



The Republican

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BULLETIN OF THE JOHN WHELAN CUMANN OF REPUBLICAN SINN FEIN

JOHN WHELAN CUMANN

SINN FEIN POBLACHTACH SET
UP A CUMANN IN LIVERPOOL

A new cumann of Republican Sinn Fein was established on Monday 3 March with the inaugural meeting of the John Whelan Cumann in Liverpool. Two members of An Ard-Chomhairle arrived in the city to oversee the meeting and to explain the finer points of the Constitution. Séan Ó Sé and Pádraig Mac Mathúna later addressed a public meeting attended by around 30 people in a city centre location. Both Pat and Séan spoke and said that Republican Sinn Fein was now the only organization in Ireland still calling for a British withdrawal.

Séan stated that the current 'talks process' could never deliver on republican objectives and would end only in an unacceptable compromise which, in turn, would result in further conflict. Only Republican Sinn Fein's EIRE NUA policy for a federal democratic socialist Ireland could lead to a just and lasting peace. Besides being the best solution for all the people of Ireland it was the one most likely to be acceptable to present-day loyalists.



SÉAN Ó SÉ AND PAT MAC MATHÚNA ADDRESS THE PUBLIC MEETING

The following day, Tuesday 4 March, members of the new cumann along with Pat and Séan visited the Fenian monument in Ford Cemetery on the outskirts of the city where Pat laid a wreath in honour of the 16 Fenians buried there. Overall the visit -the first by RSF to Liverpool -was a great success. Both members of An Ard-Chomhairle made many friends and the John Whelan Cumann was established on a sound footing for the challenges ahead.



John Whelan

The new cumann was named in honour of John Whelan who was a Liverpool-Irishman & IRA volunteer killed at the Upton Station (County Cork) ambush in 1921. We have no further information on John Whelan and have written to the National Graves Association (NGA) for help. If any of our readers have any details (or hopefully an old photograph) please let us know.



LIVERPOOL AND THE GREAT HUNGER

A chara

Where does the Irish Free State government get off taking it upon itself to thank Liverpool for its benevolent role towards the Irish refugees that arrived in the port of Liverpool during the 'famine' years. "It is keen to acknowledge the city's special role in accepting and caring for Irish migrants" - Avril Doyle TD, Irish minister for state.

Their praise conjures up pictures of these starving and dying refugees being rushed to Emergency Ward Ten on arrival, awash with Live Aid concerts. As is known the truth was far from that! These starving people were left mainly to fend for themselves, countless thousands died in appalling conditions; 40 or 50 deep in Liverpool's pestilent cellars. These 'dungeons' had already been condemned in 1842 after another Irish influx from hunger, and bricked up thanks to the work of the famous Dr Duncan of Liverpool. Our people had to smash their way into these cellars because there was no other place for them.

The living were left to lie with the dead in these hell-holes. Disease was rampant. At the same time, British merchant ships stuffed tight with quality foodstuffs arrived at Liverpool from Ireland throughout the 'famine' years while this dispossessed Irish mass perished less than a couple of yards from where these ships berthed with food destined for

the belly of the British bourgeoisie. In fact both food and starving refugees were shipped out together from Ireland bound for Liverpool.

Dr Duncan became the first Medical Officer of Health ever to be appointed in Britain from 1847-1863. His appointment was as a direct result of the horrors of British rule in Ireland exploding onto the streets of Liverpool, horrors that were seeping into the wealthier districts of this city.

England 'was' a socially backward country compared to other European nations of that time. The English working class of Liverpool lived and worked in the most horrendous conditions, the worst in Britain. The British army complained after rejecting 75% of the city's working-class men on health grounds that they 'were unfit to be shot at'. It is hard to believe that people could live in worse conditions, but they did. "It is they [the Irish] who inhabit the filthiest and worst of these unventilated courts and cellars." (Dr Duncan of Liverpool speaking in 1842.) Much worse was to come with the advent of the 'Great Famine' looming in Ireland.

The only reason the 'kindly' city fathers didn't close off the Port of Liverpool to the Irish as did the Isle of Man authorities was Liverpool was the ex-African slave capital of the world; it was well used to shipping millions of humans in stinking fever-ridden holds of its ships across the Atlantic. There was much money to be made for the powerful shipowners etc.

To say people chose to stay on in Liverpool, rather than cross the Atlantic, is laughable.

Liverpool was the most hostile place the Irish could possibly find themselves in. Media outlets ran intense anti-Irish feeling to prevent any solidarity there may have been with the Irish from the English working-class. Vicious Orange Lodge attacks were common on the vulnerable, murders and suicides were near daily occurrences. Corpses were fished out of the Mersey daily. Then the final insult: the bodies would be put on display naked to the public from behind bars that opened on to the street known as the 'Drowned House'. No, this was the flight of the very poor, many having been given the small amount for the crossing by landowners' agents to clear them off the land once and for all. Others were carried as live ship's ballast; they wanted only to be fed. Decades after the 'famine' the Liverpool Irish ghettos were a death trap; 64% of its children never reached the age of nine compared to 39% in London. For the rest of working-class in Liverpool it was 49%.

During the 'famine' years Liverpool's answer wasn't medical help or sufficient food. In fact, Martial law was called for from certain quarters. Mass arrests and deportations took place. Two thousand fully armed soldiers were sent north from London, 800 Cheshire Yeomanry, 700 Auxiliary men arrived and three war ships sailed for Liverpool and anchored in the Mersey.

Twenty thousand, mainly from the lower middle-class, many of them Orange Lodge members were made special constables to bolster the already 800-strong Liverpool police force, for the sole duty of keeping these destitute Irish contained.

They may have also been used to dig the secret mass graves that have been unearthed in the city and recently came to light, the latest in 1973 containing 3,561 bodies stacked in order of presumed age that were secretly incinerated before tests could be carried out. This was on British Home Office orders which it now denies knowledge of. It is now known as the 'Mystery' Mass Grave. It took eight years before this

mass grave was reported in the press and then only in the *Catholic Pictorial* (September 6, 1981).

Those Irish who escaped the typhus infection in Ireland and paid passage to the Americas too had reason to 'thank' Liverpool for its benevolence. Three quarters of the human traffic to cross the Atlantic sailed from Liverpool; 95% of which were Irish. Dr Douglas, the Medical Officer at Grosse Isle, Canada, started in his report that in his opinion "the filthy Liverpool slums, where poor emigrants were forced to lodge before embarking, were one of the main causes of the ship fever disaster." (*The Great Hunger*, p 278.)

It has been estimated, though not widely known, that 100,000 Irish souls were swept away in Liverpool during the genocidal years of the Gael (*Pardon and Peace*)

This is a city that up until today has no memorial to those who perished in its guts nor has much consciousness of this trauma, much to our shame. The schools of the city teach the descendants of the banished Gael who survived this Holocaust only the 'glorious' rule of the British Empire, not the fact that it tried to wipe them out.

The truth about this British-manufactured 'famine' tragedy has never really been told. And if this revisionist tampering carries on, it never will.

Just for the record, Ms Avril Doyle, the first relief ever organised in Liverpool for Irish 'famine' victims was by Irish navvies who were building a railway from Liverpool to Bury, Lancashire. They donated a day's pay each. This is in stark contrast to the 'Honourable' James Lawrence, the Tory Lord Mayor of Liverpool in 1845 and local booze baron, who refused to hold any conference on relief for the Irish.

A book that is a must to be read on this Holocaust is *The End of Hidden Ireland* by RJ Scally.

D Ó HÉANACHÁIN

Liverpool

John Whelan Cumann

- Liverpool Cumann of Republican Sinn Féin -

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Still a hostile place for the Irish

Liverpool can still be a hostile place for half of its population -those of Irish descent. The Orange Order in Liverpool remains strong (5,000 paraded on 12 July last year) and wields a powerful influence in the City Council, Labour Party and trades union movement, and within Merseyside police. Since 1969, thousands of Irish people have been detained and interrogated by Liverpool Special Branch officers at the infamous Bridewell near Dale Street, and at the ports. The Irish have lived in the city in great numbers for hundreds of years but instead of becoming more accepted they appear to have become less so. A few examples from recent years can best illustrate this: In October 1994, a meeting of the local Troops Out Movement branch at which a Sinn Féin councillor was to speak was summarily cancelled by Merseyside Trade Union Centre following Orange threats. The TOM branch was subsequently disaffiliated by the centre without a hearing and without right of appeal. On 24

GETAWAY WITH PTA

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January 1995, Granada TV's 'This Morning' programme broadcast a wholly biased appeal for "the immediate release of Lee Clegg" (the British soldier convicted of the murder of Irish teenager Karen Reilly) urging viewers to phone in and "put pressure on the Home Secretary". In an unprecedented move Granada allowed only one phone line, the 'Yes Vote' line. On 7 November 1995 - 14 months into the Provisional IRA ceasefire- Liverpool Labour Group abruptly cancelled a SAOIRSE meeting booked (by a Labour councillor) at the town hall. Labour councillors were instructed not to attend any such SAOIRSE meeting. On 17 March 1996, Merseyside Police riot squads confronted a peaceful St.Patrick's Day parade in an aggressive manner and allowed around 30 Orange/fascist thugs to disrupt the entire event by blocking the parade route. Merseyside Chief Constable, Jim Sharples, justified the police operation by describing some of those on the parade as "pro-IRA elements" and suggested that placards portraying the Home Secretary in a bad light might be "provocative". These comments were made in a letter to Bob Parry M.P. who, himself, had claimed that an IRA unit was based in Liverpool. These allegations were then published in the 'Liverpool Daily Post and Echo' which also claimed that "IRA men were seen on the roof of the Irish Centre". On two separate occasions since 17 March 1996,

police officers armed with automatic weapons have burst into the Irish Centre while a helicopter hovered above the building -how many other community centres in Britain have received such attention? On 2 May 1996, following a loud-hailer interruption of the 'This Morning' weather forecast- in protest against the torture of Irish political prisoners in England -viewers phoning the Granada studio were told "It was an IRA demonstration". Because of Orange opposition the planned 'twinning' of Liverpool and Dublin was postponed for a full year and, when it did take place (on 15 January) it was deliberately low-key and with minimal publicity. And, despite all the flowery 'twinning' rhetoric - only two councillors (one from Dublin and one -a Liberal Democrat from Liverpool) attended the recent St.Patrick's Day parade in the city. This was seen by many as a calculated snub to the Irish community in Liverpool.

Getting off the Peace Train

Since 1990 an Irish political prisoners solidarity group - the Phoenix Support Group- has existed in Liverpool. The group's purpose is to assist the prisoners in English jails and, despite the fact that the overwhelming majority are Provisional POW's, the group has always regarded itself as politically independent. When the Provisional IRA ceasefire was called in August 1994, many people -in spite of denials from all sides- believed that there must have been important concessions made by the British Government. Phoenix Support Group, along with many similar groups throughout Britain, was absorbed into the **Saoirse** campaign for the release of

all Irish political prisoners. Since the lifting of the broadcasting ban some months earlier, republicans had watched and listened as PSF had handled interviews skilfully. But they waited with growing anxiety for a basic republican message to be given. Here surely, was a new opportunity to remind the British public that the conflict was about the colonial occupation of part of Ireland by the British army and government. No such clear message was ever forthcoming. Under the auspices of **Saoirse**, the Phoenix Support Group organized public meetings at which prominent PSF members spoke. While the plight of the prisoners was never ignored

Getting off the Peace Train

it was clear that the main purpose of these public meetings was to promote the Sinn Fein peace strategy - a strategy in which many had lost confidence. The strategy was based on a 'broad front' or Pan-nationalist alliance which, theoretically, included the SDLP and the Dublin and Washington administrations. There was also a concerted effort to bring the British Labour Party into the alliance and this was to cause problems for the strategy in Britain. Sinn Fein's problem was (and is) that its core support in Britain has always come from a combination of traditional republicans, socialists, communists and anarchists. Yet these same people - who had no faith in 'Labourism' - were expected to be the bridge between Sinn Fein and British Labour. Many of them were dismayed when Sinn Fein speakers asked them to write to their Labour or Lib-Dem (and even Tory) M.P's. Republican core supporters in Britain also refused to drop basic republican demands in favour of an ambiguous call for peace talks. They wanted to mount a more aggressive campaign on behalf of the prisoners of war. Republican supporters were becoming an embarrassment to the 'peace strategists' and this finally resulted in the arbitrary disbanding of **Saoirse** in Britain.



"THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT HAS NO SELFISH STRATEGIC OR ECONOMIC INTEREST IN IRELAND. IN THE EVENT OF AN I.R.A. CEASEFIRE WE WILL RESPOND FLEXIBLY AND WITH IMAGINATION. OUR ARMY IS THERE PURELY AS PEACE-KEEPERS. THE R.U.C. IS A CARING AND KINDLY POLICE SERVICE. I LOVE YOU ALL..... YOU DO BELIEVE ME?.....DONT YOU? "

Similar difficulties were being experienced within the 'Troops Out Movement' with proposals to change the name of the TOM and to also change its slogans: "Troops Out Now" and "Self-determination to the Irish people". The TOM was in transition, from 'Brits out' to 'Talks now' - many left. Republican supporters who could no longer

go along with all the changes began to drift away, and some think this was the actual remit of the peace strategy leadership in Britain - now under the tight control of a subverted rump of the Troops Out Movement. A new 'umbrella' group - the Irish Campaigns Network - was set up, controlled in both its Northern and Southern sectors by former or existing members of the TOM.

In January of this year Phoenix Support Group was asked to organize a broad platform meeting to be addressed by speakers from Fianna Fail, the SDLP and Sinn Fein. After discussions a group meeting voted 'not to squander any more 'POW,s money' on providing platforms for reactionary politicians' and to reassert the group's independence as a prisoner support group. The group's stance was, they believe, retrospectively vindicated a fortnight later when Irish Labour T.D, Declan Bree, abused his invitation to address a Bloody Sunday meeting at London's Caxton Hall, and used the occasion to describe IRA volunteers as 'criminals'.



Subsequent to these events several members of the Phoenix Support Group decided to apply to establish a curann of Republican Sinn Fein Poblachtach in Liverpool. This possibility had been the subject of much group discussion in the preceding few months. One member in particular had been very vociferous in his support for the application, had suggested that we order copies of 'Saoirse -Irish Freedom' - the newspaper of Republican Sinn Fein, and had later suggested we increase the order. He had also stated: "The analysis of RSF is correct". However, at the last moment this person backed out and now leads a local 'peace' group. Significantly, he is also on the Steering Committee of the Troops Out Movement.

What is clear to the rest of us is that any talks based on the Downing Street Declaration and the Framework Document, recognizing -as they do- unionist 'consent' (the Loyalist Veto) is undemocratic and unacceptable and can lead only to further conflict.

VICTORY
To Ireland's Freedom Struggle