

Dublin dances to MI5 tune?

By Tom O'Hanlon

A spectre is haunting the political establishments of Ireland and Britain; and that spectre is political opposition to the Belfast agreement. Believing that the pacification of resistance to British rule in Ireland is close at hand, their response to those who refuse to submit before British rule in Ireland becomes all the more vindictive. In September 1998, the Dublin government introduced a plethora of draconian legislation, which inflicts the severest of penalties, for convictions founded upon a dearth of evidence. Miscarriages of justice will be the price many will have to pay in this new culture of political intolerance.

On March 28, 2001, Michael McKeivitt was arrested and taken before the Special Criminal court and charged with membership of an unlawful organisation, and with directing an unlawful organisation between August 29, 1999 and October 23, 2000. Michael McKeivitt is the first person to be charged with directing an unlawful organisation, an offence under Section 6, of the repressive Offences against the State 1998 (Amendment) Act. The charge of 'directing' carries a mandatory life-sentence.

On June 29, 2001, during a remand hearing, the Special Criminal Court was told that in relation to the charge of membership of an unlawful organisation, the prosecution's case against Michael McKeivitt would rely solely upon the evidence of a Garda Chief superintendent. In relation to the charge of directing an unlawful organisation, the prosecution's case would rest solely upon the evidence of an American citizen, namely one David Rupert. The court heard that Rupert has worked at the behest of the FBI and MI5 since 1992.

During the course of this remand hearing, the court learned something of Rupert's personal history. The court was told that prior to 1992,

Rupert was an exceptionally successful business tycoon, whose financial interests included ownership of several bars and restaurants, a successful clothing firm and a large haulage company, which had at its disposal some 40 lorries and 100 trailers. However, the court learned that Rupert's flamboyant and lucrative lifestyle came to a sudden end as a result of the involvement of his haulage company in a tragic accident that resulted in multiple fatalities. The financial fallout from the accident saw Rupert faced with a lawsuit in excess of \$50 million.

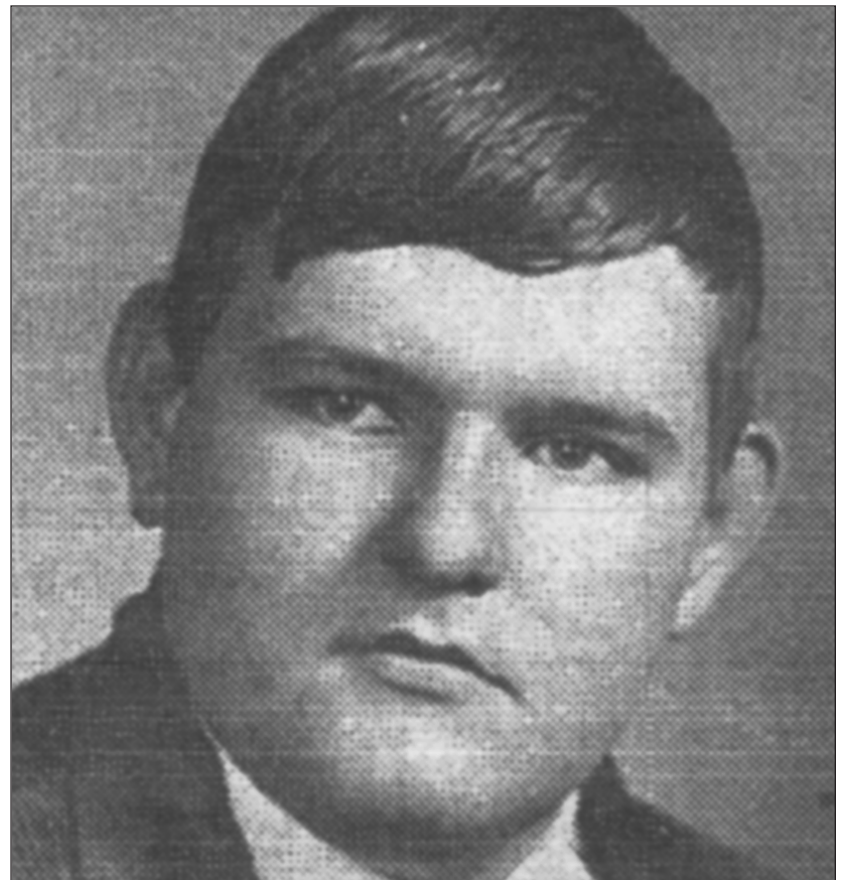
The financial affairs of Rupert were placed under strict scrutiny as a result of the \$50 million lawsuit. Serious allegations of tax fraud by the IRS were followed by charges of large-scale tax evasion: charges which carry a serious prison sentence in the US. In 1992, Rupert stood on the brink of financial ruin and faced the imminent prospect of several years in prison. It was at this low point in his life that the FBI placed an ultimatum before Rupert: Work as an operative in Ireland or face financial ruin and many years in prison. Rupert chose to work at the behest of the FBI.

The court learned that in 1992 the FBI and MI5, acting in joint co-operation, dispatched David Rupert to Ireland to gather information on Irish Republicans. The prosecution alleges that Rupert became very close to members of Republican Sinn Fein in the Bundoran area, and that he also attended several RSF Ard Fheiseanna. The court heard allegations that Rupert also established contact with members of the IRA, and that he kept MI5 and the FBI fully informed of his meetings and contacts with IRA members during this time. Rupert alleged that between October 1998 and August 2000, Michael McKeivitt asked him to procure an assortment of military equipment for use against British armed forces in Ireland.

These allegations by the prosecution were totally denied by the defendant's legal representatives. Hugh Hartnett, Senior Counsel for Michael McKeivitt, told the court that the prosecution's case depends solely upon the credibility and character of David Rupert. Hugh Hartnett SC went on to tell the court that Rupert 'was an informer, and we believe his evidence to be untrue'. He demanded that the prosecution produce a detailed history of the financial affairs of Rupert, along with records of payments, which Rupert received from MI5 and the FBI following his financial ruin in 1992. Hugh Hartnett SC also sought full disclosure of all statements made by Rupert, and all communications between MI5 / FBI and Rupert whether by e-mail, fax, tape or phone, as their disclosure are essential, prior to an application for bail by the defendant's legal team.

On Friday July 6, 2001, the Special Criminal Court ruled that the application for full disclosure of relevant documents by the lawyers for Michael McKeivitt was 'premature'. As a result, the defendant is currently awaiting the disclosure of statements by Rupert, along with communications and financial payments between MI5 / FBI and Rupert. Justice Joseph Matthews delivering the judgement stated that it was the court's view that there was no general right under law for full disclosure prior to a bail application. The court was also told that Gardai were opposed to the granting of bail, as they believed that Michael McKeivitt would continue to operate as leader of the IRA. The court's use of these Special Branch statements to deny bail violates the European Convention (article 6.1) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (article 14.2) which upholds a defendant's presumption of innocence.

As a result of this ruling by the Special Criminal Court, Michael McKeivitt has been placed in an impossible legal predicament. On the one hand the defendant is faced with



David Rupert - MI5 paid perjurer

a charge that carries a mandatory life-sentence, whilst on the other hand, the court currently refuses to disclose any evidence, thus preventing the defendant from preparing his defence. This is a glaring example of the repressive and draconian nature of the Special Criminal Court, where a defendant's rights are few; a jury is non-existent, and the dubious evidence of Gardai is accepted above all others, resulting in injustice upon injustice.

Recently, the Special Criminal Court has been subject to renewed criticism by the United Nations, and a number of human rights organisations. These criticisms have proved extremely embarrassing for the Dublin government. In a pathetic, face saving response, the Dublin government announced a review of the Offences against the State Act and the Special Criminal Court. The government's report will be published before the end of summer. However, no legal experts or commentators are expecting any radical changes in how the Special Criminal Court operates.

The Dublin government's decision to charge Michael McKeivitt with membership and direction of an unlawful organisation marks the culmination of an unprecedented three-year campaign of vilification against the McKeivitt family. A campaign that has seen slanderous allegations appear in the print media, alongside a

concerted attempt to financially ruin the family by forcing the closure of its print business.

The Dublin government's decision to rely on an MI5-FBI agent in Ireland in order to convict an Irish citizen also marks a hypocritical departure in government policy. Who can forget the Dublin government's criticisms of the 'supergrass' trials in the six-counties during the early 1980's? Where they once voiced doubts and scathing criticisms of Christopher Black and Harry Kirkpatrick- they now uphold the character and rely upon the dubious word of David Rupert! A man who when faced with debts of \$50 million and a probable prison sentence, embraced an offer by MI5 and the FBI, and was only too willing, in light of his predicament, to become an MI5-FBI paid perjurer.

The use of this MI5 paid perjurer in Ireland raises further questions concerning the welfare of every Irish citizen. When was the Dublin government told that an MI5-FBI agent was operating in Ireland? Did the Dublin government have prior knowledge, and grant subsequent approval? If this indeed is the case: How many more MI5 agents are operating in the twenty-six counties with Mr Ahern's approval?

The issues that lie at the heart of this trial and its outcome have the potential to effect everyone whom the Dublin government glares upon with political disapproval.

Orange marches provoke widespread rioting

By Donal McHugh

The July 12th climax of the marching season saw widespread rioting across the North, as the RUC resorted to brutal tactics in their attempt to force Orange marches through Nationalist areas. Violent confrontations between police and protesters erupted in Derry, Ballycastle, Lurgan and the Short Strand area of east Belfast.

The most serious rioting, however, was seen in north Belfast's Ardoyne area, where riot police used water cannon and plastic bullets to disperse protesting residents. Many locals were seriously injured, including a 16-year old girl shot in the forehead with a potentially lethal plastic 'baton round'. Police paid a heavy price for their actions, however, with spirited nationalist resistance taking its toll. By the end of the night the RUC had clocked up 117 casualties in the fierce fighting, as local youths defended their area with stones and petrol bombs.

From the beginning, police tactics seemed specifically designed to provoke confrontation, with the RUC adopting a heavy-handed approach

guaranteed to increase tension. Locals had been blockaded into their homes since early morning to allow the passage of an Orange Order march along the Crumlin Road. Passing loyalists took advantage of the opportunity to shout sectarian abuse and throw bottles and stones at Nationalist homes. The RUC made no attempt to interfere, although the area had been swamped by more than 70 police landrovers.

In preparation for the return of the Orange marchers that evening, residents attempted to organise a peaceful protest to demonstrate their anger. The RUC intervened to prevent them assembling on the Crumlin Road, flooding the area with officers in riot gear. Demonstrators were physically assaulted by police attempting to seal off the area. Two water cannon were now brought into position, as the RUC launched a full scale invasion of the Ardoyne. They were met with a fusillade of stones, as young Nationalist residents prepared to defend their homes from attack.

Full scale rioting now erupted, with police firing indiscriminate volleys of plastic bullets at the protestors. The defenders responded with petrol bombs and burning cars. Witnesses

describe how women and children were batoned off the streets by a rampaging RUC mob, while other residents were attacked in their homes. In one particularly disturbing incident, a police landrover mounted a pavement in an attempt to run over a group of children.

The rioting continued until the early hours of the morning. 48 plastic bullets were fired in total, leaving 10 people seriously injured. This figure stands in stark contrast to the 3 plastic bullets fired when police faced Loyalist rioters in Portadown, 3 weeks previously. Even more significant was the recent decision by British police to forego the use of plastic 'baton rounds' entirely when faced with serious rioting on the streets of Bradford. Such lethal weaponry, it seems, is reserved solely for Irish 'troublemakers'.

This latest attack on the people of Ardoyne comes hard on the heels of an orchestrated campaign of loyalist intimidation. In addition to numerous sectarian pipe-bomb attacks in recent months, the residents have been subject to a loyalist blockade of their local primary school. For several days in June, children were prevented from entering the Holy Cross girls

school by a mob of loyalist demonstrators. The RUC response to this sectarian blockade was remarkable. In order to avoid "trouble", they reinforced the loyalist position with a line of riot police. Nationalist anger at the situation was only contained by the imposition of a 'curfew' on local youths by members of the Provisional IRA.

Such a response is in itself a damning indictment of the erstwhile defenders of the Nationalist community. That it should come at a time of increasing loyalist intimidation and sectarian attacks is a deeply worrying development. Monday 16th July saw a sustained attack on the Short Strand area by an armed loyalist mob, led by senior members of the UDA. The parallels with the events of 30 years ago are obvious.

With PIRA decommissioning looking ever more likely, and the forces of 'law and order' ranged firmly on the side of the loyalists, the Nationalist community finds itself in a weaker position that it has been in for over 30 years. The last thing it needs at this dangerous moment is the presence of an enemy within, policing its ranks on behalf of the British government.

Sectarian onslaught continues

By Joe Cullen

Nationalist and Republican residents across the six counties are coming under an ever increasing number of attacks by Loyalist paramilitaries. In the first six months of this year, there have been seventy-six pipe bomb attacks; for the same period last year, there were only five.

Similarly, for petrol bombs, so far this year Loyalists have carried out one hundred and eighty one attacks against Nationalist homes. Last year, the total for the same period was eighty-six.

Not only is the number and frequency of attacks increasing, so too is their geographical spread. In the past month alone, Catholics have been murdered by Loyalists in

Coleraine and in Antrim town. There have been pipe bomb attacks in North, South and East Belfast, Larne, Portadown, Ballymena, Newtownabbey, Derry City, South Derry and elsewhere. A church was burnt down in Glengormley and Loyalists attempted a car bombing in Cargin, Co.Antrim.

The response of various politicians to the Loyalist violence has been

absurd to say the least, with David Trimble displaying grotesque political opportunism in accusing Republicans of the murder of Ciaran Cummings in Antrim, and Sinn Fein bizarrely condemning locals in Ardoyne for defending their area from Loyalist attack. Yet notwithstanding these facts, the issue of loyalist arms is rarely heard in the decommissioning debate.

Dublin-Monaghan bombings - new evidence emerges

By Paul Fitzpatrick

On the 17th May 1974 three synchronized car bombs ripped through the centre of Dublin. Some ninety minutes later, another bomb exploded in Monaghan town. In the aftermath, thirty-three civilians lay dead, among them two young children and two pregnant mothers. Hundreds of others were maimed. To this day it remains the single biggest loss of life, in one day, since the current conflict began over thirty years ago.

The families of those killed and injured have spent the last twenty-seven years campaigning for answers to some very serious questions. What was the level of collusion between British Military Intelligence and the Loyalist death squads who actually planted the bombs? And why was the Garda investigation into the bombings so inadequate? But the families have met with a wall of silence, imposed and maintained by successive Dublin governments and their commissars in Garda Headquarters.

Now, however, new evidence has been unearthed, raising yet more questions and revealing just how

inadequate the original Garda investigation actually was. An interview with Dublin eyewitness Roger Keane on TV3's 20/20 programme has cast new light on the events of that fateful day.

For weeks before the attacks on Dublin and Monaghan, a general Garda alert had been in operation. Any member of the public who observed a suspicious vehicle was to immediately inform the Gardai. Keane, who in 1974 was a Posts and Telegraphs worker stationed at Alborough House, North Strand, reported at 1pm on May 17th a suspicious British-registered white van parked near the entrance to Alborough House. The Gardai did not respond to his call, despite being on a state of high alert due to the threat of Loyalist bomb attacks. Keane persisted however, and again at 5pm made a 999 call to report the white van. It wasn't until 5.25pm that a Garda patrol car was sent to Alborough House to investigate, but by this time the van had been driven away in the direction of Dublin Port. Keane described to the Gardai how a tall "army type of man" had approached the van from the direction of Amiens Street. He was

described as being smartly dressed in a white suit and carrying a Switzers bag and an Evening Herald newspaper.

After the bombs had exploded, Keane again contacted the Gardai and insisted that he be taken to Dublin Port so he could identify the van and possibly the man he had seen earlier. Two Gardai from Howth station accompanied him to the port where he promptly pointed out the white van he had seen that afternoon. Keane also recognized a suit that was in the van as the same worn by the man he had seen. The Gardai gained access to the van and found a number of cardboard egg cartons and a suitcase. The case was opened to reveal the uniform of a British Army officer. A short time later a man returned to the van and Keane identified him as the driver he had seen earlier that day. Two detectives arrived to interview the British officer, and Keane was then escorted from the scene.

To this day Roger Keane has no knowledge of whether this British Army officer was ever actually questioned by the Gardai, or even if he was asked to provide an alibi. It is also unknown whether any forensic

examination was carried out on the empty egg cartons. Their presence, say explosive experts, is extremely significant, as they can be used as a safe way to transport unstable detonators or explosives. Of course, the Garda Commissioner has refused to comment on Mr. Keane's statement. 27 years on, the cover-up still continues.

For too many years the Irish people have listened to the empty rhetoric of Southern politicians who try to use tragedies such as Enniskillen, Shankill Road or Omagh for political gain. In contrast, the intentional massacre of thirty-three innocent civilians on the streets of Dublin and Monaghan has been largely ignored. It seems that the deaths of their own citizens mean little to them, because the silence of the Dublin government and the Gardai has been deafening. What are they afraid of? Could they be afraid that their 'partners in peace' will ultimately be revealed as being responsible for the deaths of thirty-three Irish citizens? It is time for the families of those who were killed injured in Dublin and Monaghan to be told the truth. Britain must be held accountable for her crimes.

Media hypocrisy hits new low

By Donal McHugh

The Southern media have never been renowned for their balanced and impartial coverage of Republican affairs. In recent weeks, however, their hypocrisy has reached a new low, with the press engaging in a feeding frenzy over a series of lurid tales emanating from the Byzantine corridors of the Garda Special Branch's Harcourt Street headquarters. Two allegations in particular have been the subject of much ill founded speculation.

The first of these concerned an alleged drugs find in Monaghan, linked by Gardai to a separate arms cache uncovered nearby on the same day. Press reports attributed the drugs to Republicans, claiming first a CIRA then an RIRA link. In neither case was any evidence produced to substantiate the claim.

IRA sources have since categorically denied any connection with the drugs find, rubbishing press claims of involvement with the drugs trade. "We've been here before", said one long-time activist, pointing to the long history of British 'dirty war' tactics. The adoption of these British-style 'black propaganda' methods by the Dublin government, however, is a new, and worrying, development.

The second of the allegations concerned the fate of a young man arrested recently on a charge of IRA membership. Media reports alleged that, while on remand in Portlaoise, he had been the victim of a physical attack by Republican POWs.

A spokesperson for the Republican prisoners provided the background to the allegation. "This young man arrived in Portlaoise in a terrible state. He had been badly beaten by Garda detectives during his interrogation, and much of his body was covered in bruises. The IRA O/C immediately arranged for him to be seen by a doctor first thing the next morning. That doctor believed his condition to be so serious that he had him transferred to Portlaoise hospital for treatment. The man returned to the wing later that day, and was subsequently released on bail several days later."

Within days however, reports were circulating of a brutal Republican attack on a defenseless young man. Tom Brady of the Independent, a particularly loyal Special Branch lap dog, even interpreted the 'attack' as evidence of a new 'split' in the Republican Movement. Across the media, tame journalists were leaping through hoops in their efforts to incorporate this latest 'atrocious' into their denunciations.

For too many people in Ireland, the established mass media provide their only source of information on political and social affairs. As Republicans know only too well, the coverage they provide is often deeply flawed. The sad reality is that in the twenty-first century we still lack an independent, impartial mass media, dedicated to providing people with balanced, accurate coverage of events. Instead, we are lumbered with a profoundly conservative media establishment, beholden to the vested interests of the political and business elite. Until we see radical changes in the structure and ownership of the media, the vast majority will remain ignorant of the lies and distortions of their political masters.

A farewell to arms

After Weston Park, Is Provo decommissioning imminent?

By Tom O'Hanlon

The unsuccessful conclusion to the recent negotiations held at Weston Park in Shropshire marks the failure of a concerted three-year effort to implement the minutiae of the Belfast agreement. In an attempt to distract from the failure of the talks, both governments have agreed to present an 'excellent package' of proposals to all of the constitutional parties before August 12th, the scheduled deadline for suspension of the agreement or the commencement of elections to the Stormont assembly.

But what are the various negotiating positions and sticking points that prevented a successful conclusion to the six days of talks? And what are the prospects for an agreement to emerge in the weeks and months ahead?

In the aftermath of the breakdown of negotiations at Weston Park, all of the parties were quick to attribute blame for the collective failure to reach agreement. Selective leaks to the press pointed to some of the issues which created the political stalemate. But the leaks also pointed to the path down which the Provisional movement intends to travel, in order to resolve the outstanding matters which have bedevilled the Belfast agreement since its inception.

The Provisional movement's negotiating position prior to and during the Weston Park talks was placed under informed scrutiny in an article by The Observer newspaper (15/07/01). The front-page article disclosed that Brian Keenan, a prominent member of the Provisional movement, held secret talks with Jonathan Powell, Tony Blair's Chief of Staff, in West Belfast last January. During these secret talks Powell outlined what the British government's response would be, in the event of PIRA decommissioning. Keenan learned that a reduction in the numbers of British soldiers across the six counties, plus the removal of some British military installations in South Armagh and the acceptance of

former PIRA prisoners onto 'District Policing Partnership Boards' would quickly follow any PIRA gesture on decommissioning.

The article also disclosed that during the negotiations at Weston Park, the Provisional movement offered to seal three of its dumps, with the use of concrete or chemicals, in the event of the British government implementing the other outstanding issues. This negotiating offer is a logical conclusion of the PIRA position of May 2000 and of January 2001, when they gave an undertaking to place their arms beyond use.

This 'generous' negotiating offer by the Provisional movement will come as no surprise to seasoned observers of the Machiavellian Provisional leadership. The destruction of PIRA weaponry is the logical conclusion of their current political strategy. PIRA weapons were originally procured to resist British rule in Ireland. But by their own admission, the Provisional movement have agreed to administer British rule in Ireland for the foreseeable future. In light of this commitment, their weaponry has become nothing more than a political anachronism, which they are only too willing to shed.

However, in the interest of political accuracy, it is more precise to state that PIRA decommissioning has already begun. On three occasions between June 2000 and May 2001, PIRA dumps were inspected by the International Independent Commission on Decommissioning. Media reports intimated that the inspected dumps were sealed by electronic tags. Regardless of the methods used, Mr Ramaphosa and Mr Ahtisaari were satisfied that the dumps in question had remained sealed between inspections, and after every inspection, they dutifully travelled to Downing Street to inform Mr Blair of this fact. Clearly, no PIRA volunteer in his or her right mind would ever approach these dumps after they had been compromised in such a manner. A manner which in effect amounts to actual decommissioning.

It is therefore a truism to state that PIRA decommissioning commenced with the first arms inspection on June 26, 2000. What remains to be decided by the Provisional leadership is the extent and the means by which all PIRA dumps are to be compromised or destroyed. Hence the intimations emerging from Weston Park, in relation to PIRA's negotiating proposal that three of their dumps be destroyed by the use of chemicals or concrete.

The destruction of PIRA weaponry by whatever means marks another stain on the curriculum vitae of the Provisional movement. In completing this act, they will become the first Republican organisation in the history of Irish Republicanism to have destroyed their weaponry at the behest of the British government. And let us not forget that it was the British government who initiated the original decommissioning demand through Patrick Mayhew's infamous 'Washington three' speech some years ago.

Yet it is important that Republicans remain focused on the fundamental political principles that lie at the heart of this demoralising process. In many respects the arms issue is of secondary political importance. The Provisional's willingness to decommission is indicative of the political cancer that has infested that movement in recent years. It is true to state that any Republican organisation can destroy arms and then go on to purchase more at a future date. But no Irish Republican organisation can ever reclaim a principle once it has been abandoned. By administering British rule in Ireland, the Provisionals have accepted its legitimacy in perpetuity. Never again can they, with any shred of political integrity, denounce the illegitimacy of the British presence. By endorsing British rule and by implementing the Belfast agreement, they have permanently removed themselves from the Republican family.

But will a PIRA offer to destroy its weaponry prove sufficient to satiate the ravenous political demands of the UUP? And will this PIRA offer to

'place its weapons beyond use' sustain and nurture the Belfast agreement over the coming months?

If the only obstacle that blocked the full implementation of the Belfast agreement were PIRA decommissioning, then the future implementation of the agreement would be guaranteed by the spineless compliance of the Provisional leadership. But Ulster Unionists are determined to prevent any former PIRA prisoners from taking seats on the new 'District Policing Partnership Boards'. They believe that this is the thin end of a wedge that would eventually see former PIRA prisoners become members of the reformed RUC.

The Unionists refusal to accept this proposal remains the only impediment to the inevitable physical destruction of PIRA weaponry. This is undoubtedly the major sticking point that prevented agreement at Weston Park. The Unionist's rejection of these proposals also scuppers the assurances that Jonathan Powell gave to Brian Keenan last January, in relation to the British government's response to PIRA decommissioning. It was also reported that during the course of the negotiations, the Dublin government committed itself to conducting an investigation into allegations of collusion between elements of the Garda and the PIRA along the border. But this commitment, which amounts to nothing more than a sop to Unionism, proved insufficient to attain Unionist agreement.

If Unionist objections to former PIRA prisoners taking seats on police boards can be overcome, and Blair commits his government to a gradual reduction of the British military presence across the six counties, then agreement amongst the constitutional parties may be possible, and the Belfast agreement may indeed be implemented in full.

This leads us then to the salient question: Can the implementation of the Belfast agreement bring about an end to political conflict in Ireland?

Clearly, the answer is no. Irrespective of ones own political opinions, there are some objective truths that lie at the heart of the

Belfast agreement. When the mists of political confusion and spin surrounding the agreement begin to clear, perhaps a more sober and realistic interpretation may be possible. When placed under close scrutiny, it is clear that this agreement attempts to stabilise British rule in Ireland. British sovereignty over the six-counties reigns supreme. The Unionist veto permeates every aspect of the agreement, and acts as an impediment to the restoration of the Irish peoples' right to self-determination. The Belfast agreement clearly represents Britain's most audacious attempt to sustain its rule in Ireland. For these reasons, the Belfast agreement will prove incapable of resolving the current political conflict in Ireland.

With the signing of the Belfast agreement, the mandarins in Whitehall may believe that they have secured an overwhelming political victory. They have seen the Republican struggle fragmented, and the pacification of Ireland hangs tantalisingly within their grasp. But time will prove their victory hollow. The presence of Irish Republican prisoners in Irish jails is testimony to the resilience of Irish Republican struggle. The flames of resistance have not been extinguished. The revolutionary movement will be rebuilt. This is a historical and political imperative. This may not be achieved in the short term, but its attainment remains a political inevitability.

The outstanding political issues that prevented a successful conclusion to the talks at Weston Park may well be resolved in the days and months ahead. The imminent final acquiescence on the part of the Provisional movement will finally close an inglorious chapter in the history of modern Irish Republicanism. The Provisional movement's journey down the road to constitutional nationalism is near completion. Perhaps history will point to the recent negotiations at Weston Park as the moment when the Provisional movement definitively declared its intentions to bid a final farewell to arms.

3 Irish citizens held in Slovakia

By Tom O'Hanlon

On July 5, three Irish citizens appeared before a Slovak court and were remanded in custody for forty days under Slovak law. Various Western European news agencies have released details concerning their court appearance, but the actual facts surrounding the arrests and the motivation behind the subsequent detentions continue to remain unclear. As we go to print, the case remains shrouded in confusion, due to a lack of information arising from the fact that the three Irish citizens are being detained incommunicado in Slovakia.

Statements released by the Slovak government relating to the arrests and detentions have only added to the existing confusion. On July 6, the Slovak government released a statement denying suggestions that three

Irish citizens were being detained under Slovak law. However, within twenty-four hours of this statement, the Slovak government issued a contradictory statement, confirming that three Irish citizens were indeed being detained in a Slovak prison 'on expectation of an extradition application from Britain'. It was intimated that the extradition applications related to a conspiracy to import arms, and fund-raising for an unlawful organisation.

Following this confirmation by the Slovak government, statements from British State agencies failed to shed any further light on whether or not an extradition application had been lodged by Britain. On July 7, a spokeswoman for the Northern Ireland Office stated 'We are aware of the fact that three individuals have been arrested in Slovakia on the expectation of an extradition application from Britain'. However, the

spokeswoman continued 'It is our policy not to discuss individual cases and we cannot confirm whether an application for the extradition has been or will be made'.

Alongside this non-committal response by the NIO, the RUC refused to confirm or deny the arrests when pressed by journalists, preferring to refer the matter to the British Home Office. In response to press inquiries, a spokesman for the British Home Office in London confirmed that three Irish citizens were being held in Slovakia but stated 'At this sensitive juncture we cannot confirm if extradition procedures are being instigated. It is not Home Office policy to discuss security matters at such an early stage'. As is clear from these combined statements, a cloud of legal ambiguity surrounds the legal status of these three Irish citizens.

As one can imagine, the families of those detained are distressed by

the dearth of information surrounding their fate. The Sovereign Nation has been in contact with a close friend of one of the families concerned. This paper can report that the three men regularly travel to Europe on business related matters, and that Irish solicitors representing those detained have been told that they will not be permitted to visit them in Slovakia, or contact them by phone. The families have also encountered great difficulties in ascertaining the address of the prison where the three men are being detained, and as a result, are unable to post clothes or any other necessities to their loved ones. No family members have been in contact with the three men by phone, since their arrest on July 5.

In an attempt to glean any shred of information relating to the arrests and detentions, relatives of the three men contacted the Department of Foreign Affairs. However, a source

close to one of the families has told the Sovereign Nation that inquiries and requests for assistance made by the relatives of the three men were treated with contempt and were summarily dismissed by the Department of Foreign Affairs.

In the absence of any assistance from the Dublin government, relatives of the those detained have been forced to contact a variety of human rights organisations, in the hope that they may be in a position to garner some information concerning their fate. This disturbing lack of interest represents a damning indictment of the Dublin government's indifference to the welfare of Irish citizens abroad.

Any subsequent developments concerning the fate of these three Irish citizens will appear in the next edition of The Sovereign Nation.

Uncle Bertie's Five Year Plan

Internment returns to the 26 counties

By Donal McHugh

In the Soviet Union of the 1930s, Joseph Stalin perfected the Show Trial as a ruthlessly efficient means for dealing with 'subversive elements'. The lesson, it seems, has not been lost on our own 'Uncle' Bertie, who appears to have embarked on a Five Year Plan of his own - in this case to remove the 'subversive' radical Republican element from 26 county society.

The last year has witnessed a new spate of political prosecutions in the South, as the Dublin Government rolled out the full repressive machinery of the State in an attempt to crush all opposition to British Rule in Ireland. The old favorites - police brutality and blatant 'stitch-ups' - were there of course, as the tried and tested judicial scaffold of the Special Criminal Court was swung into action once again to apply its well worn rubber stamp to the decisions of the Garda Special Branch. But the Free Staters' new willingness to learn from others has not been limited to the examples of Stalin - it appears that they have also been receiving tuition from those stalwarts of justice and democracy in British Intelligence.

The Dail's renewal of 'draconian' anti-Republican laws in June coincided fortuitously with the discovery of a 'bomb' in Monaghan. Not only had this heinous device been strategically placed to endanger the lives of scores of GAA fans, but it also conveniently included a tidy package of illegal drugs. It seemed that all Garda Commissioner Pat Byrne's Christmases had come at once. Surely the gods were smiling on the forces of 'law and order' that fine June day.

But what does this wondrous discovery signify? To any experienced political observer the answer is clear. It points to a radical departure in Free State policy towards Republicanism - namely, the adoption of British 'Dirty

War' tactics by the Dublin government to reinforce a new campaign of glorified internment.

To assess the motivation behind this new policy, and its implications for the future of the Republican struggle, we must look to the revamped Offences Against the State Act introduced by Bertie Ahern in 1998. The political background to this piece of quasi-fascist legislation is revealing. It was introduced at a time when the political fortunes of the Southern elite were at an unprecedented high. The Stormont Agreement had neutralized the threat of radical Republicanism, transforming the enemies of a corrupt elite into aspiring candidates for admission to that elite. The enemies of the system had become its Praetorian Guard. But one problem remained. The IRA had not surrendered, and, leaving behind those who had abandoned the struggle, it was continuing its war against British Imperialism. The loyal administration in Leinster House was determined to crush it once and for all, while it had the chance. The tragic deaths of 29 civilians at Omagh provided the opportunity, and it was grasped greedily by the defenders of Imperialism, old and new, across the island.

The product of the subsequent storm of invective, hypocrisy and misinformation was the revamped Offences Against the State Act. Proudly lauded by Ahern as a "draconian" piece of legislation, it broke new boundaries in its open disregard for basic human rights.

Its chief purpose was to provide new powers for the Special Criminal Court - a quasi-military tribunal established in the early 1970s to try political cases, and staffed by three judges or senior army officers. The new legislation provided for the imprisonment of any Irish citizen for a period of up to seven years at the request of a senior Garda officer. No evidence is required for a "conviction", allowing the court to function as

a judicial rubber stamp for government decisions. In addition to this sanitized version of internment, the new legislation removed the internationally recognized right of a detainee to remain silent under interrogation. Such silence, under the act, is considered an admission of guilt, and can be used as evidence to bolster a conviction.

Almost universal media collusion in a widespread demonization campaign allowed for the smooth implementation of this fundamentally undemocratic decree. When the time came for the legislation to be renewed in June 2001 however, a new strategy was necessary to deflect public attention from its draconian provisions. The discovery of an alleged Republican bomb in Monaghan on the eve of the vote served government purposes nicely.

Such a cynical ploy is not, as Republicans are only too well aware, without precedent. On the 1st December 1972 the Dail was due to debate the introduction of an amended - and considerably more repressive - Offences Against the State Act. Opposition was intense, and the proposed legislation was expected to fall. On the morning of the vote, British Intelligence agents, in collusion with Loyalist paramilitaries, exploded two massive bombs in the center of Dublin. Two people were killed, and 127 injured. In the chaos that followed Republicans were initially blamed, and the legislation passed without opposition.

But the planting of bombs is not an activity restricted to members of the British security services. Recent evidence from the Donegal Garda corruption scandal has revealed that members of the Gardai themselves planted bombs in Derry, before passing on information on their location to their colleagues in the RUC. Their success in 'preventing' these 'Republican attacks' ensured a speedy ascent up the greasy promotion pole to the senior ranks of the

Gardai. It would seem that this temptation to 'massage reality' has once again proved too great to resist.

Already, Ahern's authoritarian tendencies have claimed their first victim, with many more in the pipeline. On the 30th May, Dermot Gannon, a 34 year old father of three from Dublin, was jailed for four years by the Special Criminal Court on a charge of IRA membership. No evidence was produced to substantiate the allegation, and Gannon was imprisoned solely on the stated opinion of Special Branch Officer Basil Walsh. In his summing up, the presiding judge, "Justice" Frederick Morris, emphasized his reliance on the new legislation, saying that he was convicting Gannon purely on the recommendation of the Chief Superintendent.

Eight other men are currently awaiting "trial" on identical charges, in what is clearly a reintroduction of internment designed to intimidate Republican activists. These cases, with their blatant disregard for even the usual veneer of democratic norms, are indicative of the new trend in State policy towards Republicans. The use of "membership" charges as a cover for internment has, of course, a long history in the 26 counties. The abandonment of the requirement for supporting evidence, however, raises its use to a new level.

Such a policy would have been impossible in the years prior to the signing of the Stormont Agreement - the fear of a political backlash at the open trampling of citizen's rights would have been too strong. Since then, the unprecedented - and personalized - demonization of Republicans by the Southern media has created a political climate in which the government feels secure in assuming dictatorial powers. That it should feel it necessary to do so, however, bears eloquent testimony to the increasing effectiveness of the Republican campaign.

Vantage Point

The view from the cuckoo's nest

The editor of English broadsheet The Guardian was in for a nasty shock recently when he decided to embark on a campaign advocating the establishment of a British Republic. Under the Treason Felony Act of 1848, he was told, his newspaper's staff would be threatened with possible life imprisonment. The Act, originally used against Irish Republicans, makes it a treasonable offence to call for the abolition of the British monarchy, even by peaceful means.

And quite right too, says Vantage Point. "Off with their heads!"

Maggie Thatcher's admiration for her fascist forebears has never really been in doubt, but a little confirmation is always welcome. That confirmation came recently in the form of revelations from former senior British diplomat David Goodall. Goodall recalled a Thatcherite proposal from the mid-1980s to implement a "Cromwellian" policy in the six counties. The nationalist population, she suggested, should be expelled to the South in the interest of peace. "After all, it's been done before", she said, citing Cromwell's 17th century genocidal campaign.

Still, she can't really be condemned can she? Like her modern day successors, she was only searching for a Final Solution to the Irish Problem.

In contrast, Vantage Point's old friend Grizzly Adams has been showing off a more tender side to his nature in the media recently. Many were shocked by his frank admission of a predilection towards tree hugging. The revelation, however, will come as no surprise to most SN readers. Grizzly, after all, has always liked to surround himself with wooden characters whose greenery is a distinctly seasonal phenomenon.

Knowing Bertie Ahern's distaste for 'unrepresentative micro-groups' who use armed struggle as a means of attempting to remove the British State's presence in Ireland, Vantage Point was a little puzzled by his recent announcement of plans to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Robert Emmet's rebellion. History (at least when Vantage Point was at school) records that Emmet was the leader of ...well, an unrepresentative micro-group, who ...erm... used armed struggle as a means of... eh... attempting to remove the British State's presence in Ireland. Confused? So, it appears, is Bertie.

Like many viewers of the Endgame in Ireland series, Vantage Point was temporarily overcome with nostalgia for the good old days. One T-shirt in particular grabbed his attention - an obviously popular Sinn Fein garment from the early '90s. A copy of this vintage classic would have to be acquired.

A call to the Sinn Fein shop on the Falls Road, however, revealed an unforeseen problem. "Sorry", Vantage Point was told, "we don't stock that line anymore". No explanation was offered, revealing a truly mystifying reluctance to cash in on such a unique merchandising opportunity. After all, it's not like these timeless maxims ever go out of date. "A vote for Sinn Fein is a vote against Stormont" is surely a slogan for all time?

A Poisoned Chalice?

Republican POWs and the 'early release scheme'

By Donal McHugh

It would be safe to say that the imprisonment of prominent loyalist Garry Smith, in June of this year, was not an occasion for heartfelt mourning in the Republican community. A close associate of Johnny Adair, Smith's well being does not weigh especially heavily on the thoughts of most Republicans. But his arbitrary detention, and that of Adair himself in August 2000, raises a serious issue for Republicanism. That issue, which has never yet been properly addressed, is the status of ex-prisoners, and its implications for the republican community are enormous.

Between July 1998 and July 2000, 239 Republican POWs were released from Long Kesh as part of the Stormont Agreement's 'Early Release Scheme'. Under the terms of that agreement, every one of these men is subject to the same arbitrary re-arrest and imprisonment visited on Smith and Adair. Their freedom is provisional, dependant on the day-to-day whims of Britain's colonial governor, the Six County 'Secretary of State'.

But why, we must ask, was such a policy ever endorsed by a party claiming to represent the interests of Republicanism? What could possibly have motivated their acceptance of such a humiliating state of affairs? Indeed, the shortcomings of the current situation are only emphasized by its unnecessary nature. Considering the magnitude of the concessions the Sinn Fein leadership was offering to the British government, a complete amnesty for the POWs should have been among the least contentious of their potential demands. Instead, the Sinn Fein leadership managed to achieve what, for successive British governments, had only been a

far-off dream. They oversaw the criminalisation of the Republican prisoners, and with them, the entire Republican struggle.

As a result of their actions, the Republican community was to witness a nauseating sight. Instead of being treated as honorable combatants in a legitimate war of liberation, the prisoners were forced to throw themselves on the mercy of the British regime. Forced to apply individually for consideration by the Secretary of State, each POW was released on a personal basis - with each release a 'regrettable concession' towards future 'peace'. Instead of walking out proudly en masse, they were released in dribs and drabs over a two-year period, each man carrying with him a "criminal record" as reward for his sacrifice.

The ex-prisoners, of course, can not be blamed for the tragedy which has befallen them. Like the majority of their comrades, they were presented with a fait accompli, over which they had no control. No, responsibility lies instead with those who first negotiated and then endorsed their criminalisation.

It is clear, then, that a dark shadow hangs over the 'glorious achievements' of Sinn Fein's much-vaunted negotiating team. But what, we must ask, went wrong for this intrepid band? Two plausible explanations present themselves immediately, neither mutually exclusive. The first has the advantage of simplicity, though it is still deeply worrying - incompetence. The Sinn Fein team was simply out-classed by the opposition. Confronted by the combined forces of two governments and a bevy of career politicians, their all-too-human shortcomings soon became apparent. Caught up in the excitement of 'international diplomacy', too many late nights, months of tension and the approach of an artificial deadline combined to cloud their judg-

ment. Under the strain they simply lost their nerve and signed needlessly on the dotted line. To use a military metaphor, they ventured into enemy territory and were annihilated.

The second explanation is considerably more sinister. It begins with a simple, though profoundly disturbing, question - what *benefits* accrued to the Sinn Fein leadership through the criminalisation of the POWs? The answer is clear - the threat of arbitrary re-arrest effectively neutralized a potentially powerful source of opposition. The prisoners, by definition, were a 'militant' element of the Movement. They could be expected, on release, to add significantly to the numbers opposed to the new policy of compromise. The destabilizing effects on the leadership of such an influential constituency advocating a more principled Republican stand, or perhaps even a return to war, would have been immense. The era of Republican 'statesmen' and dinners at the White House would have been in danger of coming rapidly to an end. The threat of arbitrary imprisonment had the potential to stifle this unwelcome dissent - to inhibit those who would otherwise have objected. It served leadership purposes admirably. Such a consideration, even acting at a subconscious level, could have had a significant influence on the outcome of the negotiations. The poisoned chalice presented to the prisoners contained, for the aspiring elite, the heady draught of political power. The question of who will pay the price remains to be determined.

The status of Provisional ex-prisoners remains an ignored, but potentially explosive, issue. It can be addressed only by the prisoners themselves. Whether they will do so before it is too late remains to be seen.



Editorial

MI5 given free rein in South?

The Dublin government's reliance on an MI5 paid perjurer as its main prosecution witness in the upcoming trial of Michael McKevitt marks a new low in the political affairs of the 26 county state. To put it mildly, Mr. Rupert is obviously a man of questionable character, given his history of financial irregularities and his negligence as owner of a business that was held responsible for multiple fatalities. The persistent refusal of the Special Criminal court to disclose any legal documentation relating to this case must also bring into question the defendant's chance of receiving a fair trial in this notorious court. But the presence of an MI5/FBI hired operative in the 26 counties raises other serious matters. How much freedom of manoeuvre does MI5 actually have in the day-to-day life of the southern state? Does MI5 operate in the South with Mr. Ahern's approval? On July 18th, relatives of victims of the Dublin-Monaghan bombings handed Mr. Blair a letter of protest demanding an inquiry into the part played by British Intelligence in the bombing. Perhaps the Dublin government should clearly outline its actual policy in relation to MI5 operatives in Ireland. As the history of the Dublin-Monaghan bombings clearly show, the role of British intelligence in the affairs of this island affects the welfare of every Irish citizen.

The Hidden War

The recent upsurge in Loyalist violence is extremely worrying for Nationalists and Republicans across the six counties. There has been a ten-fold increase in pipe bomb attacks so far this year. This violence has taken place with little comment from the main media organisations or from the Dublin and London governments. This is in stark contrast to the often hysterical media attention that is directed at anti-Agreement Republicans. This silence must give encouragement to the Loyalist paramilitaries that their attacks on the Nationalist community will go unpunished. Violence against Nationalists is not a cause for concern for many in seats of power - evidence surely that Nationalists still hold only second-class citizenship in the six counties. Even worse has been the response of the Provisional Movement to the Loyalist attacks. After the recent UDA and RUC attempt to invade the Ardoyne, Sinn Fein Stormont member, Martin Meehan was quickly giving television interviews condemning the defence of the Ardoyne by local young Nationalists. The sight of leading Provisionals abandoning their principles has become a regular sight in recent years but the sight of them abandoning the people is a new low. It is sad that some people have already forgotten the pogroms of 1969 and the burning of Bombay Street.

Membership charges as cover for internment

The Dublin government has long been sensitive to the political consequences of interning Republicans. Instead, it has resorted to the charge of 'IRA membership' as a media-friendly substitute. The distinction between conviction and internment has often been nominal. Many Republicans will recall the Special Criminal Court's conviction of Don O'Leary in 1989 - a particularly blatant example of the 'rubber stamping' process at work. The only evidence offered to support the State's case against O'Leary was a Republican poster found hanging in his bedroom. It was more than sufficient for the non-jury court, and O'Leary was sentenced to 5 years in prison.

Incredibly, this situation has only worsened in recent years. The amended Offences Against the State Act introduced by Bertie Ahern in 1998 removed even this theoretical requirement for supporting evidence. A conviction is now possible based solely on the unsupported word of a Garda Superintendent.

The recent conviction of Dubliner Dermot Gannon, the first to be tried under the new legislation, signaled the covert reintroduction of internment in the 26 counties. Eight other men are currently awaiting trial on identical 'membership' charges. With Gannon convicted purely on the stated opinion of a Special Branch officer, their prospects for a fair trial look bleak.

The Dublin government is no stranger to the rhetoric of 'human rights'. As it has amply demonstrated, however, its commitment remains to the rhetoric rather than the reality.

Letters to the Editor

The Sovereign Nation, PO Box 6328, Rutland St., Dublin 1.

Poverty in Ireland

A recent report on poverty in Ireland, quoted in the Irish Times, has revealed that almost one quarter of the Irish people live below the poverty line (earning less than 50% of average income). Yet the politicians never tire of reminding us that we live in the 'Celtic Tiger', with a booming economy the envy of many less fortunate nations. (When they can take the time out from voting themselves massive pay rises, that is.)

Much new wealth has undoubtedly been created in recent years, but where has it gone? Certainly not to the ordinary people of the country. The inequalities between rich and poor have been growing, not shrinking. As usual, the well placed few have reaped the rewards of economic success, while the many struggle on as before. The politicians, at least, are guaranteed a share of the pie. As, I imagine, are the manufacturers of brown paper envelopes.

Brian Murray, Dundalk

G8 Summit

As a socialist and a republican I think that it is very important for the

Republican Movement to see itself as part of the wider international struggle for justice and equality. For that reason, I would like to use your letters page to commend all the men and women from around the world who protested in Genoa outside the G8 summit. It sent a powerful message to the capitalist leaders inside that they will always be resisted in their attempts to oppress and impoverish the people.

Joe Moran, Dublin.

Special Criminal Court

The Special Criminal Court and its judges have a long and disgraceful history of jailing Republicans on the flimsiest of 'evidence'. That was bad enough but now it seems that it is no longer in the Court's power to decide how long Republicans must spend in prison. This power has been given to the DPP, who are able to appeal the sentences given to Republicans as being too lenient. This has been a very successful tactic and many Republicans have gotten longer sentences as a result. Surely, it would be simpler to abolish the SCC and simply allow the DPP to pass sentence, without going through the whole rigo-

morole that currently passes for justice in this state. It would even save taxpayers' money!

Martin O'Connell, Galway

Media bias

In the past few weeks, I have read articles by 'journalists', Tom Brady and Jim Cusack. These articles concerned so-called drugs finds by the Gardai in Monaghan. According to Brady, the find 'proved' that Republicans are involved in drug dealing. As a life-long Republican, I can remember this sort of rubbish being mentioned many times before. Isn't it only a couple of months ago that a Garda in Donegal was found to have invented an arms find, in order to gain kudos with his superiors? I don't think it is beyond the wit of the Garda Special Branch to similarly invent a drugs find in order to blacken Republicans.

Even more despicable though is the willingness of certain aforementioned journalists to believe these stories without question. Surely, it is an ethic of journalism to investigate the facts of a story and not just believe what one's told?

Dublin Republican.

Review Section

Endgame in Ireland?

By Tom O'Hanlon

The four-part documentary series, *Endgame in Ireland?* recently shown by RTE, attempted to trace the chronology of events from the hunger strikes up to the signing of the Belfast agreement, and the current political stalemate. Each episode contained anecdotes and impressions of key events from the main participants in the process. While much of the period from the 1981 Hunger Strikes to the signing of the Belfast agreement has been comprehensively examined in various books and documentaries, *Endgame in Ireland?* did shed some new light on various aspects of the conflict.

The first series covered the background to the Anglo-Irish agreement. For the first time we learned of Thatcher's outlandish proposal for a large-scale population movement of Irish nationalists across the border, from the six to the twenty-six counties - a proposal that was inspired by Oliver Cromwell!

The series traced the Provisional movement's drift towards constitutional politics, while also revealing the modus operandi of the Irish civil servants who negotiated the Anglo-Irish agreement and the Belfast agreement. It is worth quoting at length the following statement of Sean Donlon, a high-ranking civil servant who played a part in negotiating the Anglo-Irish agreement. His comments refer to an early morning negotiating session during the annual Anglo-Irish summit of 1984: "The morning began for most of us, I think, rather badly, because we had undoubtedly overindulged during the previous evening. The hospitality had been very generous and there were many sore heads around the place". Sad words indeed, emanating from a man who was negotiating the future of the Irish nation. Fitzgerald's subsequent humiliation at the hands of Thatcher during the post-summit press conference illustrated the contempt with which the British government viewed this Irish negotiating team.

A constant political feature through-

out the whole series was every British government's insistence that the Unionist veto be incorporated into all of their public statements on Ireland, along with negotiating documents, and all inter-governmental agreements between 1985 and 1998. At no stage during this period did any British government ever seriously contemplate any dilution of British sovereignty over the six-counties.

The Provisional leadership's much vaunted 'negotiating skills' were also placed under the microscope during the course of the series. In March 1993, during secret talks between Martin McGuinness, Gerry Kelly and two MI5/British government interlocutors, the British government requested a two-week cease-fire, and in return offered the prospect of immediate political negotiations between the Provisionals and the British government.

The Provisional leadership agreed to the request and informed the British through their established contact. The British then choose to ignore the offer of a cease-fire, and terminated contact with the Provisional leadership. McGuinness when describing the subsequent absence of a reply from the British stated: 'I sat back. The days passed. I made contact with the contact. I thought, what is going on here? What's happening? Why has there been no response? What's wrong, is there a problem? There was nothing, and eventually it became clear that it wasn't going to happen'.

Following the termination of these secret talks, the Provisional leadership concentrated on reaching a joint agreement with Hume. Joint statements from Hume and Adams were dispatched to the London and Dublin governments. Hume told both governments that if accepted, a Provisional cease-fire would follow. But the previous display of weakness by the Provisional leadership had weakened their hand in the eyes of the British government. This further offer of a Provisional IRA cease-fire only served to strengthen this perception of weakness.

The Provisional leadership's cynical duplicity was clearly illustrated

during the series. Footage of the lead-up to the elections for all-party talks in January 1996, showed Sinn Fein canvassing teams wearing T-shirts that displayed the slogan 'A vote for Sinn Fein is a vote against Stormont' Along with 'Disband the RUC' and 'Not a bullet, Not an ounce', this slogan has now been decommissioned, as it might highlight some unpalatable truths for the Provisional grassroots!

The series also covered the background to the Hume-Adams document. The document was said to contain the proposal of a timetable for British withdrawal. However, when John Major received the document, he categorically rejected it out of hand: 'This is completely unacceptable. This isn't going to work. The principle of consent is fundamental to any political agreement in Northern Ireland', he told Reynolds when rejecting the document. Major went on to state that no British government would ever sign up to a timetable for withdrawal. Yet despite this rejection of the most fundamental Republican demand, the Provisional leadership remained committed to a process that would eventually lead to the stabilisation of British rule in Ireland.

When describing the grandiose function held at the Department of Foreign Affairs in Dublin, in celebration of the setting-up of the power-sharing assembly, Peter Mandelson stated that the event was 'like the resigning of the treaty of Versailles'. A mischievous choice of words on Mr. Mandelson's behalf? Students of history will be well aware that Versailles was the chosen location for the imposition of peace terms on the defeated German nation in the aftermath of World War 1.

Many Republicans are of the opinion that the Belfast agreement represents an Irish Versailles. But whether it represents the endgame in the national liberation struggle is an entirely different matter. What we can say is that as long as the British government exercises control over any part of Ireland, any suggestion of an end to the national liberation struggle is premature.

The real war criminals

If Milosevic is guilty, then so too are many others

By Joe Cullen

MANY politicians and news media in the West warmly greeted the arrest and extradition of Slobodan Milosevic, to the War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague. Tony Blair hailed it as 'good news indeed'. EU Commissioner Chris Patten said that the citizens of the former Yugoslavia now 'have the opportunity once again to lead normal and steadily more prosperous lives'. An important question is would they be equally welcoming if other politicians and military leaders suspected of war crimes in the Balkans (and elsewhere) were also brought to justice, as that would surely strengthen the legitimacy of the Hague Tribunal? It is unlikely, since they themselves might have to appear before it. The bombing of Serbia and Kosovo in 1999 by the US and Britain was illegal under international law as it violated the UN Charter requirement that the use of force against another country must have UN Security Council approval. For that reason alone, there is a prima facie case against Tony Blair and Bill Clinton. Of course this wasn't the first time that Western leaders have broken international law: just about every US President and British Prime Minister in recent times is guilty of war crimes. To take only the more recent ones: Reagan for arming the Contras in Nicaragua and the bombing of Libya without UN approval in 1986; Thatcher for the sinking of the Belgrano during the Falklands War and also for the bombing of Libya; Bush and Major for atrocities committed during the Gulf War, such as the massacre on the

road to Basra of 100,000 fleeing Iraqis and Clinton for bombing Sudan, again without UN approval in 1998. The list is almost endless. Why haven't they too been brought to justice?

If we look at the history of war crimes courts we get a clearer picture as to why some war crimes are punished and some are not. The Nuremberg trials at the end of the Second World War set the standard: only the losers went on trial. Undoubtedly, Germany and Japan were guilty of some of the most heinous crimes in history but they weren't the only ones committing war crimes during that period. The USSR's slaughter of 30,000 Polish officers in the Katyn forest in 1940 was a war crime; the British bombing of Dresden in 1945, which killed tens of thousands of civilians was also a war crime; likewise the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the Americans. Surely those responsible for these atrocities should also have faced a war crimes court? But, of course, the Russians, British and Americans won the war. So not only were their atrocities not prosecuted but also as victors, they got to judge others' crimes.

The Hague War Crimes Tribunal is following the same pattern: Milosevic lost the war so he gets to face a trial. The British, Americans and their allies were the victors, so they get to be judge and jury. Clearly Milosevic does have a case to answer and it is very possible that he is guilty of war crimes, but like the Germans and the Japanese in World War Two, he isn't the only one. As already mentioned, in ordering the bombing Serbia and Kosovo, Tony Blair and Bill Clinton

broke international law. In a further, more specific, example of double standards, a Serbian leader Milan Martić was indicted for war crimes for a cluster bomb attack on Zagreb in May 1995. In May 1999, NATO cluster-bombed a hospital in Nis. Unsurprisingly, no NATO personnel have been indicted for this crime.

Even the founding of The Hague War Crimes Tribunal raises fundamental concerns. The court was set up by the

World



View

UN Security Council at the instigation of the then US Secretary of State, Madeline Albright. Yet, she is the politician, who in an interview with CBS television, in response to the question whether or not the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children as a result of US led sanctions was a price worth paying, said that yes she felt it was worth the price. Surely a politician whose policies lead to the deaths of thousands of children and who finds these policies acceptable should themselves appear before a war crimes tribunal? However, the prospect of Western leaders facing a war crimes tribunal

is remote. The US has refused to even consider ratification of the treaty establishing the International Criminal Court, precisely because it is concerned that American officials might face prosecution in some other country.

While the chances of the Western dominated United Nations Security Council establishing a war crimes tribunal to examine the actions of Reagan, Bush, Clinton, Thatcher, Blair et al is slight, there is a small hope that powerful Western leaders and their allies may, indeed, one day face justice. This hope lies in the so-called Pinochet principle. In September 1998, Augusto Pinochet, the former Chilean dictator was arrested in Britain on foot of an extradition warrant from Spain. Under Spanish law, the dictator could be tried in Spain, for crimes committed against Spanish citizens in Chile. In the end, the British refused to extradite him, on the grounds that he was mentally unfit to stand trial. However, by then an important legal principle had been established: Pinochet did not have any immunity from prosecution. It was probably only his ill health that saved him from being extradited to Spain. Several other countries, including Belgium (see side column), have ratified similar laws to Spain concerning international jurisdiction. Therefore, in theory at least, politicians who have broken international law and committed war crimes could one-day face charges. And maybe then, all peoples, and not just some, will indeed 'have the opportunity...to lead normal and steadily more prosperous lives'.

Turkish hunger strike

THE Turkish government has recently announced that it will not build any more of the F-Type isolation prisons which caused the hunger strike among Turkish and Kurdish political prisoners. It is still unclear what the Turkish government proposes to do with the isolation prisons that it has already opened.

The hunger strike began last September after the government tried to force political prisoners into the new prisons. The prisoners feel that there is a higher likelihood that they will be brutalised in the new prisons rather than in the existing dormitory style prisons. The hunger strike is now entering its ninth month. In the past four weeks, the death toll has risen to 29.

Most Western media and political leaders continue to show a disgraceful indifference by ignoring the plight of the prisoners.

Greenpeace protest

MORE than 100 Greenpeace protesters recently occupied part of a US-operated radar station in North Yorkshire in a demonstration over the 'Son of Star Wars' US missile defence system. Several of the protesters were able to chain themselves to or climb on to an 80ft water tower while others climbed on to the roof of another building.

It is estimated that the new missile defence system will cost up to \$240 billion. Even more outrageous than the huge cost involved, is the fact that according to senior American physicists from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the system will not even work, as it will be unable to distinguish actual warheads from decoys, chaff, and other countermeasures an attacker would employ. Last year, 50 Nobel prize-winning scientists urged the US President to reject the system. Unsurprisingly, the new US President, George W. Bush is very supportive of the system and recently went to England to get Tony Blair's support for the project.

Sharon to face justice?

TWENTY-EIGHT Palestinians have instigated legal proceedings in Belgium against the Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon. The charges relate to the 1982 massacre of Palestinians, by Israeli backed forces, in the Sabra and Shattila refugee camps in Beirut. At the time Sharon was Israeli defence minister and was forced to resign over the issue.

Under Belgian law, it has been possible since 1993 to prosecute a crime even if it was not committed in Belgium and the plaintiff or accused was not Belgian.

The case is reminiscent of the Spanish attempts to prosecute ex-Chilean dictator, Augusto Pinochet, for crimes committed in Chile in the 1970s and 80s. That attempt ultimately failed but many hope that this one will be more successful.

Brit base attacked

AN RAF base at Akrotiri on the island of Cyprus was recently attacked and severely damaged. The trouble erupted when a local MP, Marios Matsakis, was arrested by British Military Police after he protested about the erection of two new radio masts at the base, which locals argue could cause cancer. His supporters then stormed the police station, freed the politician and in the process did up to £300,000 worth of damage to the base.

The Cypriots fought a long and heroic battle for independence against the British and it is encouraging to see some of that same anti-imperialist fighting spirit in modern Cyprus. As for the British army, it seems that no matter where they go in the world, they are never welcome.

Sanctions against Iraq

Despite recent 'reform' attempts, Iraqi people are still dying

By Joe Cullen

IT IS now more than 10 years since the Gulf War ended. Those few weeks in early 1991 resulted in the deaths of 200,000 Iraqis; 900 tons of radioactive waste was spread over the country and 90% of Iraq's electrical capacity was destroyed. The high explosive tonnage delivered upon Iraq during the war was more than twice the combined Allied air offensive of World War Two. Sadly, for the Iraqi people, this was only the beginning of their ordeal.

In the aftermath of the war, US and British led sanctions were imposed on Iraq through the United Nations Security Council. Ostensibly, these sanctions were designed to prevent Iraq from rebuilding its military infrastructure and in time lead to the downfall of Saddam Hussein's regime. But ten years later, Saddam Hussein is as much in control as ever. So not only have the sanctions not achieved one of their main aims, they have, in fact, had a devastating effect on the Iraqi population. According to UNICEF and the International Red Cross, over 1.5 million Iraqi civilians (600,000 under the age of 5) have died as a direct result of these sanctions. Of course, politicians like Tony Blair, Bill Clinton and George Bush will claim that the sanctions only affect military goods and that civilian goods are allowed into Iraq. The reality is different however as the import of anything that is perceived to have possible dual military-

civilian uses is prohibited. This has meant that essential medicines and medical equipment are not allowed. It has also been nearly impossible for the Iraqis to rebuild important infrastructure such as water sanitation facilities as the necessary equipment isn't allowed because of its supposed dual function. At one stage the situation became so absurd that lead pencils were on the proscribed list.

In 1996, the UN approved an 'Oil for food' programme. The idea was that Iraq would be able to sell some of its huge oil reserves in exchange for essential civilian goods. The revenue that was received for Iraq's oil was paid directly into a UN account, where before Iraq received it, reparation payments for the Gulf War and payments to cover UN costs were deducted. The remaining money could then be spent on basic necessities. There was never enough and in 1998, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for the programme, Denis Halliday, resigned in protest at the effects of the continuing economic sanctions. Two years later and his successor, Hans von Sponeck also resigned, describing the oil for food programme as 'totally inadequate' in meeting the needs of the Iraqi people.

It is important to remember that prior to the Gulf War and sanctions, Iraq's standard of living was the highest in the Middle East. Iraqis enjoyed free medical care and free education. Literacy levels reached 80%. Today, Iraq is a very different country. Apart from the huge numbers dying as a

result of sanctions, 2 million suffer from severe and protracted malnutrition; 25% of children are born with low birth weight; cholera, dysentery and typhoid have all increased more than ten-fold.

If the Western dominated United Nations really does feel that economic sanctions are a vital tool in the fight against ruthless regimes, then why aren't sanctions used in similar situations elsewhere? For example, Indonesia's invasion of East Timor is broadly similar to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait - a powerful country invading a weaker neighbour. A reasonable person would expect that in such a case, Indonesia, too, would face economic sanctions. But not only has that not been the case, in fact, Indonesia's biggest supporters have been the very countries that have led the imposition of sanctions on Iraq: the US and Britain. In the 27 years since Indonesia invaded East Timor, Britain and the US have continued to sell arms and other military equipment to the Indonesian regime. The result: more than one-third of the population of East Timor have been killed. No big secret lies behind this obvious hypocrisy - Indonesia is a valued ally of the West and therefore does not get punished, whereas by 1990, Iraq was no longer an ally and therefore does get punished. But, of course, the West is using more than sanctions in its war against the Iraqi people.

The US and Britain are also regularly conducting bombing missions on Iraqi targets. Since the war 'ended',

an additional 400 tons of explosives have been dropped, killing at least 300 people. The most recent massacre was in June of this year when it was reported that 23 Iraqi civilians were killed when US and British planes bombed Tel Afr, a village north of Baghdad. This atrocity got little more than token coverage in most of the Western media. By carrying out these bombings, the US and Britain's political and military leaders are guilty of breaking international law, as these bombings do not have the authorization of the UN Security Council.

In recent weeks, the US and Britain have tried to 'reform' the sanctions. Supposedly, after ten years, they have realised that sanctions hurt Iraqi civilians and that 'smart' sanctions, which would alleviate civilian suffering while tightening controls over the regime, should be imposed. Many observers believe that these 'reforms' are little more than a propaganda exercise in order to deflect mounting criticism. Even The Economist newspaper - hardly a left-wing revolutionary journal - said that the 'smart' sanctions would still keep Iraq one big 'soup kitchen'. For the moment, the US and British plan has been thwarted as the three other permanent members of the Security Council - China, Russia and France - have refused to endorse it. Instead, the present sanctions will continue for at least another five months. And in the meantime, Iraqi men, women and children will continue to suffer and die.

A British Catastrophe

This article is the first in a series that will attempt to outline the history of the Palestinian national liberation struggle. The article traces the chronology of events from the end of World War 1 to the partition of Palestine in November 1947.

By Tom O'Hanlon

In the aftermath of World War 1 and the subsequent break-up of the defeated Ottoman Empire, the League of Nations placed Palestine under British mandatory control. After assuming control, the British government demonstrated its political bias by appointing the Zionist, Herbert Samuel, as first governor. This initial period of British rule was characterised by a huge increase in Jewish immigration. This policy was consistent with Britain's pre-war commitment to establish a Zionist state in Palestine; a policy which ran counter to the wishes of the native Arab population.

In 1918, there were 50,000 Jews in Palestine, but by 1939, this number had increased to 443,000. This policy of Zionist immigration, facilitated and encouraged by the British government, transformed the political landscape of Palestine, and created a political cauldron of dispossession and discontent.

From 1901, the Jewish National Fund set itself the task of purchasing Palestinian land from Arab feudal landlords. The purchased land was placed exclusively at the disposal of Jewish immigrants, who went on to own or work the land. The Palestinian peasants who previously occupied the land were ruthlessly expelled, and prevented from procuring employment on Jewish property. An exclusive Jewish Trade Union 'The Histadrut' was established. Its slogan was "Jewish land, Jewish Labour, Jewish produce". The Zionist leader, Joseph Weitz, clinically outlined the objectives of the Zionist movement when he stated that 'among ourselves it must be clear that there is no place in this country for both peoples together. Transfer the Arabs from here to the neighbouring countries, transfer all of them, not one village or tribe should remain'.

In 1936, Palestinian anger and frustration at this evolving political catastrophe exploded into an open rebellion that took three years to quell. While suppressing the Palestinian uprising, the British government relied heavily on the assistance of Zionist organisations. The British government recruited large numbers of Zionists into the 'British settlement police'. By 1939, the ranks of this colonial militia had swelled to 21,500. The formation of the British settlement police and the defeat of the Palestinian rebellion were crucial factors in the eventual consolidation of the Zionist State in Palestine.

The British were thoroughly ruthless in their suppression of the rebellion. The dynamiting of Arab homes and the criminalisation of Palestinian guerrillas were some of the tactics employed by the British. However, the creation of a Zionist death squad, infamously referred to as the 'special night squad' was the most sinister tactic of all. Over 5,000 Palestinians lost their lives during the three-year uprising - mostly at the hands of the special night squad and a further 15,000 Palestinians were maimed or injured. This Zionist death squad went on to form the core of the Zionist militias who drove Palestinians from their homes and villages during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war.

With the commencement of the Second World War, Britain's global strategic interests clashed with its Zionist commitments in Palestine. On the one hand, it was imperative for Britain to maintain a secure route to India via the Suez Canal in Egypt, and to maintain its military bases throughout the Middle East during the war. But with the influx of Jews to Palestine reaching a pinnacle during the late thirties, Britain risked incur-

ring the wrath of the Arab world, thus, threatening its strategic bases. Therefore, in 1939, the British attempted to placate the Arab world by belatedly placing restrictions on Jewish immigration to Palestine.

This restriction of Jewish population movement into Palestine came at a time when the European Jewish community was suffering at the hands of European Fascism. The restrictions imposed by the British government angered and appalled the Zionist organisations. This anger manifested itself in the formation of Zionist paramilitary groups, who commenced attacks against the British government in Palestine, which they now viewed with increasing political hostility.

The most notorious Zionist militias to emerge during this period were the Palmach, the Stern gang and the Irgun. These groups initiated attacks against British State institutions, military camps, railway lines and communication centres across Palestine, in response to the restrictive immigration controls. They also waged a terror campaign against Palestinian peasants, forcing them to flee their lands, thus paving the way for Jewish occupation of the vacated lands.

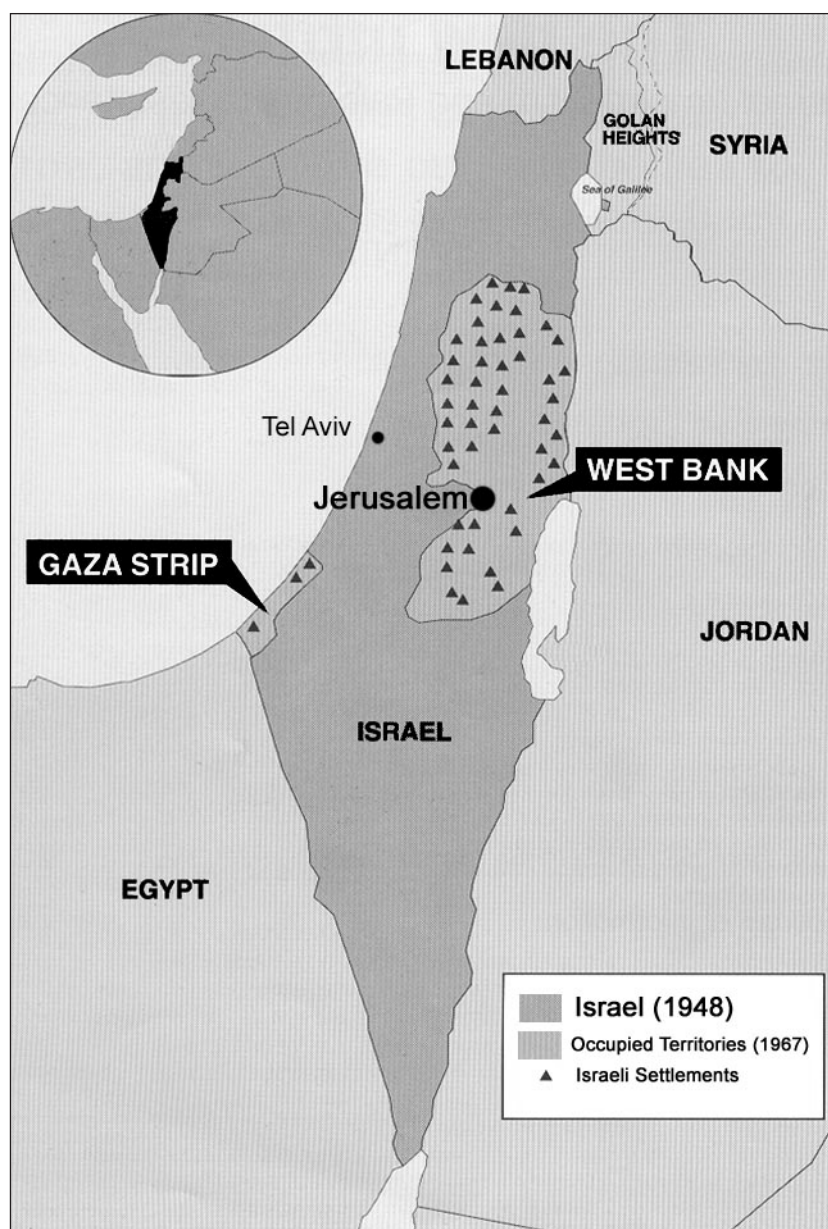
By the summer of 1946 Britain had lost control of events in Palestine. British troops were unable to leave their compounds due to the threat posed by Zionist militias. On July 22nd 1946, the Irgun blew up the King David Hotel, the Headquarters of the British administration and its armed forces. Ninety-one people were killed in the explosion. British policy in Palestine lay in tatters. The British government announced its decision to withdraw from Palestine on May 15, 1948 as it had lost any vestige of control over the situation, and then proceeded to formally ask for the UN to intervene and produce a solution before the scheduled date of withdrawal.

After a series of negotiations which excluded any Palestinian rep-

resentation, the UN announced a proposal to partition Palestine into two separate states, one Zionist, the other Palestinian, with the Holy City of Jerusalem remaining under UN control. The UN decided to grant 57% of Palestinian territory to the Zionists. In doing so, the UN ignored the salient fact that Jews only constituted 30% of the population of Palestine, and that Zionists previously owned 8% of Palestinian land in 1947, prior to partition. While Zionism rejoiced at this fortuitous political outcome, the Arab world was filled with horror at the seizure of over half of Palestinian national territory by the forces of Zionism.

On 29 November 1947, when the ratification of the UN partition vote was announced, the General Secretary of the Arab League, Abdul Rahman Azzam Pasha, led all of the Arab delegates out of the UN assembly hall in protest. Upon leaving the assembly hall, Abdul Pasha's parting words to an international journalist were an ominous warning of things to come: 'The partition line will be nothing but a line of fire and blood'. These words proved to be truly prophetic. In the period between the partition vote and its implementation on May 15 1948 [the date of British withdrawal], Palestine spiralled into civil war. When it emerged that the declaration of the State of Israel was scheduled to coincide with the withdrawal of the British forces from Palestine, the Arab world recognised this as its last opportunity to crush the Zionist State in its infancy. As several Arab armies mobilised to confront the forces of Israel, it became clear that the future of Israel and that of the Palestinian nation would be decided upon the battlefields of the first Arab-Israeli war.

The next issue of The Sovereign Nation will outline the events surrounding the establishment of the State of Israel and the outcome of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war.



Map showing modern day Israel, including the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967.

A Short History of Ireland

Part 1 of a new series charting Irish history from Celtic

times to the present day

Celtic Ireland

Prior to the rise of the Roman Empire, over two thousand years ago, Europe was a Celtic continent. Emerging from their Central European homeland in the 6th century BC, these Iron Age tribes had spread their language and culture across a huge swathe of European territory. Although this Celtic civilization stretched from modern day Spain to Hungary, its peoples never combined to form a united 'nation' or empire. Politically divided, its regions were to gradually fall one by one under Roman rule. Of all Celtic Europe, only modern day Ireland and Scotland managed to retain their independence and culture.

That culture, which survived intact in Ireland into the 17th Century, was exceptionally rich in art, literature and philosophy, and provided the basis for a politically and socially advanced civilization. The Gaelic language, in fact, is Europe's third oldest written language, preceded only by Latin and Greek. Its legacy lives on today, providing Ireland with both its cultural uniqueness and its ties to the sister Celtic nations of Scotland, Wales and Brittany.

By the 2nd century BC the Celts had established themselves in Ireland, assimilating an earlier Bronze Age population. The turbulent centuries that followed saw powerful new kingdoms vying with one another for supremacy, as political power coalesced around the royal forts of Tara in Meath, Emain Macha in Armagh and Rath Cruacha in Connacht. By the 5th century AD the Heroic Age of Celtic Ireland was over, but it had left behind a rich legacy of myth and legend - most famously the epic Tain Bo Cuailgne and the exploits of the Fianna. The arrival of Christianity in the 5th century marked the beginning of a new age in the history of the island.

But what was life like for ordinary people living in this society? For most of its history, Celtic Ireland was a communal, agricultural society, with its social and political structures based on the clan system. Each clan, or large family group, was a politically autonomous unit, although most combined to form larger tuatha, or regional kingdoms. Within each clan, land was owned communally, and periodically redistributed among the members according to rank and need.

The *ceile*, or 'free clansmen', were the basis of the Celtic social structure. They worked a plot of land, paid taxes towards the community, and formed the army in time of war. They also had political power, electing local assemblies to administer clan affairs.

Above the *ceile* were the *flaith*, or 'civil servant' class - public officials elected by the clan to carry out administrative duties. Their work included the upkeep of roads, hospitals and public mills, along with policing and the organization of the army. They were controlled by the local assembly, and received a lifetime grant of land in return for their duties.

Ranking above the *flaith* were the 'professional classes' - the Druids, Bards, *Brehons* (Judges) and Doctors. Membership of these professions was open to anyone willing and able to undertake the many years of rigorous training required. The Druids, or 'Priests' of the Celtic religion, played a varied role in Irish society, acting as religious ministers, political advisors, philosophers, historians and teachers. Although they gradually disappeared after the introduction of Christianity, their role was largely filled by the priests and monks of the new Celtic Christian Church.

Above the *flaith* was the 'ruling class' of Celtic Ireland - the Chiefs, ranging in status from clan chiefs, through provincial 'kings', to the Ard Ri, or High King of Ireland. Brehon law provided for the election to office of all Chiefs - the concept of 'hereditary power' was unknown in Celtic society. The function and powers of a chief were also limited by Brehon law - his role was not to make laws, but merely to uphold them. He acted as the president of clan assemblies, military commander in time of war, and supreme judge in the public courts - a role more akin to that of a Republican President than an absolute monarch.

Women, it should be noted, played a unique role in Irish society, in comparison with other contemporary civilizations. They possessed legal rights unparalleled anywhere in Europe until the 20th Century - including the right to be elected Chief, and to lead their clan in battle.

Brehon Law, the basis of the Irish legal system, was a comprehensive and advanced legal code, based on arbitration and compensation. It provided for a wide-ranging 'social welfare' system, including land set aside for the poor, and public hospitals paid for by clan taxes. It was administered by Brehons, or professional Judges, who spent many years in training before becoming qualified.

A little known aspect of Celtic Irish society is the advanced medical system in existence from its earliest days. Brehon law specifically required that the sick, the wounded and the mentally handicapped be cared for in public hospitals at the clan's expense. It also included a comprehensive system of regulations, with laws governing hospital conditions and severe penalties for unqualified physicians.

The high point of Celtic Irish civilization, however, was undoubtedly the 6th to the 8th centuries - a 'golden age' created by the fusion of Celtic tradition and Latin scholarship. Traveling Irish monks exported their learning to a continent deep in the throes of the Dark Ages, while at home, monastic scholars recorded the history and mythology of their land in lavishly decorated manuscripts. Ireland had become the 'Island of Saints and Scholars'.

But darker times lay ahead. The coming of the Viking raiders in the 9th century brought a new era of war and instability to Irish society. Brian Boru's victory at the battle of Clontarf in 1014 ended their reign of terror, but his reorganization of the High Kingship failed to produce its aim of a strong centralized government. A renaissance in art and literature followed, but the country was beset by dynastic rivalries. And the respite from foreign invasion was to prove short lived. A new power was emerging on the continent which was to threaten the very existence of Celtic civilization. A conquering Norman army was imposing a brutal regime of feudal slavery on the Anglo-Saxon English, and Ireland was to be its next target...

In the next issue of The Sovereign Nation, Donal McHugh will outline the background to, and consequences of, the Norman Invasion of 1169.

Statement from IRA POWs

The following statement has been received from the
Oglaigh na hEireann POWs, Portlaoise Gaol.

Allegations have been made in the media recently concerning the morale and cohesion of Republican prisoners in Portlaoise. We would like to take this opportunity to respond to these allegations, and to reiterate our commitment to the struggle for Irish freedom.

Morale among the imprisoned Volunteers here in Portlaoise remains high. In recent weeks, however, we have been subject to what is clearly an orchestrated media campaign, alleging divisions and despondency among the POWs. We reject all these allegations. Our morale remains high because our analysis has been vindicated by the progress of events - events which have only served to strengthen our determination.

The events of recent years clearly mark a turbulent period in the history of Irish Republicanism. With great sadness, we witnessed the departure from our ranks of many former comrades, led under false pretences into the service of those whom they once opposed. The Movement has also been subjected to a new campaign of almost unprecedented viciousness by the Dublin government, suggestive of a return to the Civil War values of the 1920s. As we have seen, a parallel media campaign of vilification has also unloosed the full panoply of slander, black propaganda and dirty tricks on the opponents of British rule in Ireland.

Despite this, the Republican Movement has survived, and will continue to survive. The desire for freedom is a flame which cannot be extinguished. We have borne witness, not to the defeat of Republicanism, but to the rise of a rejuvenated Movement across the island. We, the prisoners, remain fully confident of our eventual victory.

And that victory is just as necessary today as it has ever been. The lies and distortions of press and politician alike have not been sufficient to hide the grim reality behind the

façade of 'peace' in Ireland. The flawed analysis of those who proclaimed the Stormont Agreement as a 'stepping stone to Irish unity' has been comprehensively disproved.

To those who say that the causes of conflict have been removed, we say nothing has changed. The British occupation of the North continues, and the will of the Irish people remains subservient to the diktats of a foreign power.

To those who say that the Stormont Agreement has brought the prospect of equality to the North, we say that it has merely brought equality of oppression. The northern working class, Protestant and Catholic alike, remain subject to the jackboot of capitalist imperialism. Their liberation, and the emancipation of their Southern countrymen, remains the primary objective of the Republican Movement.

And to those who say that the path to freedom lies through the 'democratic process', we say that democracy in Ireland remains an illusion. The political elite, their wealthy capitalist masters, and their loyal servants in the mass media, retain their stranglehold on power. Their position and wealth relies on the exploitation of the people. The 'democracy' they so staunchly uphold is nothing more than a smokescreen for the naked pursuit of self-interest.

Finally, to those who say we are despondent, we say you are mistaken. We remain unbowed, unrepentant and unbroken, and we shall be victorious.

An Phoblacht Abu!

Among Comrades - An interview with Tony Hyland

Friday 3rd November 2000 saw the repatriation from England of three Republican prisoners : Liam Grogan from Kildare, Tony Hyland from Dublin and Darren Mulholland from Dundalk.

Between them, they were sentenced to a total of 69 years on a charge of conspiring to cause explosions in London in July 1998. The following is the second of a three-part interview with the men.

S.N: Tony, first of all welcome home, its great to finally have you back in Ireland. How do you find the IRA unit in Portlaoise prison?

T.H: Cheers. Obviously, with our repatriation to Portlaoise prison, we are back amongst comrades and friends, so that is a welcome change in environment. It is also easier for our families to visit us when they wish. Morale and discipline in the unit is excellent. The conditions are good, and as a result there are plenty of activities with which to occupy our time. However, our position here in Portlaoise prison is in stark contrast with that of our comrades in Maghaberry, who as we speak, are being denied political status. They are being detained on the same landings as loyalists, they are denied any right of association, and they are under a daily regime of 23-hour lock-up. There is no access to education facilities, and their families and friends are repeatedly threatened and intimidated while visiting. I would urge everybody to lobby, petition and campaign in some way, in order to highlight and support our comrades' demands for a restoration of political status. I think this issue is extremely important at this moment in time.

S.N: Your respective repatriation applications seemed to take a long time to be processed. What were the difficulties that you encountered?

T.H: We encountered a series of delays in having our repatriation applications processed by the British Home Office and the Irish justice departments. Delays were explained away as inevitable bureaucratic difficulties that had to be overcome. But at the outset, we expected some political obstacles to arise as a result of our opposition to the Belfast agreement.

S.N: You were sentenced to 25 years in the Old Bailey. What were your perceptions of the trial, and how do you feel about the sentence?

T.H: I'm not the first IRA prisoner to receive a long prison sentence and I don't think that I will be the last. I can remember getting really annoyed during the trial when the judge was summing up before sentencing, you know, basically castigating us etc. I can remember thinking to myself, who do these people think they are? They are in no moral position to be judging anybody.

S.N: How do you view the Belfast agreement?

T.H: I think the Belfast agreement represents a massive setback for the Irish Republican struggle. In time, Republican history will not be kind to the Provisional leadership, who in effect confiscated the mantle of the Republican struggle, and capitulated at the feet of the British government in the clearest possi-

ble terms. People should be clear about the fact that this agreement is in no way transitional with respect to a British governmental withdrawal. The unionist veto permeates the agreement and acts as a political veto at every stage of the agreement; it can inhibit legislation at assembly level; prevent the expansion of the existing, pathetic, cross border bodies; and most importantly it blocks any radical constitutional change. The Provisional leadership has betrayed the freedom struggle by administering British rule in Ireland and by unreservedly accepting the unionist veto. One can only question as to why the very same leadership rejected what was on offer at Sunningdale all those years ago?

S.N: You were studying for an economics degree at college before your arrest; have you any plans to continue with your studies?

T.H: Yes I'm currently studying with the Open University. I am taking a science course at the moment. I am also learning two languages. So that passes the time away nicely.

S.N: Well Tony, it's great to have you back in Ireland. On behalf of the Sovereign Nation, pass on our best wishes to the IRepublican prisoners in Portlaoise Prison.

Republican POWs

The following is a complete list of sentenced
Oglaigh na hEireann prisoners in Portlaoise Gaol.

Name	D.O.B.	County	Sentence
Damien Lawless	9-1-69	Louth	3yrs
Anthony Ryan	22-8-75	Dublin	3yrs
Frank Nolan	9-10-62	Dublin	3yrs
John McNamara	28-1-62	Kildare	3yrs
Martin Conlon	12-11-69	Armagh	4yrs
Seamus MacGreevy	25-10-53	Meath	4yrs
Seamus McGrane	26-5-54	Louth	4yrs
Thomas Larkin	9-4-56	Louth	5yrs
Anton Beggs	24-12-62	Dublin	5yrs
Paul McIntyre	15-7-78	Dublin	6yrs
Saoirse Breathnach	9-7-74	Dublin	7yrs
Alan Ryan	3-6-80	Dublin	7yrs
Philip Forsyth	9-10-73	Dublin	7yrs
Gerard Moyna	28-8-54	Belfast	7yrs
Pascal Burke	9-1-64	Dublin	8yrs
Larry Keane	28-3-57	Kildare	10yrs
Paddy McDonagh	7-10-63	Louth	10yrs
Kieran McDonagh	19-8-61	Louth	10yrs
Kevin Murray	13-5-53	Louth	12yrs
Liam Grogan	1-1-77	Kildare	22yrs
Darren Mulholland	28-2-79	Louth	22yrs
Tony Hyland	13-9-72	Dublin	25yrs

Prisoners can be contacted at the
following address:
E2, Portlaoise Prison, Portlaoise, Co. Laois.

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e-mail: 32@ireland.com

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PEPPER SPRAY ATTACK ON HUNGER-STRIKE COMMEMORATORS - A POLICE WEAPON IN THE HANDS OF WHOM?

On the 21st of July 2001 a contingent of the Irish Political Status Committee (IPSC) took part in the 1981 Irish Hunger Strike Commemoration march in Liverpool organized by the James Larkin Republican Flute Band, and supported by other Republican flute bands from Scotland. To the powerful beat of drums and flutes playing familiar rebel tunes the contingent marched behind their banner REINSTATE POLITICAL STATUS. Supported by several thousand people, the march proceeded through the city to a rally addressed by the band organisers and John Pickering, ex-Republican prisoner. A message of solidarity was also sent by DHKC, the Turkish group supporting the Turkish prisoners and their supporters currently on hunger-strike in Turkey. After the rally, while the Irish Political Status Committee contingent awaited transport to take them to the venue for the event's social, they were attacked by a man who jumped in front of them spraying a blinding spray directly into their faces. A number of the contingent experienced an intense burning sensation in the eyes and temporary blindness, but were nevertheless able to attend that evening's social event in Liverpool. It was believed that the substance was pepper spray.

One of the IPSC contingent, a young man who refused to be named, pointed out that while police officers in Britain are often supplied with pepper spray, it is not an easy matter for a member of the public to gain access to the substance. Several members of the contingent stated that police in a marked car had been watching the group from about 60 metres away. The police had not intervened, although they must have seen the attack, they claimed. "This won't stop us from fighting for Political Status and fighting to kick the Brits out of Ireland", said a woman beside him. "Who ever was behind it should know that no amount or level of intimidation and repression has ever stopped people pursuing their righteous goals. On the contrary - repression breeds resistance. As the song goes 'The higher you build your barriers the taller I become...'"

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