stop the harassment of these writers and underwrite the right to freedom of expression by their opponents.

Signed.....

Letter

A Chairde

The political debate around the Stormont deal has been lost by the Provisionals. The latest chapter of humiliation for the Provos came with the decision of the UUC to yet again rewrite the "agreement" in their meeting at the end of October. It is obvious that Trimble and Co. can not even be bothered to "houstrain" the Provos any more.

Events of recent weeks have witnessed the clearest exposure of the Agreement that is possible. The Stormont deal was about "debate", "openness" a rejection of "violence" its supporters told us. Yet the reality is it has never been more dangerous to articulate the Republican position. To simply say that you believe that the British Government's role in Ireland is one that should end before we can have real justice and peace invites death and intimidation to your door. To point out the glaring fact that the Provos have sold out Republican principles has a similar result.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my full support to those in the Republican Writers Group and others who have been victims of the Provos' fascism. The Republican argument shines brightly. It is up to those who care to articulate our vision at every opportunity.

Le meas

David Mc Sweeney.

Drogheda, Co. Louth

Irish Republican Writers Group

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