

# Continuing the struggle

**JIM DEE** interviews a member of the Continuity IRA army council

**I**n July 1996, at the height of province-wide nationalist unrest which followed that summer's Garvaghy Road reversal, a car bomb devastated the Killyhevlin Hotel in Enniskillen. The bombing was later claimed by the Continuity Army Council (CAC), a new group which espouses support for the policies of Republican Sinn Féin.

Beginning with the Garda's seizing of a 1500 lb. bomb near Carrickmacross, Co Monaghan in November 1995, CAC operations over the last two years have been sporadic and—with the exception of the Killyhevlin bombing—largely unsuccessful. Most recently, the CAC is believed to have abandoned a 500 lb car bomb outside the Carrybridge hotel in Lisbellaw in late July, although no group claimed responsibility.

In mid-August, at a location outside Belfast, a member of the Army Council of the CAC outlined the group's views on the peace process, the IRA's new cease-fire and the CAC's future intentions. Over the course of a two-hour interview, the representative claimed the CAC was the true IRA, and that the years between the 1986 split and 1995 were spent establishing a "very broad command structure—across all 32 counties", procuring finance, weaponry, and training new operatives. He claimed that following the IRA's 1994 cease-fire the CAC decided "to show the British establishment in Ireland—and to the world—that there was an alternative", and thus began stepping up actions. Excerpts:

**The Provisionals view the peace process as another front in the advancement of the struggle. Can you see that?**

We don't feel that it is going to advance anything in terms of what the republican demand is—that is a British withdrawal, or a declaration of intent of British withdrawal—which was the initial demand of the Provisionals, of whom we were a part of at that time. So we see the peace process from the Provisional point of view as very much a watering-down of what their aims were.

**What is your view of the new Provisional IRA cease-fire?**

They now are negotiating from a position of weakness. We would hold the view that when negotiations took place with the Brits in 1972 and 1975 they were from a position of strength—albeit they ultimately fell through. You're best to negotiate from a position of strength not from a position of weakness.

**But, for example, the bombs in Baltic Exchange and Bishopsgate in 1992 and 1993, and the fact that they both doled out damage equaling all of the bombs here since 1969—that shook the British financial establishment. Isn't that negotiating from a position of strength?**

They were known in republican circles as 'spectaculars'. When we talk about strength, we talk about a sustained campaign. Coupled with that the fact that they went so constitutional, so political, that their resources were channeled down the political road. We're talking about things like their submitting applications to the RUC to commemorate their dead, their applications down south to give out Easter Lilies—they became very much conformists. We would also feel they were very much infiltrated by British agents who guided them down that road.

**There have been reports that the Provisionals recently grabbed a few of your members and held them for interrogation. Is that true?**

They have threatened a number of our people. What we've got in different areas is a different way of dealing with people. Obviously it's different in South Armagh than in Belfast, and probably different again in Derry. South Armagh would be more friendly towards us, Derry slightly less than South Armagh. Belfast would be bitterly opposed to us.

**Because there is strong support for Adams in Belfast. How could you hope to overcome that?**

We've got to overcome that slowly and progressively. It's not something we're going to overcome overnight. We've got to advise people. And I don't want to specifically talk about Adams, I would be reluctant to assess him personally. We feel the organization he is head of has very much passed their sell by date. We believe they have been heavily infiltrated by British intelligence, probably as early as the 1970s, and steered slowly down a cul-de-sac.

**Obviously the Provisionals won't take any challenge lightly. And I imagine they would respond pretty strongly.**

We are expecting that and we will deal with that when we are in a position to do so.

**There are reports that you have drawn support from dissident Provisionals. Is that true?**

That is true. But again, we are very vigilant as to who comes into our organization from the Provisionals—from a security point of view. Basically that would be regarding two aspects. One, we regard those people as having left the movement. So if they want to come back into the movement, they have to go through a process. Second, for security, with regards to infiltration by the Provisionals and from the Brits.

**There was a recent Belfast Telegraph report claiming that you have established three brigades in Belfast and a fourth in south Antrim. Is that true?**

No that's not true. It's inaccurate in as far as what people refer to as a brigade. We would refer to them as companies. We would have five or six in Belfast. Regarding south Antrim, I'm not aware of any.

**What sort of numbers are you talking about in Belfast?**

We would have somewhere between fifty to one hundred in Belfast, I would think, and growing.

**Is that because of the events of this summer?**

I think the last two summers drew recruits, probably more in reaction to the RUC and the Brits in their handling of the two marching seasons. But our strategy is a long-term strategy, as opposed to short term. We have to build brick by brick, slowly and carefully.

**What if the present talks produce an interim settlement. Will that deter you from further actions?**

Not at all. Obviously we view any settlement as going to be within the context of British occupation—which is totally unacceptable to us.

**But if there is a settlement, you could then have the Provisionals, the RUC, and the British army against you. That's a pretty formidable array of opponents.**

We would still continue. It is a very formidable array of opponents, and has been for some time. The Provisionals have given us no help whatsoever, and have opposed us in every way, but we have still got there—this far.

**Do you plan to intensify your actions?**

Yes. They will be ongoing.

**Will that only be here in the North?**

Oh, no. That won't be restricted to the six counties. When I talk about brick by brick, I'm talking about the movement. Military actions will be ongoing—maybe tonight, maybe tomorrow night. Military actions will be ongoing. As you're well aware we are a guerilla organization, and as a guerilla organization you can only carry out operations when the situation lends itself to that—meaning if you've got the equipment, intelligence and logistics to carry out the operations.

**Do you have that?**

In some areas. But maybe not all three in all areas.

**The Provisionals are considered one of the most successful guerilla forces in the world, and they haven't forced a British withdrawal. Smaller groups like yourselves would seem to have even less of a chance at doing that.**

The situation as we see it is that we don't see ourselves as possibly forcing a British withdrawal. But we can create a situation—as the Provisionals have—of continuing to loosen the chains of British rule.

**Now if you escalate actions, there could be a very violent loyalist backlash.**

We have got to face that when it happens. But we have contingency plans for dealing with that.

**And at that point you would likely face massive calls from nationalists in the North and the South to stop. What would you do then?**

Nothing.

**You would continue on?**

Yes.

**Obviously that would be seen as undemocratic.**

That has always been the charge—right from 1916. The struggle has always been fought by a minority, and we're not worried if we have to continue the struggle alone.

**How do you see things progressing in the next two years?**

On the talks front we see that over the next two years very little progress will be made of any kind. There will be a lot of procrastination, maybe not as slow as before. We would plan to strengthen our organization and bolster it throughout the whole of Ireland. We'll carry out operations at any opportunity we can carry them out. We have an advantage in that a lot of our operators are clean—young—they have not been involved in actions before and the intelligence that the Free State and the Brits would have would be limited. We've also developed targets the Provisionals haven't even thought of—a lot of things involving computers, economic and transportation disruption, actions with maximum impact and minimal risk.

**How do you view Dublin's involvement in the peace process?**

I think the aim of all of them is to create a situation where there is no violence, and to patch over the cracks that will eventually open up again unless we have a long-term solution.

**You consider the Dublin government illegitimate, but the government in Dublin is recognized by the overwhelming majority of people living down South. How will you deal with that?**

The same way we've dealt with it for the last 25 years—ignore it. It doesn't matter. If there is only one person who fights for an end to British rule, that person has a right to do that—a legitimate right to do that. Numbers don't matter.

Ruairi O'Bradaigh pictured at the Roscommon IRA memorial



Bobbie Hanvey