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The reconquest of Ireland

By James Burke

Today, it would be hard to imagine an Ireland without the Gaelic Athletic Association. Since its foundation on the 1st November 1884, in Hayes' Hotel in Thurles, it has grown into a national organisation which covers every parish in the country, north and south. Before its creation, organised sport played a very small part in the lives of the ordinary people, especially in rural Ireland of the time. Farm labourers worked a twelve-hour day, seven days a week, and small tenant farmers were likewise tied to their plots of land. According to Michael Cusack, one of the founders of the GAA, 'the Irish peasant too often wasted his evenings and holidays in smoking and card playing'. This behaviour was carried on in the numerous shebeens and unlicensed premises where whiskey and poteen were consumed in large quantities, resulting in many family and social problems. The whole organisation of any sport was geared mainly towards the gentry and was of an English orientation, thus excluding the working class people of the country.

The GAA was founded to give organised sport of an Irish nature to working class Irish people. Archbishop Croke, one of its first patrons wrote at the time, 'if we continue travelling for the next score years in the same direction that we have been going in for some time past, condemning the sports that were practised by our forefathers, effacing our national features as though we were ashamed of them, and putting on, with England's stuffs and broadcloths, her masher habits and other such effeminate follies, as she may recommend, we had better at once, and publicly, abjure our nationality, clap hands for joy at the sight of the Union Jack and place 'England's bloody red' exultantly above the 'green'. The new organisation was so successful that Michael Cusack could say, 'it swept the country like a prairie fire'. Not alone did the GAA play a major role in promoting Irish games for the working people, but was by its very nature a separatist movement as well as filling a social and cultural gap which no other movement could do.

Though the dedication of thousands of amateur players and helpers it has grown to the organisation we know today, with Croke Park as an example of what can be achieved by a sporting body that puts its mind to achieving a stadium of such a standard. During the same period, the IFA squandered millions and built nothing. However there are those who would now criticise the GAA for not allowing other

sports to be played there, such as rugby and soccer. For the Gaelic Athletic Association to keep Croke Park solely for Gaelic games is, they insist, narrow minded and out of date. We are told that in the spirit of reconciliation between north and south or between England and Ireland, games other than Gaelic ones should be permitted. Wouldn't it be nice to see England play Ireland at rugby there? We could all sing 'Ireland's Call' instead of the national anthem, after listening to 'God Save the Queen', and we could watch as the English team forced the President into the muck again.

This campaign of virtual vilification of the GAA, firstly because they built a stadium worthy of their organisational efforts, and secondly because they defend the principles that they were founded on, i.e. to promote Irish national sports, is nothing short of a deliberate attempt to undermine the organisation itself. All and any excuses are being used in a shameless effort to try and somehow embarrass the GAA into giving way to those who do not have the best interests of the GAA at heart. It is but another facet in the attempted reconquest of the whole of the island by those who would have us good subjects of Her Majesty. Franz Fanon, the French political writer, when writing about his experiences in the Algerian war of independence said that while it might be hard to remove the colonial power, it was even harder to remove the colonial mentality from those who had been colonised. Today we see this 'west-Brit' mentality manifesting itself in all sorts of ways, be it the tabloid British newspapers and television soaps or various royal visits to our Lords and Ladies on the occasion of their birthdays. We are subjected to various stories of southern Irishmen serving in the British army and how proud they are. We have even seen their military funerals on our streets and are told of how proud we should be of those killed fighting for 'Queen and country' during Britain's numerous wars. At the same time on television, the relatives of RIC men insult those who fought for Ireland's freedom. It would seem that being Irish and being proud of it is now seen as being backward and uncivilised in these peoples' eyes, and to prove that we are not, we should open the gates not just of Croke Park but the whole country to its reconquest. Part of the founding ethos of the GAA was to help maintain Irish Ireland. The GAA should continue to do so by keeping Croke Park as an example of Irish Ireland at its best, both for its own sake and Ireland's.

Sinn Fein: going for the big lie

By James Burke

The American writer Gore Vidal once said of one of his characters that 'he will lie even when it is inconvenient, the sign of the true artist'. If such is indeed the sign of artistic genius, then Sinn Fein and its leadership could open a few galleries. Over this past few weeks, both before the Ard Fheis and after it, the lies dripped from their lips. Gerry Adams was once again quoted as saying that he was not a member of the Provisional IRA and never had been. Despite the peals of incredulous laughter from all corners of the country, he stoutly defended his remarks. Various individuals in Sinn Fein volunteered to throw themselves on their proverbial pens in an effort to cover his tracks, when some of the articles Adams had written in the past were threatening to expose him for the liar he is.

The attempted abduction of Belfast republican Bobby Tohill by the Provisional IRA was another embarrassment for them, worsened by Hugh Orde's insistence that it was indeed the Provisionals. Sinn Fein's response to this unforeseen event, given that they think they can never be caught at such things, was to say 'that people should not rush to judgement'. Adams, also commenting on the kidnapping, said, 'the PSNI have claimed that this was an abduction by the IRA. There have been such claims about the IRA before. They have proven to be without foundation'. Martin McGuinness, appearing on the BBC's Politics programme on Sunday 29th February, said about the same incident; 'I am opposed to all punishment beatings and have been for twenty years'. On the same programme McGuinness made a Freudian slip on being asked about the continuing need for the Provisional IRA, when he said, 'I do have a *role*... a view on the continuing need for an IRA'. One should remember that when giving evidence to the Saville inquiry, he said he had left the IRA back in the early seventies.

Other examples of shady and illegal activities were brought up by the Dublin government, the sharpest attack coming from Michael McDowell. Sinn Fein protested that it was all a figment of people's imagination at best, and at worst a dirty plot by the Dublin government to undermine their electoral chances in June. Sinn Fein accused the Dublin government of running scared because they saw Sinn

Fein making gains in the South during the local and European elections. There was not one word of truth in all these accusations as far as Sinn Fein was concerned. According to McGuinness, 'Sinn Fein was more interested in the Peace Process than in any elections'. Michael McDowell then added fuel to the already smouldering flames when he accused Sinn Fein of being like the Nazi party in Germany during the 1930s. There was no doubt that behind this onslaught by



Bobby Tohill: 'rescued' - not kidnapped - by SF death squad

the various politicians on Sinn Fein, there lay an agenda to undermine them in the elections. Many had wondered when the cosy honeymoon period between Sinn Fein and the Dublin government would indeed end. For the past number of years, Dublin has turned a blind eye to quite a number of incidents involving the Provisionals, both north and south of the border. Even the cold-blooded murder of Belfast republican Joseph O'Connor in 2000 had been glossed over. Despite the dogs in the street knowing the truth it was simply a matter of Sinn Fein saying they had nothing to do with it.

It seemed to many that Dublin had finally decided the time had come when Sinn Fein was so locked into the Belfast agreement that there was no turning back. As had been predicted years ago, when that point was reached, Dublin would 'stick the boot in' with as much relish as could be mustered. Sinn Fein, despite crying foul, had left themselves open to the accusations which were being levelled at them. For years they had created a facade of arrogance. No lie was too big and no action too despicable. Adams, McGuinness and company, from the moment they decided to go down the road that ended with the Belfast Agreement, had engaged in one lie after another. In fact, the whole so-called 'peace process' was built on nothing but lies. IRA volunteers were lied to day in and day out. There would be no decommissioning and to

suggest otherwise was a figment of someone's imagination. Volunteers should not pass any remarks on any statements made by the Sinn Fein leadership, as they didn't really mean them. They were only for public consumption and to fool the British. The list of lies was virtually endless.

Is it any wonder then that given Adams and McGuinness' track record that they would continue to lie, and if so, is it really important one way or the other? The answer

to that question is both yes and no. No, it does not surprise us that the Sinn Fein leadership would continue to lie, given the fact that they sold out the republican struggle with this very tactic. And yes it is important from many different perspectives. The recent abduction of Bobby Tohill is just one example. The Provisionals had attempted to kidnap Tohill and had threatened they were going to take him across the border and kill him. Acting like a 'pseudo gang' of the British army, this group had identified a 'dissident' republican as a target. Embarrassed by their exposure, Sinn Fein denied

Provisional involvement and set about trying to cover their tracks. This involved threats to the family of their intended victim. As a result of these threats, less than a week after his rescue by the RUC Mr Tohill was reported in the Andersonstown News as saying, 'that his recollection of events was unclear' and that he would not be pressing charges. Sinister incidents like this one have been common place in nationalist areas, with many men being beaten to within an inch of their lives. Given the recent revelations from Freddie Scappaticci, McGuinness' remarks about being opposed to such events sound very hypocritical. Sinn Fein's lies are backed up when needed by threats and force. Whatever about criticising Bertie Ahern, one doesn't live in fear of the local Fianna Fail members kidnapping and killing you. The idea that Sinn Fein could lie its way into power and deal with its opponents in its customary fashion is frightening in the extreme. Given their track record and the fact that they have exchanged republican ideals and principles for political power, one is left with the feeling that perhaps when Michael McDowell called them Nazis, he was right. Perhaps Adams found advice in the writings of that party's leader when he wrote, 'the great mass of the people will more easily fall victim to a big lie than a small one'. There is no prize for guessing who could tell the big one.

'Bungalow blitz' set for rural Ireland

By John Doyle

The Dublin government has set in motion a free-for-all bungalow blitz in rural Ireland with the announcement that planning regulations in rural areas are to be dramatically relaxed.

The Minister for the Environment, Martin Cullen, has instructed planning authorities to implement new guidelines on housing in the countryside. The aim of these new guidelines is to clear the way for An Bord Pleanála to cut the rate of over-turning planning permissions for one-off houses from 76% to around 10%.

The Environment Minister has rejected the 'Minister-for-Bungalow-Blitz' tag of critics of the plan by insisting that rural dwellers must be accommodated locally. Mr Cullen said that 'the new guidelines are based on a presumption that people who have roots in or links to rural areas, and are part of and contribute to the rural community, will get planning permission for houses'. This includes as qualifying people who work full-time or part-time in rural areas.

Under the radical changes persons born or living in rural Ireland will be entitled to obtain planning permission to build one-off houses even in scenic areas that are already under strong pressure from new homes, and areas where there is also pressure from urban-generated housing. The new guidelines do not contain any measures to stop a son or daughter of a landowner building a house and selling it on to a person from an urban area. With the ever-growing increase in the cost of property in Ireland, this will encourage rural landowners to use their land for the purpose of housing development.

The new guidelines will also clear the way for the building of more holiday homes in our countryside. Another cause for concern is the fact that specially designated areas of conservation, heritage and protection are also to be opened up to one-off housing. These guidelines will have a serious impact on the Irish countryside by paving the way for a building free-for-all in scenic and coastal areas. This has infuriated environmentalists who fear that that Ireland's countryside and landscape will be dealt a fatal blow.

Taking a somewhat naive view, the Minister has denied that the new policy will open the floodgates for one-off houses by abandoning any sense of planned approach to rural housing. He has said that it was 'not a panacea to concrete over Ireland', and that

people would not be allowed to 'build on top of mountains'. The Minister has argued that the statutory designation of Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and Natural Heritage areas was not intended to operate as an inflexible constraint on housing development.

Mr Cullen has also argued that the new guidelines will help to realise the regional development goal of the National Spatial Strategy (NSS). However to argue against this notion by the Minister, this is a simple creation of the mind, because building more houses in the countryside without doubt

'These guidelines will have a serious impact on the Irish countryside by paving the way for a building free-for-all in scenic and coastal areas'

means that fewer will be built in the 'gateway' and 'hub' towns identified by the NSS. Instead of the government concentrating on opening up the floodgates for the building of more privately owned houses in rural areas, they should be concentrating more importantly on the immediate housing problems that there are at present in urban areas. This of course is due to the gross lack of government funding required for the building of council houses in urban areas, for the people who cannot afford the luxury of buying their own homes.

Official figures already show that one-off houses in rural areas account for one-third of the total output of housing annually. However, listening to the Environment Minister and other politicians anyone might think that prospective bungalow-builders were facing harsh restrictions. This type of development is naturally unsustainable, not least because of car dependency. Small, narrow country roads colonised by housing are distant from basic public services such as shops and schools, and dangerous because of the lack or non-existence of footpaths and lighting. But the problems that will arise from the introduction of these new planning guidelines are not limited to those of social isolation; they will also lead to the increase of traffic on country roads that are already substandard.

The Green Party has warned that the floodgates are now open to the pouring of concrete. They have argued that the guidelines will lead to increased contamination of drinking water and rivers from septic tanks. Green Party leader Trevor Sargent made a telling point when he argued that the Minister's guidelines will store up problems for future generations and create among other negative things more pollution. Mr Sargent was quoted as saying that 'Ireland is already the most car dependent country in Europe. These guidelines will only make matters worse.' The contamination of ground-water from the rapid growth of septic tanks and other low-quality sewage treatment systems is a major issue, which has also been emphasized by the Environment Protection Agency.

An important factor not mentioned in the new guidelines is the huge vested interest involved in the sale of sites solely for profit and gain. It has been estimated that half-acre sites are now selling for €45,000 on average, and that farmers and other landowners could be making more than an astonishing €800 million a year from such property deals.

Of course this Government knows all about property deals, under the table or otherwise. One cannot help but wonder how many Fianna Fáil TDs, or their close associates, own private land in rural areas?

Not surprisingly the Minister, Mr Cullen, announced the new policy on the eve of the Fianna Fáil ardfeis, which took place in Citywest Hotel in Dublin recently. This of course was timed to reap the maximum political benefit from the ardfeis. The announcement of the new guidelines also gives Fianna Fáil a major boost in the run-up to the local elections, which are being held in June. The Taoiseach commented on the policy by saying that it was the hottest political issue in rural Ireland.

The new policy on rural housing is to facilitate building rather than restrict it. Conditions for obtaining planning permission for one-off housing are mentioned in the guidelines, but 'roots' and 'links' are so ill-defined that it amounts to an open season for the 'bungalow blitz'. One of the rural development associations, the IFA, has said that planning decisions should be based on principles of good planning, including wastewater treatment and road safety. These new guidelines have been introduced without any serious research or analysis done by the government into the reality of the situation of rural housing.

Mahon Tribunal: 'omerta' versus O'Rourke

By Frank Hennessy

Last month, wealthy property developer Tom Gilmartin made sensational allegations against senior members of Fianna Fail. The builder began his testimony to the Mahon Tribunal by giving detailed descriptions of the man whom he claims asked him in a threatening manner for a very large sum of money soon after he had attended a meeting with Bertie Ahern and other cabinet ministers in 1989. This meeting, which has been denied by Ahern and his party faithful, will be a contentious flashpoint in the weeks and months ahead, especially with the local June elections looming.

In his long awaited testimony to the tribunal the wealthy builder outlined his version of events leading up to the meeting on February 1st 1989. He said that Liam Lawlor, the West Dublin TD, brought him to Leinster House to meet Taoiseach Charlie Haughey. In a room on the fourth or fifth floor, Gilmartin met then ministers Gerry Collins, Seamus Brennan, Albert Reynolds, Pdraig Flynn, Ray Burke, the late Brian Lenihan and Bertie Ahern. Mary O'Rourke, sister of Brian Lenihan, has since confirmed that she attended such a meeting in Leinster House after being invited by Pdraig Flynn.

After the meeting, Gilmartin says, an unidentified man approached him in a corridor of Leinster House and 'demanded' £5 million. Gilmartin told the tribunal: 'This man took out a piece of paper with an account number written on it and said, "I want you to deposit the money in that account"'. The developer says he told the man, 'You people make the fucking mafia look like monks, you're joking me'. He said he tried to walk away but the man followed, grabbed his hand and said, 'You could end up in the Liffey for that statement'. The developer gave the tribunal the name of a Bank of Ireland official who might be able to reveal who held the Isle of Man bank account into which the money was to be paid. Conor Maguire, senior counsel for Bertie Ahern, challenged Gilmartin's accounts of meetings with the Taoiseach, but as yet has not denied such meetings took place.

It remains to be seen whether Pdraig Flynn will dispute Gilmartin's account of how the former EU commissioner asked him to lie about a £50,000 political dona-

tion. Gilmartin states in evidence that in September 1998 he was contacted by telephone by Mr. Flynn. He said he was surprised to hear from Mr. Flynn, as the pair of them had not spoken for nine years. He says he remembers the conversation 'as if it were yesterday'. An agitated Flynn told him he had just been faxed a list of questions by a newspaper concerning a £50,000 cheque given to him by Gilmartin in 1989. Gilmartin said he intended the money to go to Fianna Fail but instead of handing over the cheque to the party, Flynn cashed it himself. Flynn allegedly begged Gilmartin

'Following a meeting with ministers, an unidentified man approached Gilmartin in a corridor of Leinster House and demanded a £5 million bribe. 'You people make the fucking mafia look like monks, you're joking me', he said'

to tell the tribunal that he had given back the £50,000 to the developer; in other words Flynn asked Gilmartin to lie to the tribunal. When Gilmartin refused to do this, Flynn asked that Gilmartin say the money was for his (Flynn's) 'election expenses'. As Pdraig Flynn sat purple-faced just feet away in Dublin Castle, Gilmartin went on to reveal how Flynn wanted to fly to England to discuss the matter in person. He went on to say that he felt sorry for the predicament that Flynn found himself in but he wasn't going to lie to the tribunal to protect anybody.

Since Gilmartin decided to give evidence to the tribunal he says he has had to endure a string of menacing phone calls and death threats, including a visit to his Luton home by three men who claimed to be from the IRA. He added that he was told that if he turned up in Dublin, to remember what happened to Veronica Guerin.

Seamus Brennan and Ray MacSharry, who both deny being present at the 1989 meeting, have recently sought legal representation at the tribunal. As this sleazy story unfolds it seems the powers that be have found themselves up against an incorruptible adversary who has refused to be intimidated by the expensive barristers lined up

to demolish his story. When Conor Maguire, senior counsel for Bertie Ahern, suggested that Gilmartin may have tampered with his diary to suit his story, the developer replied, 'maybe your client doctored his diary'. The chairman of the tribunal Mr. Alan Mahon has described the behaviour of the Taoiseach's barrister in the cross-examination of Mr. Gilmartin as 'quite improper'. Judge Mahon continued to criticise Mr. Maguire for introducing evidence from an old court case involving Mr. Gilmartin in Cavan in 1978. Mr. Maguire said the judge in that case had referred to the developer as 'shifty'. Mr. Maguire accused Mr. Gilmartin of adopting a malicious approach in his evidence to the inquiry. Mr. Gilmartin rejected the barristers claim that he was embittered, and said there was nothing more malicious than what 'Mr. Ahern and his merry men had done to him'. Mr. Maguire went on to say that Mr. Ahern could not have been at the meeting on February 1st 1989 because his diary showed that he was elsewhere.

Mr Gilmartin, it seems, has found a very unlikely 'ally' in the form of former Cabinet Minister Mary O'Rourke. Seemingly she is the only former minister to recall the Leinster House meeting. In a statement to the inquiry, she recalled how Pdraig Flynn stepped in to her office and invited her to meet Tom Gilmartin. She remembers walking into the room and states that some of those present at the meeting included Charlie Haughey, Bertie Ahern, Ray Burke and Pdraig Flynn. On receiving a letter from the tribunal asking her about the meeting, she remembered it without any difficulty. She dictated her account of it for her secretary to type up later. Mary O'Rourke's sharp recall now leaves her open to the very embarrassing prospect of being cross-examined by her own party colleagues. Having denied all knowledge or any recollection of the meeting, the 'Teflon Taoiseach' and his loyal lieutenants will be keen to test her memory.

While some may doubt Mr. Gilmartin's claims, he has been proven correct on many things he has revealed to the tribunal so far. Try as they may to rubbish his claims, it now looks likely that the evidence that Mary O'Rourke, one of their own, a Fianna Fail Senator and a former Education Minister, will give to the inquiry may be a lot harder to dispense with.

Blair on the rocks

Brian Moore examines at the latest crisis to hit Tony Blair's increasingly unsteady administration - the United Nations bugging scandal

2004 is shaping up to be a bad year for Tony Blair. As the Labour government prepares to celebrate the beginning of its eighth year in power, the days when 'Teflon Tony' could do no wrong in the eyes of the British people are a distant memory. Instead, Blair's increasingly unstable administration has been rocked by a series of major scandals in recent months, mostly emanating from the still highly contentious invasion of Iraq. With Blair's popularity at an all time low, his many enemies in the Labour Party are sharpening their knives in anticipation of an ignominious downfall. Blair's position as Labour leader has always been based on his ability to appeal to 'Middle England' - to pull in the support from middle class voters the party believed it needed to win and maintain itself in power. Never popular with the party's 'old guard', or even its traditional support-base in working class communities, Blair's refusal to implement an even vaguely left-wing manifesto has long alienated much of Labour's natural constituency. More recently, his increasingly authoritarian policies at home and his unquestioning support of George Bush's far right, Christian fundamentalist administration in the US has lost the party much of its left-liberal middle class support. Now, as each month brings a new scandal to light, Blair's remaining appeal to middle class voters is diminishing rapidly. With opinion polls showing that a majority of Britons now view their leader as 'untrustworthy', Blair has become in the eyes of many Labour Party members less an electoral asset than a liability.

Most of Blair's current problems stem from his politically disastrous decision to participate in the US invasion of Iraq. The non-existent 'weapons of mass destruction' fiasco has haunted him since, with public disquiet on the issue refusing to abate. More recently, the Hutton Report into allegations that the government had 'sexed up' its case for war by making claims about Iraq's chemical weapons capacity which it knew to be untrue, proved to be a somewhat paradoxical disaster for the government's credibility. A former Diplock Court judge well schooled in the etiquette of 'national security', Lord Hutton's overzealous acquittal of the Blair administration on all counts, combined with his disproportionate condemnation of the BBC for publicising the allegations, created a public perception of a whitewash in progress which proved much more damaging to the government's perceived integrity than any adverse judgement could ever have been. Now an unprecedented spying scandal that calls into question the very legality of the war itself has undermined Blair's position even further, threatening to mark the beginning of the end for his reign in British politics.

An unlikely rebel

As is often the case, the spying scandal currently convulsing the British establishment had rumbled on for months without gaining much attention, slowly building up a head of steam before exploding suddenly onto the political stage. The allegation at its centre was first made public in March 2003 when the *Observer* newspaper published an article claiming that the US National Security

Agency (NSA) - the US intelligence service tasked with electronic surveillance and code-breaking - had asked its British counterpart, GCHQ, in the run-up to the war to help it bug the offices and homes of United Nations diplomats from a number of countries who were then members of the Security Council. The US and UK governments were attempting at the time to secure a UN resolution to authorise the invasion of Iraq, and the six countries in question - Angola, Cameroon, Guinea, Pakistan, Mexico, and Chile - were viewed as crucial 'swing' members of the council who could vote either way.

The anonymous source behind the *Observer's* allegation was Katharine Gun, a 29-year-old intelligence officer who worked as a Chinese translator at GCHQ headquarters in Cheltenham. Gun had provided the *Observer* with a copy of a memo then circulating within GCHQ. The memo, marked 'top secret', was from Frank

Koza of the NSA, and asked GCHQ to provide the NSA with information on the voting intentions of Security Council members, 'minus US and GBR of course'. Koza requested 'the whole gamut of information that could give US policymakers an edge in obtaining results favourable to US goals or to head off surprises'. Gun's solicitor, the prominent civil rights campaigner James Welch, has argued that 'what was being sought was an edge at a time when they were trying to secure a second UN resolution

to the war in Iraq. What the US was asking Britain to do was clearly unlawful in international law. It was a clear breach of the Vienna Convention [the 1961 treaty which prohibits spying on diplomats] and it is also very arguably unlawful in domestic law.'

A scandal is born

Gun did not retain her anonymity for long. As soon as an investigation was launched into the source of the leak she confessed, but stood over her action, claiming that she had acted out of necessity to prevent loss of life in an illegal war. 'I didn't feel guilty about what I did,' she has since said, 'so I couldn't plead guilty, even though I would get a more lenient sentence.' She was arrested in March 2003, and eight months later was charged with breaching the Official Secrets Act.

At first the case did not receive much media attention. Then, on the 24th February, the charges against Katharine Gun were dropped amid huge publicity and in circumstances that called into question the very legality of the war itself. From the beginning, Gun had made clear her intention to fight the case on the issue of the war's legality. On the morning of February 24th, her defence team had submitted to the court a summons for the release of the government's own legal advice on the issue; advice the Blair government had resolutely refused to make public. Hours later, the prosecution announced that the charges were to be dropped, claiming that there was 'no realistic prospect' of securing a conviction.

Gun's legal team, however, insist that the charges were dropped precisely because the defence intended to challenge the legality of the war, summoning the attorney general's legal advice to the Blair

'The days when 'Teflon Tony' could do no wrong in the eyes of the British people are a distant memory'

government in their support. Although the attorney general, Lord Goldsmith, had ruled in favour of the war's legality, his argument is widely believed to have been seriously flawed, and Gun's defence team had secured highly damaging evidence undermining his conclusion. In the months since the war it had gradually become apparent that Whitehall mandarins were seriously divided about the legality of the conflict. Crucially, Gun's lawyers had managed to obtain evidence that the entire Foreign Office legal team had concluded that an invasion would in fact be illegal under international law.

This has since been confirmed by Elizabeth Wilmshurst, former deputy head of the legal team at the Foreign Office, an academic law expert with over 30 years experience of international law. Wilmshurst, who resigned shortly after the invasion, has now publicly confirmed that she resigned over the issue of the war's legality, claiming that Lord Goldsmith had railroaded his analysis through in the face of considerable opposition. The Foreign Office legal team, she says, had taken the view that Saddam Hussein's military capacity did not present an immediate threat either to Britain or to any of his neighbours, and so did not justify a pre-emptive strike.

As *Forum Magazine* goes to press, Lord Goldsmith's advice has still not been made public, despite repeated calls by opponents of the war. However, he is understood to have argued that prior UN Security Council resolutions, including some dating back to the first Gulf War, provided a legal basis for military action. Wilmshurst's analysis of his conclusion remains dismissive: 'Some agreed with the legal advice of the attorney general. I did not.' Evidence has also recently emerged indicating that the attorney general's earlier advice on the issue was much less certain than the version presented to the British cabinet immediately prior to the invasion, leading to allegations that Goldsmith 'sexed up' the case for war in a desperate attempt to satisfy Blair. Lord Boyce, chief of the British defence staff at the time, has since revealed that senior military commanders doubted the legality of the invasion, and were only convinced by Goldsmith's final assurance on the issue.

A problem becomes a crisis

If Tony Blair thought that dropping the charges against Gun would put an end to the budding spy scandal, he was sorely mistaken. In fact, the government's position worsened significantly in the following days, as new bugging revelations continued to emerge. Wielding the sharpest knife of all was a disgruntled former minister, Clare Short. On February 25th, Short appeared on BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme. She praised Katharine Gun's bravery in defending her actions, then revealed that she herself, while in cabinet, had felt that there was 'something smelly, fishy' about Lord Goldsmith's advice on the war. The case against Gun was dropped, she said, 'because they do not want the light shone on the attorney general's advice.' Incredibly, Short revealed that the cabinet had themselves only been given a summary of the attorney general's legal opinion, and no discussion on the issue had been allowed.

Short, who is currently pursuing a personal vendetta against Blair, now took advantage of the opportunity offered by the Gun case to drop a bombshell in her enemy's lap. She was 'absolutely

certain', she said, that UN Secretary General Kofi Annan had been bugged by British Intelligence for years, and intensively so in the run up to the Iraq war. She knew this, she said, because she herself had read transcripts of his private conversations while a minister: 'In fact, I have had conversations with Kofi in the run-up to the war, thinking, "Oh dear, there will be a transcript of this and people will see what he and I are saying."'

Short's revelations ignited a media storm. Blair, under pressure, refused to deny the allegations, claiming that he could not comment because of his duty to protect Britain's intelligence network. 'Our intelligence services,' he told the media, 'were performing a vital task for our country and it really is the height of irresponsibility to expose them to this kind of scrutiny and public questioning in a

way that can do this country no good.' Clare Short, he said, furious, 'is totally irresponsible - and entirely consistent'.

Short was unperturbed by Blair's attack. 'What is the PM going to say?' she asked. 'Either he has to say it's true we are bugging Kofi Annan's office, which he doesn't want to say, or he's got to say it's not true and he'd be telling a lie, or he's got to say something pompous about national security.' She also defended going public on the issue: 'There is no British national security involved in revealing that Kofi Annan's private phone calls have been improperly revealed and there is no danger to anyone working in the British security services by making this public. What will happen is it will stop and Kofi Annan will have the privacy and respect he should have.'

Short's revelations, in themselves, are unsurprising. Kofi Annan was seen by the US and UK as one of the key international figures opposing their plans to invade Iraq, and the UN itself as the greatest obstacle on the path to war. In the build-up to the war, when the UK government was working flat out to obtain a resolution supporting military action, Annan was highly active in seeking a peaceful alternative. In the end, the UK was unsuccessful, and the invasion was mounted without Security Council approval. The revelations did spark huge anger among UN staff, however. One anonymous UN source complained that, 'This isn't just illegal. It's sleazy and destructive. He [Kofi Annan] has a right to expect that he can sound leaders out in confidence. Without that expectation, he cannot function effectively.' The point was reiterated by the Secretary General's spokesman Fred Eckhard, who said that, if true, the bugging allegations 'would put into question the integrity and privacy of diplomatic communications, given that those who talk to the secretary general have the right to assume that their conversations are confidential.' Other prominent UN diplomats, including former Secretary General Boutros-Boutros Gali, former chief UN weapons inspector in Iraq, Hans Blix, and former UN humanitarian coordinator in Iraq, Hans von Sponek, have since come forward to voice their suspicions that they too were bugged by British and American intelligence agencies.

As a result of the publicity, Blair's credibility, both at home and on the international stage, has been severely dented. Discredited, disgraced, and increasingly unpopular, Blair's political future appears bleak. Although his short-term survival is not yet in doubt, the question of who will lead the Labour Party into the next general election is suddenly a lot more uncertain than it was at the beginning of the year.



GCHQ whistleblower Katharine Gun

Immigration: restrictions on welfare

By Alan Patterson

Last month Social and Family Affairs Minister Mary Coughlan announced new restrictions to protect the social welfare system. The measures will restrict access to social assistance and child benefit payments for people who have little or no connection with Ireland. Immigrants will not be paid social welfare unless they can prove they have lived here for two years continuously. The new restrictions will come into force on May 1st when ten new states join the EU. They will apply to all EU states except Britain and not just the ten new members. But citizens from EU member states, including the accession countries, will be entitled to social insurance-based payments such as unemployment benefit, disability benefit and retirement pensions from day one if they have made social insurance contributions. This means that if an EU citizen has paid these contributions in his or her own country, they will be entitled to any benefits that derive from those payments in Ireland. However, the dole may be claimed only for the first three months while they hunt for a job. If by then they can't prove that they can support themselves in Ireland, then they are not entitled to residency.

Surely it will shock nobody that Ireland is to impose these welfare restrictions on immigrants to prevent abuse of the system. It will not please those on the far shores of 'political correctness' who oppose all controls no matter how well justified. But it will appeal to sensible people who do not object to immigration or the granting of asylum in genuine cases but have seen widespread welfare abuse. Not one of the member states will open its borders to the new EU citizens without restrictions. All of them fear the consequences of unrestrained immigration, possibly by people who have suffered from discrimination, like those now protesting against welfare cuts in Slovakia. The size of the problem cannot be quantified. But all the countries in the Union, with only two exceptions, felt it wise from the beginning to guard against dangers like 'welfare tourism'. The exceptions were Britain and Ireland. And when Britain joined the other 13 members in imposing restrictions, the inevitability of Ireland having to follow suit was quickly apparent to the government here. The British curbs would have meant that Ireland would stand alone as the only EU member state not imposing some restrictions and

conditions on immigrants. Ireland would have achieved nothing by remaining in isolation.

In the past the government refused to admit that there was a problem here. It is about time that they finally recognised the political reality of a situation that has developed so rapidly as to demand urgent attention. Some immigrants have always viewed Ireland's welfare system as an attractive and easy target for abuse. The safeguard measures are firm but fair, and do not breach EU law. Ireland retains the right to change its

'Surely it will shock nobody that Ireland is to impose these welfare restrictions on immigrants to prevent abuse of the system... it will appeal to sensible people who do not object to immigration or the granting of asylum in genuine cases but have seen widespread welfare abuse'

social welfare regime whenever it likes, once it doesn't discriminate against specific nationalities, just as it doesn't single out skin colour as a justification for refusing entitlements. At a time when it holds the EU presidency, the government would probably prefer if it did not have to take the action now planned. But, in the circumstances, it was left with Hobson's choice.

The government has also given a pledge that EU citizens who want to come here and work would be free to do so. Really, you can't get it any fairer than that. Ireland alone is the only country to have proffered to Brussels clear legislation that guarantees full access to the labour market on May 1st next. Businesses in Ireland last year employed 47,000 non-nationalists on work permits. It is estimated that 70 to 80 per cent of those jobs would be filled in future by citizens from the new EU states. There is no doubt that the new restrictions will be welcomed by all current taxpayers here, including the people currently working on permits from outside the current EU 15. Many of these come from the new countries, particularly, Lithuania, and Latvia and no doubt they will argue that the more safeguards are imposed the better, because it will reduce the likelihood of them getting blamed by the general public for a handful

of social welfare abusers. Most immigrants come to Ireland with every intention of seeking work, which will enable themselves and their family to have a better standard of living. The country should welcome those who come here to work. We need their labour. Our economy will benefit from EU citizens coming here to work.

Ireland has virtually full employment and there are skill shortages, for instance, in the nursing profession. The danger now is that Irish and foreign nurses are being enticed to work abroad. Such is the reality of a free, or partially free, market in labour. Why shouldn't a nurse take a job in the United States, where employers pay so much more? Or in Britain, where they offer a variety of fringe benefits? But what is good for the individual may not be good for the country. We would end in a sorry state if we could not staff our hospitals and universities with the best professionals. And we are already approaching crisis point. This should prompt serious self-examination. It should begin with understanding the extent of the crisis. It has been reported that there is a shortfall of roughly 700 nurses, and the implications for health-care are grave. The reasons why

foreigners want to leave are instructive, and worrying. One is racism, often encountered from patients. Another grievance, shared with the Irish nurses, is lack of career advancement. Opportunities are much greater in Britain, where they can expect an offer of a senior position much sooner than here. The time has passed when the authorities could afford to ignore all these factors. Health service administrators must grasp a simple fact. Irish hospitals will not get the staff that is needed unless they are paid properly and are given job satisfaction.

Alan Patterson is a republican prisoner in Portlaoise Gaol

Disagree with something
you've read?

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

FORUM MAGAZINE

After Madrid

Forum Magazine has always taken a strong line against American imperialism. We make no apologies for that. It is why we opposed the war in Iraq and continue to condemn the American occupation of that country. The reason we oppose American foreign policy is not because we are anti-American (we are not) but because we believe that American foreign policy primarily serves the narrow self-interests of a small section of Western society - the wealthy and powerful.

While American presidents may preach democratic values and notions of freedom, these are hollow words used for expedient

reasons. Who would have supported the war in Iraq if Bush had told the truth and said the war was mainly about oil and Western greed? Not many. But when the war is sold as an attempt to liberate a long-suffering people and to prevent the proliferation of WMD, many more supported it, albeit grudgingly. But if America really was interested in spreading democratic values and human rights around the world, then how is it that the US has one of the worst records in this regard? From Vietnam to Latin America to the Middle East, the US has chalked up millions of victims over the past half century. And if the American government really was concerned about democratic values then why does it continue to

support despotic and unelected regimes around the world? Why does it continue to encourage coups against democratically elected governments, in places such as Venezuela and Haiti?

As well as the 'war on terror' that is being fought abroad, there is the war on dissent being fought at home. Increased repressive legislation in the UK, US and elsewhere makes it more difficult for those opposed to imperialism to vent their opposition. Allied to this is the cynical claim by the conservative media and others that opposition to American imperialism shows support for the likes of Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein. Not everything can be reduced to the simplistic you're-either-with-us-or-against-us scenario that George W Bush and his allies so love. Many of those opposed to the war in Iraq opposed Saddam Hussein's regime a lot earlier than the American or British governments did. After all, it is not so long ago that Donald Rumsfeld and British government ministers were paying courtesy visits to Saddam Hussein in Baghdad. As for al-Qaeda, could that organisation have developed so quickly and so strongly without the support of the US in Afghanistan in the 1980s?

Forum Magazine opposes the actions of al-Qaeda as much as it

opposes the actions of the US and British governments. In the aftermath of Madrid, we repeat our condemnation of any organisation that judges success by the number of innocent people it kills and injures. There is no justification for the attacks in places such as New York, Bali, Najaf, Casablanca, Karachi and Madrid.

Not only is al-Qaeda morally wrong but it also sets back every genuine national liberation struggle in the world. Any group which takes up arms, no matter how legitimately, is now tarnished with the same brush as those who carried out the massacres in Spain. While ETA may have had nothing to do with the Madrid bombings,

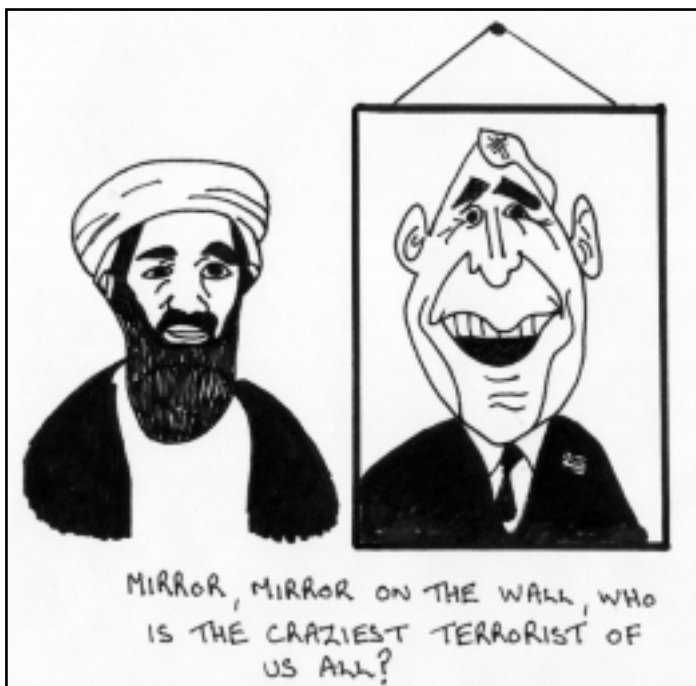
nobody seriously believes that those attacks have not made its campaign for a separate Basque country more difficult.

Some might suggest that there is a world of difference between al-Qaeda and the US government. The US government, for instance, does not plant bombs on trains, nor does it fly planes into buildings. That may be true but that does not mean it does not target civilians. In fact, if one were to take the past ten years, the US government makes al-Qaeda look like amateurs in the killing stakes. Al-Qaeda's biggest atrocity so far has been the September 11th attacks which killed just under 3,000 people. Yet the US-led sanctions against Iraq after the first Gulf War killed an estimated 1 million

Iraqis, half of them under the age of five. These statistics don't come from some obscure al-Qaeda propaganda source, they are official United Nations figures. The deaths in Iraq from sanctions may not have been covered on CNN or Sky News and there may not have been minutes' silences across the world in memory of the victims, but they represent real people, all the same. Last year's war in Iraq killed an estimated 10,000 Iraqi civilians. Once again these deaths went largely unmourned in the Western world.

All this adds up to an uneasy question: Is there a large element of racism in our apparent lack of concern with the deaths of Iraqis and other people from poorer countries, especially when they are dying at the hands of Westerners?

The terrorists in their plush offices in Washington and London and the terrorists in their caves in Pakistan and Afghanistan are actually two sides of the same coin. Both have a complete disregard for the will of their people. Both are willing to target innocent people to achieve their goals. Both seek less tolerant, inward-looking societies. Both rely on the other's crimes as justification for their own. Both need to be defeated.



Letters and articles can be sent to Forum Magazine at:

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Déjà vu in Haiti

By James Burke

The recent removal of the democratically elected president of Haiti, Jean Bertrand Aristide, was best described by the former US Attorney General Ramsey Clarke when he said it represented 'the clearest demonstration of US regime change, and by armed aggression, that you'll find'. Aristide, who had been forced to flee Haiti for the Central Africa Republic, has accused the United States of kidnapping him. US Secretary of State Colin Powell insisted that 'he had left of his own free will' and added 'we did not force him on the aeroplane. He went onto the aeroplane willingly and that's the truth.' However, as Mr Powell must know, the first casualty in any conflict is usually the truth and this one is no exception.

Jean Bertrand Aristide had been elected and took office in February 2001. The government of the United States, who looked

on him as being too left wing, did not welcome his victory. A former catholic priest who advocated 'liberation theology' and who preached anti-capitalist sermons, Aristide was viewed as a threat to the right wing minority opposition, which is led by a tiny but wealthy elite. In the years since his election, the United States played a leading role in forcing hundreds of millions of dollars in international aid to be cut off. As a result, the economy of Haiti further deteriorated and Aristide was unable to begin the type of infrastructure projects required to kick-start the failing economy. As well as interfering with international aid to the country, the United States supported the opposition and encouraged them in their refusal to participate in elections, with the view of labelling the government as being undemocratic. Aristide, like President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, was accused by the US of corruption and of arming the poor in the slums, despite the fact that both men were freely elected and had the support of their nation's poor majorities.

Of course this is not the first interference by the US in the affairs of Haiti. Having established democratic institutions under French rule, the fledgling state was occupied by US marines in 1915 and they remained there until 1934. In 1917 the nation's parliament was dissolved because they refused to grant approval to a US sponsored constitution that would have allowed foreigners to own land in Haiti. The United States subsequently orchestrated an election

in which the turn out was 5%, and the constitution was approved by '99.98 per cent of the voters'. In 1956 Dr Francois Duvalier (Papa Doc) seized power in a military coup and later pronounced himself president for life. His US backed dictatorship was based around a personal militia known as the 'Tonton Macoutes' who butchered any opposition that appeared. Papa Doc died in 1971 and was followed by his son Jean Claude (Baby Doc) who continued the family tradition of mass murder. Duvalier was finally deposed by Lt-General Henri Namphy in 1986. In 1990 Jean Bertrand



Aristide was elected for the first time but was overthrown in a military coup a year later by Brig-Gen. Raoul Cedras, and the country's first experience of democratic rule was brutally ended. Ramsey Clarke, who led a commission of inquiry into the coup, described Haiti as 'a prison in which its people are terrorised'. Because of sanctions imposed on Haiti by the Organisation of American States, President Clinton was forced to facilitate Aristide's return, under an agreement brokered by former president Jimmy Carter. Aristide would be allowed to return once he agreed to rule on a more 'moderate' political platform and 20,000 US marines were again sent into the country to reinforce who the real power in the region is.

The tiny internal opposition to Aristide came to a head last month, when the green light was given by Washington to a band of armed thugs led by a suspected drug trafficker and former death squad leaders, to over run the country. As a result of their previous actions and murders, Aristide had dissolved the Haitian army back in 1995. Guy Phillippe, who while in the former army had received training from US Special Forces in Ecuador, led this new band of killers. He had once been the police chief in Cap-Haitien, where he was involved in drug trafficking and plotting a coup. His second in command is Loius Chamblain, who once was in command of the FRAPH, a paramilitary group that killed thousands during the 1991-1994 military regime.

Other leaders of the group are known to have had associations with the CIA. While these 'rebels' gained control of the country, the US government stood back and watched as events unfolded. Larry Birns, director of the Washington based Council on Hemispheric Affairs commenting on the situation said, 'US policy right now is in the hands of the ideologues. You cannot overestimate the relevance of these people in shaping US policy. In a sense the Helms' school of Haitian strategy is at work here.'

As events unfolded, the Prime Minister of Jamaica, P J Patterson, who is chairman of the 15 nation Caribbean Community, appealed on behalf of CARICOM to the United Nations for immediate intervention in Haiti. The Security Council, however, failed to act until after Aristide had left and the US announced it would be sending in the marines. Patterson commented on the UN by saying, 'we cannot fail to observe that

what was impossible on Thursday could be accomplished in an emergency meeting on Sunday. We are disappointed in the extreme at their failure to act'. On the Sunday morning US troops arrived at Aristide's residence and told him he had to choose between immediate exile and probable execution by the rebels. It was made plain to him that he would not get any protection from the Americans. Despite all this, the Americans are trying to play down their role in the whole affair. Many in the region see it as nothing short of a thinly veiled coup to remove a democratically elected leader, similar to the attempt to overthrow Hugo Chavez. Chavez has declared Aristide's removal as a 'tragedy' and added 'these are our brothers who have also been trampled by the Haitian oligarchy and their foreign allies'. Viewing the situation in Haiti as a further warning to the people of Venezuela, Chavez warned his enemies that he was not Aristide and that Venezuela was not Haiti. He told the country, 'in Venezuela we have enough mountains, enough people and enough balls to defend the country.'

As a direct result of American policy, Haiti is once again in the hands of foreign troops and a former death squad leader and democracy has flown with President Aristide. No doubt the US will reward the small elite along with the gang of killers and economic aid will be restored, but not to those who should have received it. But unfortunately for them, they have seen it all before.

Same old British Army

By Liam Grogan

For a while it seemed that the British army had actually learned some valuable lessons from the past thirty years of conflict in the north of Ireland: in the aftermath of their victory in Iraq, Sandhurst-educated British army officers lined up to tell the world how they were winning the hearts and minds of those they now occupied. Whereas the Americans, with their use of 'shock-and-awe' to cower an entire population, seemed eager to prove the old adage that soldiers make bad policemen, British soldiers patrolled Basra in soft hats and shirt-sleeves, handing out sweets and kindness at every corner. The tactics appeared to work. Smiling Iraqi faces greeted the British troops as they entered Basra and other southern Iraqi towns.

What the British failed to understand was that the Shi'ites were not so much welcoming the British army as celebrating the end of Saddam. For decades his Sunni-dominated regime had abused and oppressed the Shi'ites of southern Iraq. As recently as 1991, Saddam's forces killed an estimated 50,000 people in the aftermath of the first Gulf War and the subsequent Shiite uprising. It was hardly surprising therefore that those who deposed Saddam would be welcomed. Such subtle distinctions were, however, lost on the British as they smugly chided their American colleagues for their apparently more heavy-handed approach further north.

Of course the main reason for the different approaches of the US and UK armies was that they were operating in very different theatres. The US is occupying the part of Iraq where Saddam had most of his support; those living in the Sunni triangle are not celebrating his downfall. Many Sunnis are willing and able to fight those they see as foreign invaders. Little wonder the Americans patrol in tanks and armoured personnel carriers.

But while the Shi'ites are naturally joyful that Saddam is gone and are undoubtedly grateful that the Americans and British removed him from power, the mood toward the occupation forces is changing in the south of Iraq. There have been many protests by Shi'ites, who one year on from their 'liberation' are, not unreasonably, demanding fair elections and a say in how their country is run. Like the Catholics who welcomed the British soldiers in Belfast in 1969, it appears to be dawning on the

Shi'ites that the foreign army may not be there for purely altruistic reasons.

And if one thought it unlikely that a leopard could change its spots one hasn't had to wait long for the British Army to revert to old tactics. Over the past year, and in situations remarkably similar to what occurred in the Six Counties, a number of Iraqi civilians have died in contentious circumstances at the hands of British troops. *The Guardian* recently revealed that the families of 18 dead Iraqi civilians are threatening the British Ministry of Defence with legal



Iraqi Shi'ites protest against the US occupation

action. In an attempt to hush up the cases, the MoD offered compensation of around €1,000 to some of the families while insisting that this did not amount to an admission of liability. Phil Shiner, whose firm Public Interest Lawyers acts for the families, dismissed the sum as derisory and went on to claim that, 'The 18 Iraqis are the tip of the iceberg...The [British] government must act immediately to set up an independent inquiry to establish the precise cause of these deaths.' His call has so far fallen on deaf ears.

One family, whose story appears typical, spoke to *The Guardian* about what had happened. Their relative, Baha Mousa, 26, was working the night shift in a Basra hotel when it was raided by British soldiers. Mousa and six colleagues were arrested and taken to a nearby British army base. Other workers were assured that the arrests were routine and that the men would soon be released. Four days later Baha Mousa was dead. When his father, a colonel in the police force - and therefore an ally-of-sorts with the British - arrived at the mortuary he discovered that his son's body was covered in blood and bruises. Two of the other hotel workers reported that they were repeatedly beaten for two days by British soldiers. In accounts eerily reminiscent to the Six Counties in the 1970s, they related how

they were mistreated from the moment they arrived at the Army base: 'From the first second they beat us. There were no questions, no interrogations'. For long periods of time, the men were ordered to lean with their backs against the wall and their arms straight in front of them. 'They were kicking us in the abdomen...they were laughing...We were in so much pain'. The men were subsequently released without charge.

Because of Baha Mousa's father's links to the police force, the British army promised a full inquiry into the death. Brigadier William Moore, the British commander, wrote to Colonel Mousa expressing 'regret', and offering 'sincere condolences'. That was in September of last year. Since then, not one British soldier has been arrested or charged in connection with Baha Mousa's death or the beating of his colleagues. It is a similar story with the other suspicious deaths of Iraqi civilians.

It may have taken the British officer class thirty years of war in Ireland to learn that selective, rather than collective, repression is the key to success but it seems it is an altogether more difficult task to teach this to eighteen year old squaddies plucked from the dregs of British society and trained to kill for Queen and country.

And as is usual with deaths such as those occurring in Iraq, there will be no books of condolences, no minutes' silence; there will not be a rush of politicians pledging to bring justice to the families of the dead. Just like in Ireland, there will be years of protesting and legal action by a few families with little resources other than their own determination. Like in Ireland, the truth will out, but by then a different government will be in power. The families of the victims will be accused of dredging up ancient history and will be told to stop causing trouble. The soldiers responsible will probably have retired, some undoubtedly having reached high rank. None will be punished. The British army will be occupying someone else's country. A Sandhurst-educated voice will tell us that the British Army is applying, in this new country, valuable lessons learned in Iraq about winning hearts and minds. Inevitably, some months later, stories of suspicious deaths will appear; families will first grieve and then demand justice. And so it continues.

Liam Grogan is a republican prisoner in Portlaoise Gaol

The New Republican Forum

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

The New Republican Forum:

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

Our aims are:

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

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