Fourthwrite

For a democratic socialist Irish republic

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Editorial

Not even a province

In spite of incessant efforts by both the British and Irish governments, it is growing increasingly unlikely that the DUP will arrive at an accommodation with Sinn Fein that will allow for an executive to be formed in Stormont. This should hardly surprise anyone. Devolved government has been tried nine times in Northern Ireland over the past thirty years and has collapsed every time. In spite of the obvious efforts being made by London and Dublin to break the impasse, there must be a realisation in both capitals that bringing lasting viable devolution to the Six-Counties is almost too difficult for it to be practical. Surely they must be asking themselves if there is nothing else that can be tried.

Accepting the old adage that the British government always exhausts every possible option before accepting the correct one, there now appears the distinct likelihood that London will opt for the current review of local government as a possible solution to their Irish dilemma. Recommendations are circulating at present that the 26 local authorities should be reduced to seven or eight and the newly enlarged bodies would then acquire greater powers and responsibilities. This arrangement might suit the DUP who have talked of an administrative form of devolution that would involve a purely technical (rather than political) approach to issues and thus lessen the scope for disagreement. On the surface this has some attractions but will ultimately falter because it fails to address the important questions of one: allowing people access to some amount of influence and second: how to cope with the DUP's utterly intransigent attitude to what they call Sinn Fein/IRA in public or the Taigs in private.

There may be some merit in Dublin and London persisting with this endless round of talks and ever extending deadlines for seeing progress. It may well satisfy the obligation of exploring every option but eventually they must recognise that Northern ireland is a failed political entity - stop propping it up - and replace it with a working alternative.

Intolerable behaviour

In August of this year Fourthwrite organised a meeting in An Culturlann on Belfast's Falls Road and invited, among others, former leading loyalist politician David Adams to address the subject of Irish republicanism. He was asked specifically to give an outline of how unionists and loyalists might view the philosophy and to offer his comments on why republicanism has failed to win support among his community. Many among the large attendance disagreed fundamentally with many of his views - unapologetically unionist - but all agreed on one thing and that was that it took a lot of gumption for such a well know advocate of loyalism to participate in a public meeting in the staunchly republican area of West Belfast.

We have learned recently that David Adams has come under attack from some of those he once considered his friends and colleagues. Although not related directly to his appearance at the Fourthwrite event, it seems that

this willingness to discuss and debate politics with all comers has drawn the anger of neanderthal elements within loyalism. Such blind refusal to hear criticism is not confined to loyalism of course - one of our own contributors has in the past, also felt the wrath of those on the republican side who brook no deviation from the prescribed line. Such crude reaction to dissent (or even discussion) is symptomatic of a deeper problem - the very unhealthy society that is Northern Ireland. Only when we address the underlying difficulties are we likely to arrive at the stage where we shall be able to air our differences with maturity.

In the meantime, we hope to read of and listen to David Adam's opinions - however much we may disagree with his views - well into the future. There are few enough men of integrity in northern life.

Assessment

Care for the elderly is still necessary

In our youth the golden years seemed so far away we laughed at suggestions for pensions. Who cared about a pension? Why would we save for a future that we didn't know or why plan for something that might not happen to us – old age was for someone else? Now that we are older, we think of little else.

There has been much comment on the recent Pension Commission Report. Former CBI chief, Adair Turner chaired the Commission, an independent body appointed by the British Government and the message is clear; we are living too long and the declining birth rate which followed the post war baby boom means we will have fewer young people to support an aging population in the future. The old will no longer be able to rely on the earning power of the young and millions must work longer and save harder. Seemingly, we will be expected to work in the mines or the roads, in our cosy offices, or where ever we earn our bread and butter until the age of 127 and still die on the edge of serious poverty. More worrying how will we afford health care because it is then we are more likely to require it. Who will look after us when we are 65?

According to newspaper reports there are those who have managed to escape the pension crisis. Cabinet ministers have amassed retirement packages worth more than £20m, funded by the taxpayer and our MP's pension scheme was recently found to be one of the most generous in Europe. According to reports Tony Blair has one of the most generous of pension schemes guaranteeing him an income of half his prime ministerial salary plus an MP's pension when he retires.

Details of the report highlight a particular problem with public sector pensions. It shows that while public sector workers account for 18% of employment in the economy, they enjoy 36% of accrued pension rights. The report warns that the cost of public sector pensions will climb further at the expense of middle-income earners working in the private sector, whose pension prospects are in decline. Further concerns are being voiced that women will not do well in the pension stakes and the Government has conceded that women's pensions are a national scandal since many women miss out on full state pensions because they often stop working outside the home in order to bring up children or become carers for aging parents.

The recent report gives rise to an array of feelings; uncertainty, anger, fear for the future although many of us place our worries on the back burner. Not every one has steady employment with pension rights.Tony Blair and Michael Howard both promised dignity and security in old age in their recent party conference speeches but Blair went on to promise to make welfare reform a priority if re-elected. In other words he is promising the demolition of the welfare state. This all comes at a time when the health services are in crisis and for people in the North of Ireland, additional household bills, water charges and an increase in rates are all in the pipe-line.

Not only have we been warned that our savings are insufficient but key to the issue they now tell us that we owe too much. Few people have private pension provision while the value of the state pension is projected to fall over the coming years.

All the while, reports suggest that the population's debts are soaring. Former students and future students will struggle to pay of student loans. For those who fall ill will have the additional burden of health care costs or die waiting for treatment. Those who have invested in bricks and mortar need also to beware. Equity-release plans are afoot, which will enable retired home-owners to boost their incomes by borrowing money against the value of their property. This is a dangerous road to travel but one never-the-less people will be forced to take. Families stand to loose their inheritance if home-owners are forced to unlock their wealth in their properties and be saddled with a lifetime of debt.

Thaterite policies of the 80's are being pursued with vigour. Few can argue that the concept of the social wage is being attacked and a government calling itself Labour is steamrolling over many of the gains made by the working class through years of struggle. The demolition of the welfare state, privatisation of public services, lack of pension provision for our aging population does not auger well for the future. Privatisation policies ensure perks and enhanced salaries for 'fat-cat' managers while increasing bills, price hikes and cuts in public spending contribute to lowered living standards for the ordinary worker. When the safety net of the welfare state is removed workers are left vulnerable. Vulnerable people with bills to pay, high mortgages and in many cases paying for services that should be theirs of a right, are in no position to take on the powers that be. They live in fear of loosing their their jobs and the small social welfare safety net that is left. There is a clear and obvious need to resist the return to the savagery of 19th Century economics.

Stormont...Land of the living dead

The Good Friday agreement is gone and no replacement has been found. Is the new dispensation invulnerable to attack?

byJohn McAnulty

Yet again British hopes of stability in the North of Ireland are being disappointed. The final settlement, delayed for so long, has continued to recede since the September talks at Leeds Castle. The British continued to insist loudly that only a few procedural matters stand in the way of a settlement. All the parties are at one. The IRA stand ready to disband. London and Dublin also stand ready to pass immediate changes to the original Good Friday agreement to meet DUP objections. The Holy Grail, which would see Ian Paisley as leader of the Northern statelet, is just out of reach, but all the manoeuvring brings it no closer.

The most likely outcome is that negotiations will fail yet again but that is not the most important element of the talks. The most important element of the talks is the fact that they are no longer in the territory claimed by the Good Friday agreement, with a supposed equality of sectarian rights, but in a post Good Friday scenario where the unionists are to be guaranteed a sectarian edge in order to stabilise the Northern statelet around its raison d'etre of Orange supremacy. This parliamentary supremacy will reflect itself in society. The decision by the British not to abolish the RUC reserve means that nationalist dreams of a colonial police force that will someday be 50:50 Catholic: Protestant as per the Patton proposals is no longer on the agenda. After all, there would be little point to sectarianism if it gave equal privileges!

It is quite clear that the outcome of the talks rests entirely with the DUP. They have demanded that the agreement be changed so that they never have to formally support the idea of Catholics in government. They have demanded that they have a final veto over ministerial decisions so that the Paisleyite first minister can ensure that the Lion's share of patronage goes in the right direction. The final seal is the demand that the destruction of the majority of remaining Provo arms be videoed and broadcast to engrave in letters of fire on the republicans and their supporters just how hollow the claims of victory by the Adams leadership are and exactly who won and who lost in the fight against British rule – a lesson rubbed home by loyalist paramilitaries. These government sponsored death squads recently announced that it would be ten years before they could seriously consider decommissioning their weapons! The British Secretary of state responds by agreeing to a meeting with the armed thugs while their campaign of sectarian and racist violence continues.

The DUP have the choice either of entering government with Sinn Fein after having imposed terms so humiliating that even their most bigoted supporters are unable to object or they can alternatively refuse to close a deal in which case the agreement they despise will collapse and there will be a further long period of direct rule in which they and Sinn Fein will remain major

parties, facing each other across the tables of councils and numerous quangoes where unionism will hold the majority.

Those who think the Stormont outcome will succeed are basing their hope on the widespread corruption in both parties. The local councils run successfully because those who are in public sectarian antagonists are able to do deals in private on a very amicable basis. The common activity is milking a system of payments, expenses and grants for the last drop of money – an activity so successful that one MLA is able to support two or three full-time workers on the expense account. (The DUP's Iris Robinson recently topped the local list of Westminster MPs with the largest claim sheet). The problem here is that the DUP cannot extend the ad-hoc relations of corruption to government. Their programme is for sectarian dominance and they are unable to make even the slightest public gesture that would suggest they support a government including Catholics. How stable can a government be when the majority party is constantly proclaiming its opposition to the government it leads? The situation is made worse when we remember that the Official Unionist party will be on the sidelines, always ready to criticise the DUP for any backsliding and proclaiming itself the party that truly defends sectarian privilege. A similar situation will pertain to nationalist politics, with Sinn Fein, to an even greater extent than today, proclaiming itself the Catholic party and the SDLP locked in rivalry to show that it is even better placed to assert the nationalist interest.

The other option, of sectarian rivalry in a direct rule situation, has the advantage that it is not as subject to the constant governmental crises that a Stormont regime has been, and would be, subject to and is a much more congenial environment for the corrupt wheeler-dealing that Sinn Fein and the DUP do so well. It does however have the major disadvantage that the shy retiring British government, who would really like to be hiding behind the scenery, and in fact designed the whole process so that they could do so, will in fact remain very publicly as the Northern administration. There is really only one name for that situation. The North of Ireland will remain very visibly a colony under British rule, with the British openly responsible for the crises and injustices that such rule is subject to. In the way of such colonies there will in fact always be an outflow of resources and never enough to go around. The British will have to referee decisions on rights and resources and, as they have done throughout the history of partition, they will be forced to bend the stick, in the majority of cases, towards their unionist base. It will not be long before a certain disenchantment sets in – something that has in fact already led to a substantial layer of the old republican base drifting away from Sinn Fein.

A grim future faces workers in the North. The 'carnival of reaction' announced by Connolly when partition was first proposed has in fact been magnified by the republican defeat. The supposed reforms of the Good Friday agreement have faded, as all mirages tend to do. The loyalist death squads remain and supplement their attempts to control where Catholics may live and work with a growing offensive against the small Chinese and Black communities. They remain immune from prosecution by the British state, are publicly supported by unionist political representatives and have said that they intend to continue for another 10 years. The Statistics and Research Agency

data recently published show that working-class Catholics remain twice as likely to be unemployed as Protestant workers. On top of all this a series of initiatives have been announced by the new Labour government that extend to the North the Thatcherite revolution that the Iron Lady herself hesitated to export when the troubles continued. Rates are to rise, massive water charges are to be imposed as a prelude to privatisation, regional pay is to be imposed and there are to be mass redundancies in the public sector both in the North and in Britain as a whole. Surely this grim future will provoke a response from the workers?

But the British have one big advantage. The Good Friday process was not about a settlement in and of itself. The context was the crushing of the republican opposition – a process so effective that many Sinn Fein supporters can discuss the disbandment of the IRA and the task of persuading the Paisleyites to become the government of the sectarian state without even remembering that they spent their lives supporting a programme opposing the partition of Ireland and fighting for a republic. The structures in the North can be ramshackle, corrupt, unstable and contemptible, but they will not fall without a political opposition, and that opposition will clearly not come from Sinn Fein. Nor will it come from any other existing political formation of any size. Classical republicans have been unable to build a political resistance and focus mainly on failed attempts to revive an armed campaign. The trade unions have a long history of collaboration and partnership with the state. Most of the small socialist groups either openly support the existence of the northern state or claim to oppose it in theory while supporting it in practice. A greater difficulty is the broad unthinking acceptance of the status quo that extends far beyond the political currents. Essentially it is the mass support for the Good Friday Agreement which continues even when the agreement itself has disappeared under the waves.

The most common expression of the low level of political consciousness is nostalgia for the Stormont assembly. For example, Dr Kieran Deeny was elected in last year's elections on a programme of opposition to hospital closure. He has now formed a political party that cuts across sectarian politics and attempts to defend public service more generally. Almost the first activity of the new party was to demonstrate at the gates of Stormont demanding the return of the assembly! In a similar manner it is almost impossible to speak at any trade union meeting without some small-time bureaucrat expressing nostalgia for Stormont and proclaiming that public services and workers rights would all be safe with a local assembly. A major plank of trade union strategy around the proposals to privatise the water services is to win the endorsement of MLAs, ignoring the fact that the process of water privatisation began in Stormont with the support of all the major parties and that in its brief life the assembly endorsed a whole series of public-private partnerships, with Sinn Fein leading the way in Health and Education.

To think that Stormont might act in the interests of workers in the North of Ireland one would have to blank out completely the horrific history of the original Stormont. It would be necessary to develop amnesia about the short history of the current assembly (now resting) and to ignore the fact that the members were elected through a sectarian headcount and that the assembly

itself is built to operate through a system of sectarian headcounts. The majority of MLAs are elected on platforms that are explicitly sectarian and right-wing. Having ignored all these facts one would finally have to ignore the fact that the assembly has no power to raise taxes and that its budget is set by the British treasury – it has as much independence as the current Iraqi government! It would in fact be easier to push cuts through a local assembly than in the current situation where New Labour has to show its hand directly.

Why then is the Stormont illusion so widespread? One reason is that, for the trade union bureaucracy, it provides an alternative to struggle. When the local politicians don't come through they simply shrug their shoulders in resigned disappointment and surrender. For more genuine militants the problem of imagining a democratic solution in Ireland, let alone a mass workers movement or a workers republic, is so fantastical that belief in the power of a Stormont assembly seems almost rational. Is there any hope then? Are workers in the North condemned to live with the undead – failed and corrupt political forces that yet refuse to die? For Marxists the idea that internal opposition from within the six-county colony would ever be sufficient in itself was always highly unlikely. If this was the case at the height of the republican insurrection it is hardly surprising that it is even less likely now. To find a strategy for victory it is simply necessary to take a step back and view the island of Ireland as a whole.

Immediately we find that what prevents the unionists from collapsing is not their own internal strength. Paisley's victory blinds everyone to the fact that he is unable to unite unionism and that the current crisis results from the inability of his movement to propose a rational solution that would allow him to take the leadership in government. What keeps the situation from collapsing is the unswerving support of the British for their unionist base and the increasingly desperate attempts by the Dublin government to bury the question of an Irish democracy in a very deep hole.

Right away we can say that Blair has his own problems. All his other sanctimonious right-wing solutions are becoming unravelled and he is increasingly seen as an incompetent liar. While we are well short of a convincing opposition in Britain, still there is growing disillusion with Blair and his schemes. The Dublin government are in the position of fighting tooth and nail for a Paisleyite government in the North and of converting the agreement into a guarantee to Paisley that he will have sectarian supremacy at every level. They are able to do this because the Provisional republican leadership are in lock-step with them in the 'nationalist family' that they always coveted. Fianna Fail openly wave in their faces the carrot of junior partnership in a coalition government while at the same time voicing the threat that some Sinn Fein leaders may well be on the IRA army council (and may have to be denounced if they don't do as they are told).

One reason for Dublin's desperation is that they are launching a mass attack on southern workers, again focusing on public services and on mass privatisation. If the Northern settlement begins to fail then Sinn Fein will begin to lose credibility and the unionist programme of modern Irish capitalism will become increasingly highlighted.

In fact the most stable illusion, and the strongest, around which the current attempt to stabilise partition revolves, is the illusion that Dublin have a real say in the North. This illusion arose from the Hillsborough agreement,

when Dublin formally recognised the northern state in return for the ability to offer advice and seek patronage for their supporters. It was expressed most recently by Denis Bradley, a right-wing nationalist and deputy leader of the police authority, who argues that the failure of the DUP to seriously advance any solution that would share power means that the Brtish should move on to dual power with Dublin in the North.

In fact any examination of the history from the Hillsborough agreement shows how limited Dublin's role is – all the major element of the agreement were abandoned almost immediately by London in the face of unionist protest and Dublin were unable to force them to hold the line. Describing the gombeen leaders of the semi-colonial administration in the South as partners with an imperialist power is simply laughable.

In many ways the current impasse in the North is the triumph of belief in the power of Irish capitalism. Building democracy and socialism in Ireland, building an alternative to the sectarian settlement, rest to a large extent in tearing down illusions in that power.

END

Disbanding the Provos

By Tommy McKearney

Like Antarctic explorer Lawrence Oates who attempted to assist his comrades by departing forever into the cold, P. O'Neill may soon have to leave the comfort of old friends and expire. For the greater good of the Movement it is now deemed vital that Sinn Fein must no longer find itself compromised by its long-time alter ego, the Provisional IRA. The only sure means of guaranteeing this is to stand-down the armed organisation, and sooner or later the group's Army Council will take this decision.

There is little doubt that the majority of IRA personnel will adhere to orders issued by their command structure. Dissent within the Provos is minimal and what exists is not prepared to take issue with the groundswell in favour of the parliamentary option. Most volunteers are happy to accept their leadership's view that participation in conventional politics is advantageous.

Significantly, the IRA of today is changed from the war machine that did battle in the past. The organisation has adjusted to peace with a subsequent blunting of its edge. Untested and inexperienced men have been recruited while some veterans have drifted into retirement. A sizeable number has found employment and grown accustomed to a steady income, lessening their desire to resume a punishing conflict. More debilitating still are the funding operations – revenue scams for the most part – that have undermined the organisation's status among many young nationalists in the North. In short, the IRA is ready to listen to a decent redundancy package but this must recognise some pertinent facts.

Oglaigh na hEireann is not a career and while it is too much to talk of a calling, it is possible to speak of a culture that for many men has existed all their adult lives. Shared outlook and experiences, not to mention shared opprobrium, has created bonds and needs that will take addressing. It is one thing to issue an order and thereafter declare the IRA disbanded. What is not so easily done is to dissolve the layers of contacts, friendships and family obligations that have grown up over the years and that 'community of comrades' will survive for a long time to come.

The IRA's Army Council understands, therefore, that demobilisation will have to be handled sensitively and skillfully. Crucial to this process will be the creation of an alternative way of life for 'The Boys'. Volunteers may be told that politics, after all, is only war by other means and that the new front line demands a different approach. Old soldiers must become political soldiers applying their expertise to energising the party. Good men and true will be needed to gather political intelligence (research to the rest of the world), organise transport and accommodation for peripatetic political activists and to help steward the rallies and fund-raising events necessary to maintain the party machine. For most, this retained sense of belonging will suffice and the occasional gathering of the faithful at funerals or commemorations will meet the declining urge to march and parade. The few who still insist on garnering an income from revenue-avoiding schemes will be made aware of the new facts of life. They will get a hearty but firm farewell with a reminder that legitimate political parties cannot and will not condone irregularities.

Outsiders may question the authenticity of IRA disbandment. Further arms decommissioning may offer early evidence of its bone fides but hard-headed political logic, though, will be the real arbiter. Sinn Fein, anxious to reinforce its position in the North and desperate to expand in the South, knows that coalition is the only serious option in either jurisdiction. And no putative Taoiseach or First Minister will contemplate partnership with Sinn Fein if there is the remotest possibility of a Provisional IRA revival. Political imperative will be the ultimate guarantor of dissolution and by a quaint paradox it is now only DUP cussedness that is blocking this outcome.

There is, nevertheless, one caveat and that is a deeply held fear within the IRA of its vulnerability in the event of total liquidation of its military capacity. What of all those petty thieves and hooligans punished by the organisation? What of the countless grudges accumulated by those on the receiving end of the IRA's long campaign or what of political enemies who might contemplate assassination? Support for effective policing might be one answer but it is unlikely to cut much ice just yet with people steeped in a tradition of 'self defence'.

Both Fianna Fail and the Official IRA faced this dilemma in the past and the response from both was broadly similar. They first ensured that they had the loyalty of a body of legally armed men, The Broy Harriers for Fianna Fail and party members with state issued firearms certificates in the case of Official Sinn Fein. Both groups, however, also unofficially retained a small number of undeclared weapons kept surreptitiously by a tight group of utterly reliable supporters. In a sense, this will actually assist the disbanding process by assuaging the fears of the handful of utter incorrigibles who will always refuse to believe what the rest of society accepts as fact.

The Provisional IRA will most likely attempt to arrange something similar in the event of disbanding. Issuing of firearms certificates is a policing matter and would not have to come into the political arena but would still grant the Movement a modicum of immediate protection. Only the naive would believe that the disbanding Provos would not retain a small arsenal of undeclared weapons. They will be extremely cautious about ever using them and only then under an unattributable flag of convenience.

In spite of minor internal turbulence the Provos per se will eventually be no more, though it will be a long time before anyone might contemplate assaulting an elected Sinn Fein representative without fearing severe consequences. Even a custard pie in the leader's face may be too much and if you must, disguise yourself with a balaclava…there should be a few in the shops shortly.

Antisocial ASBOs

By Pauline Hadaway

The PSNI are in the process of implementing Northern Ireland's first Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs), under controversial legislation first introduced in the UK as an element of the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act. The Anti-Social Behaviour (NI) Order 2004 permits the Police, Housing Executive and district councils to apply for civil injunctions against individuals deemed guilty of anti social behaviour, defined as conduct which 'causes or is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more people who are not in the same household as the perpetrator.'

Already widely employed within working class areas of England and Wales, ASBOs are primarily used as preventative measures, controlling movement and imposing curfews and other restrictions on 'persistent and serious' anti social behaviour, ranging from street drinking, noise and verbal abuse to criminal and sub- criminal activities such as fly-posting, vandalism, trespass and intimidation. Being civil orders, ASBOs require a lower burden of proof than criminal charges, with hearsay evidence admissible and magistrates granting orders even where no criminal act has been committed. In the absence of mandatory reporting restrictions, children as young as ten have been 'named and shamed' in poster campaigns and on the front pages of local newspapers, while individuals in breach of an order are liable to criminal prosecution and up to five years imprisonment.

Originally introduced to target neighbourly disputes and low level nuisance, ASBOs are increasingly being used to the wider purpose of controlling public order. This summer, in an imaginative extension of their powers, police in Solihull used anti social behaviour legislation to arrest nine members of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, taking part in a public protest.

The Statewatch website, www.poptel.org.uk/statewatch/asbo/asbowatch.html, documents numerous incidents where ASBOs have been extended to target not only nuisance neighbours but political and environmental protesters, homeless people, ex prisoners and even unruly or disruptive pupils in the classroom.

Blurring the distinction between criminal acts and offensive behaviour, ASBOs effectively circumvent judicial safeguards, abolish the presumption of innocence and provide a legal framework for the arrest and prosecution of citizens who have committed no crime. Yet, in England and Wales, amidst a climate of growing public concern around the perceived menace of social disorder and community breakdown, whatever the threat to civil liberties, anti social behaviour legislation appears to be winning broad acceptance across the political spectrum

There is little doubt that the extension of anti social behaviour legislation into Northern Ireland will greatly impact on communities in west Belfast. Last month the Falls Community Council (FCC) called a meeting to consider the implications of the new legislation for the area. While criticising government's failure to consult with the community and raising concerns about a possible increase in 'isolation and exclusion for young people', the

FCC issued a press statement, reporting a generally favourable response to the new legislation among local people. After decades of mistrust it seems the British government and the republican community have finally discovered an area of shared concern. Astonishingly, given the historical context of Internment, Diplock courts and the Special Powers Act, this new partnership is being forged within the sphere of policing and criminal justice.

In the run up to the May 2001 General Election, west Belfast MP Gerry Adams described crime and anti social behaviour, as 'the single biggest election issue' for his constituency. In west Belfast definitions of 'anti- social behaviour' are often fairly elastic, incorporating serious criminal activities, like house breaking, 'joyriding' or violent assault alongside relatively minor nuisances, like noise and trespass. In the absence of effective policing arrangements, where even the most violent criminal activity may often remain unreported let alone prosecuted, communities have traditionally relied upon paramilitaries to fill the policing vacuum. Significantly, many of the tactics familiar to paramilitary punishment, for example naming and shaming offenders or the expulsion and exclusion of families are echoed in the new anti social behaviour legislation. As decommissioning becomes a reality and the authority of paramilitary groups recedes, the switch from rough justice to new styles of behaviour management, may well be viewed as progressive, or even a softening up of traditional approaches to crime and punishment.

The question remains, to what extent do perceptions of crime correspond to actual experience? Statistically Northern Ireland experiences lower levels of crime than England and Wales, where, according to the 2002 British Crime Survey, rates of reported crime have fallen by 39% since 1997. For many people living in housing estates plagued by vandalism and theft or terrorised by 'joyriders' and 'hoods', these statistics carry little weight. In numerous working class areas, concerns around crime and community safety, rooted in lived experience and reinforced by horrifying headlines and photographs of bruised and battered victims, have helped to create a climate of anxiety in which civil rights are freely traded for the promise of security.

In the north of Ireland, community preoccupation with crime is sometimes understood as part of the 'normalization' process, where fears of house raids, arrests and shootings have given way to everyday frustrations over damaged property, noisy neighbours or stolen cars. As the ever present threat of violence has subsided, communities find themselves cheated of their hopes of 'peaceful enjoyment', confronted instead with the banal and mindless activities of hoods and 'neighbours from hell'. Increasingly people experience the effects of anti social behaviour in isolation from each other, for just as acts of political violence have declined in recent years, so there has been an equal and much less welcome decline in participation in political and public life.

For many people the experience of antisocial behaviour is fundamentally one of isolation, powerlessness and despair, rooted less in the bad behaviour of a handful of unpleasant individuals and more in the failure of the broader community to exercise authority and offer support. Day to day problems of bad behaviour, no longer understood and experienced collectively, are re-

interpreted as criminal acts, beyond the control of individuals, requiring the intervention of some external authority.

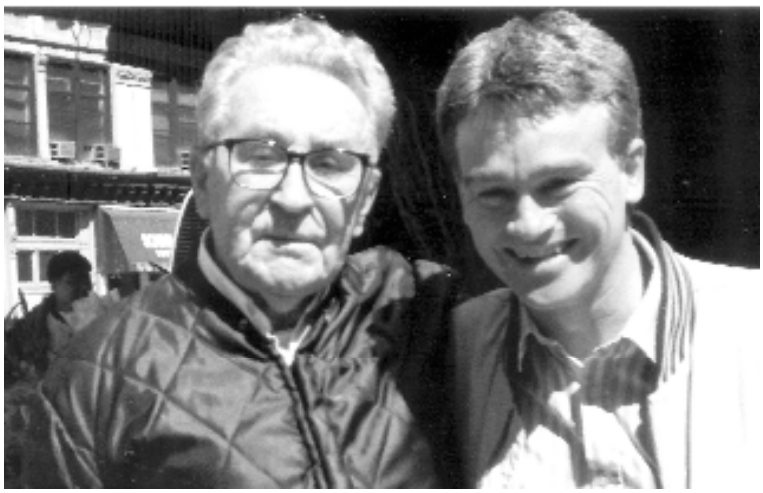
Far from solving these often very complex problems, the introduction of anti social behaviour legislation will simply intensify the sense of hopelessness, by further challenging the authority of individuals and communities to regulate and control their own lives.

While the criminal justice system dealt with serious breaches of the law, everyday problems arising from neighbourly disputes or thoughtless behaviour were traditionally sorted out in private without recourse to police, magistrates and solicitors, let alone emergency legislation. There is nothing new about people behaving badly. What's new is our reluctance, both individually and collectively, to take responsibility and act in our own best interests.

George Harrison

Irish Revolutionary and American Activist

Matt Siegfried pays tribute to legendary Irish republican and international socialist George Harrison, who died in recently New York



Above: Fourthwrite's Tommy McKearney with George Harrison in 1994

Just weeks before the indomitable George Harrison passed into history, a history he consciously took part in, my comrade, Brian Mullan, and I travelled to George Harrison's Brooklyn apartment. There we spent the day with him talking informally; visiting with his wonderful companion and nurse Priscilla McLean and recording what would become a lengthy and wide ranging interview. I hope this interview will be made available in the near future. As many socialists and radicals in the United States and around the world, I have known of George for what seems like my entire active life. He was old enough to be my Grandfather and had lived, it seemed, several lifetimes, witnessed and engaged in the struggles of several generations on several continents.

We knew him not only as the media's gunrunner from Mayo and Irish republican of the old school, but also as a stalwart of the social struggles in this country. A man who never met a picket line he would cross or not gladly join in. We wanted to tell that story, we wanted George to illuminate in his own words the world view that travelled with him from across the Atlantic and informed his active life as a socialist, an internationalist and revolutionary in this country.

Immediately put at ease by his disarming (how ironic to use that word to describe George Harrison!) charm we sat down and listened and asked and learned of a life of service. A unique, even singular life. But his was a life lived not in dogmatic isolation from the changing world around him, but a life informed by the tumultuous events of the 20th Century. As a young man and IRA volunteer he resisted the, seemingly cyclical, counter-revolutions in Ireland following the War of Independence and Civil War.

As a working class person, the revolution and Civil War in Spain became a great passion for the then young revolutionary. Spain would

continue to instruct his politics until his last days. He held his highest admiration for those from around the globe that selflessly went to defend the Republic and nascent workers' revolution against the fascist generals, reactionary priests and Nazi Luftwaffe.

As he himself said, his greatest regret was to not travel to Spain with his friends and comrades, some of whom still lie under the battlefields of Jamara and Madrid. To join with Frank Ryan, Tommy Patton, Mick O'Riordan and so many others to fight arms in hand for the freedom of Spain and the Workers' Republic. His regret was our, all of our, fortune as he lived another seven decades in the service of the ideals of those who fought and died in that heroic struggle. The struggle for socialism whose prospect seemed then so near you could hold it in your hand.

While nothing about George was ordinary he was and remained a working man. Not common but alive in commonality. He was one of a multitude of immigrants who travelled to this land seeking work, seeking freedom from poverty and oppression and often the adventure of beginning a new life. Though Ireland was always intimately on his mind. Many of those immigrants brought with them a radicalism learned, often painfully, in the conditions of their native lands. Many of those immigrants who came without politics learned them in the disappointing lie of the American Dream, the hypocrisy of a democracy which acts in the service of the US oligarchy, the ruling class, the capitalists. The daily humiliations visited on working people; especially immigrants in the hard scrabble toil of survival to make ends meet in a land where the streets were said to be paved with gold.

Many became leaders of workers' struggles, the civil rights' and women's movements. Some fought long, quiet, dignified struggles as rank and file activists. Nearly all informed the US born working class of the world beyond their borders, yet so affected by the action of the United States and often the very same bosses that exploited them at home. George's name will rightly be mentioned with others of that tradition, Nagi Daifallah (Yemen), Harry Bridges (Australia), Carl Skoglund (Sweden), Mother Jones (Ireland), and many others. Read Mother Jones' marvelous biography; she and George must be relations, however distant.

The conditions in the United States are such that Labour's voice has largely been excluded from the political process. The laws governing working conditions as well as the ability to organise are so severely restrictive and draconian, a strike or union battle in the United States has more than once resembled a civil war. The history of the United States' left is one of a relationship between the experiences and ideas brought by immigrants mutually enriching and combining with the native class struggle, the battle against racism, for women's emancipation, for civil rights, for a socialist future.

George Harrison's life was an exemplary confirmation of this dynamic. George Harrison, the Irish republican came to the United States in 1938 after a brief stint as a labourer and activist in England. He found himself working on the docks of Brooklyn and immediately threw himself into his union, which was at the time heavily influenced by the politics of the Communist Party, with which George had a long and cordial relationship. The union turned right and increasingly bureaucratic after the left purges in the late 40's. He developed, quietly, a relationship with the legendary transport workers' leader Michael

Quill who would on occasion pass money to George to assist in George's life long commitment to supply the resistance in Ireland with the means to resist. Quill knew how the money might be spent and gladly gave it anyway.

George spent thirty years as a driver for Brinks and a member of Teamsters local 820. The Union went through changes in leadership and direction. George remained an active member of the union regardless of its changes in leadership, developing relationships with his co-workers both politically and personally. Some of those co-workers were to testify on his behalf at the famed 1983 trial. The old Wobbly code of class solidarity: "an injury to one is an injury to all" was not just a slogan to George, it was a way of life. He was not just a familiar face on the picket lines of nearly every strike in New York City for several decades, but helped to organise material solidarity. Getting funds and provisions to strikers, handing out leaflets, passing resolutions in his union. Connecting the struggles, seeing their confluence.

But the thing, more than any other, that made George a uniquely American activist was his early introduction to the reality of white supremacy in the United States. When he first arrived here and found a job tending bar in which blacks were sometimes refused service and treated vilely at the pub frequented by Irish immigrants like him. He could not countenance that his own country folk, those who had suffered so grievously under the yoke of the bloody British Empire could not see and make common cause with black people here. Because of George's worldview, his certain knowledge of human equality and his enormous wealth of empathy he could not abide the racism endemic, still, in the United States.

George was often the only white man at demonstrations, marching for civil rights and desegregation, against police brutality and with those who would espouse "Black Power" to the embarrassment of members of the Irish community, including many in the republican community. As he said in the interview he saw no difference in the legitimate rage of a black community in the late 60's and early 70's, under siege and ghettoized with what the "lads in Belfast" were doing. It was reciprocated as George introduced many activists of colour to the Irish solidarity movement.

Harrison's great American hero was the white abolitionist and martyr John Brown and he proudly marched with the Black Panther Party, the Puerto Rican Young Lords and the Chicano Brown Berets. He was no liberal; he was a militant anti-racist who saw no threat from those without power demanding power over their own lives. He saw the Black and Brown Power movements of the time as natural and integral to a global struggle, of which Ireland was apart, and Vietnam and Cuba and South Africa and Nicaragua and so many other places of contest between the past and the future. Between imperialism and solidarity.

George Harrison was the least nostalgic 89-year-old I have ever met or will ever meet. When he spoke of the past it was to inform the future. When he remembered his many comrades who proceeded him, some far too young, into history it was with regret, not just for their passing, but that their contributions to the movement that they had lived there lives for were cut short. His thoughts were always on tomorrow; its activities and struggles.

George Harrison remained an Irish republican because he was an anti-imperialist and a socialist. Consequently he was the Patron of Republican Sinn Fein and an implacable foe of the Good Friday Agreement. He spoke of Marx and Che and Fidel with the same admiration that he spoke of Tone and Emmett and Connolly (how he wished that Connolly and Lenin could have met!). What I learned from George and will keep with me as I remain an activist, trade unionist and revolutionary is that the struggle is not sectoralist, it is combined and only in its active combination will we have anything like the victory we seek. We, who seek the world George sought, cannot simply tread the path marked by the deep and lasting imprints of George's enormous shoes.

George has walked his path and we are left to seek out the path to a future George would not live to see, but nonetheless, would not come into being without him. Him and the millions like him who refuse to be broken, who refuse to compromise the future to this present. Those like George who see with the clarity of a supremely calm, confident and humble man that only by the actions of those who engage in the process going on all around us, fully and consciously with the goal in mind is the goal achieved.

It is our great fortune and our enemy's great torment that there will be other George Harrisons. Imperialism made George Harrison a revolutionary and will continue to make others like him, though one can say that George was a superlative example of the best of his class, he will not be the last. Let imperialism and capitalism shudder at the idea of a new generation of George Harrsions, for they have reason to fear. Even on the occasions when I disagreed strongly with him, talking with George as I did frequently from before we interviewed him until several days before he died, I became convinced of the optimism he exuded for the youth of today internationally. That and the "actuality of the revolution" that he lived every day of his long and remarkable life. I cannot imagine a more fitting tribute to George than to commit to carry on, regardless of the obstacles and difficulties ahead. To continue, relentlessly, in pursuit of world of solidarity, emancipation and socialism that George sought. That is the only homage worthy of such a man. Indeed, as George knew and proved in deed, a life in the service of human freedom is the most honourable and noble profession in which a thinking person could engage. George Harrison, Presente`!

Coalition Partners

by Mags Glennon

A couple of weeks back, at the height of the 'controversy' about a possible Fianna Fail/Sinn Féin coalition government, an even more revealing insight into Sinn Féin's strategy could be discerned by a quick glance at the party's official website. In pride of place was a photo of Mary Lou McDonald MEP and Martin Ferris TD, attending the National Ploughing Championships. Fair enough, tens of thousands of rural people - from all backgrounds - attend the ploughing, and where the people go the glad-handing politicians inevitably follow. However what caused even this cynic a jolt was that these reps of a supposedly 'revolutionary' party were posed, beaming cheesily, in front of the Irish Farmers' Association stall.

The IFA represents 85,000 of the biggest, greediest beef and tillage farmers in the 26 counties, the demographic which elects what few TDs Fine Gael still retains. Tom Parlon, now a PD Minister, used to be leader of this Farmers Union. The Sinn Fein reps did have other options, there is a group called the United Farmers Association which represents the declining smaller and mixed family farms, rather than the 'ranchers'. But the politicians did not pose gleefully at their recruitment stand. In many ways the McDonald/Ferris picture represented the rural equivalent of Adams addressing the Dublin Chamber of Commerce last April; a method of demonstrating to the 'haves' that the party posed no real challenge their desire to grab even more.

Another target was in the party sights in October when Ogra Shinn Féin members recruited in the universities with a leaflet stating 'we are dedicated to bringing about revolutionary social change? challenging corruption and imperialism at home and abroad and achieving the freedom of our country.' So that is the youth demographic boxed off; hopefully the IFA college kiddies won't let their parents see that communist Ogra leaflet though.

In the absence of class related politics Sinn Féin's current strategy aims at substituting the much broader and more nebulous term "equality agenda" on the wants and aspirations of several demographically different types of modern Irish voter spread across two states. The party seems to have a hegemony in the most deprived working class areas, North and South, and is reaching out in an unthreatening manner to the middle classes. But it is difficult to see what a Meath tillage farmer drawing down 100,000 euros in EU grants has in common with a resident of an interface area in Belfast, where the average household income is £5,000 (e6,600)p.a. Maybe it is a matter of keeping all the plates spi ning in line and no one will notice the contradictions?

If there is one thing that is noticeable about Sinn Féin in recent months it is their failure to challenge any of the party's traditional opponents. The mainstream merry-go-round means that no actual activity takes place to oppose government policies, for example the lack of funding for the health service. The June Local Elections in the 26 counties were newsworthy for the rise of the Sinn Féin vote, especially in urban working class constituencies.

What was little commented on though was the ability of the party to gain seats with almost no conflict between themselves and parties supposedly to their right. On local issues the party scrums down with all the others around an almost identical list of concerns and promises to solve them. When one of

the major parties makes a criticism of Sinn Féin on a national issue the invariable wounded response is that the statement is 'damaging the Peace Process'.

Dermot Ahern's statement, as a senior cabinet minister, that he could at a future time see that Sinn Fein would 'inevitably' be in government in the South, and soon, generated a fair bit of hot air at the end of the 'silly season'. Ahern did insert the usual caveats about 'democratic politics' and abolishing the IRA, but since anyone this side of comatose sees the way that is going, they were meaningless. A couple of Fianna Fail backwoodsmen, and even a Mayo Fine Gael TD, welcomed the prospect of Sinn Fein in government. A few howls from the usual FG/PD/Sunday Indo contingent elicited a slight u-turn from Bertie. Willie O Dea moaned a bit about Sinn Fein economic policies 'putting Ireland back in the stone age'. Dermot Ahern re-surfaced to say that he hadn't been suggesting a coalition between Fianna Fail and Sinn Fein, just that Sinn Fein could end up in government and that this reflected the central premise of the Peace Process, which was that the party would go down the constitutional route. It was interesting to hear Ahern admit this openly, but it isn't new of course. One of the first people to examine it as a motivation for the Peace Process was Anthony McIntyre. That was over a decade ago and the calumny heaped on his head has not abated yet. But I did not hear a peep out of Sinn Fein about the 'treachery' of the Minister for Foreign Affairs accusing them of this cardinal sin.

When the whole 'coalition' kerfuffle had died down Michael McDowell spoke at a little reported college debate in TCD where he said that the Dermot Ahern statement had been demanded by Sinn Féin at the Leeds Castle talks as a method of enhancing their chances of getting the Stormont Executive back on track. Fianna Fail denied they had agreed to any such thing. At times McDowell says more than his prayers, but it would seem odd for a barrister and senior government minister to make such an allegation if it could be proved to be untrue.

At the time of the Dermot Ahern kite flying episode Mary Lou McDonald appeared on 'Questions and Answers' opposite Eoghan Harris, who described her as a 'fragrant flower growing on a dunghill'. Instead of responding to this gross insult on Republicans McDonald simpered, but did give us an idea of what Sinn Féin's preconditions for coalition in the South would be. These included a just re-distribution of resources, a commitment to working for unity, bedding down the Peace Process and "building equality". With the exception of the PDs (who have openly declared their devotion to inequality) there would appear to be no party that Sinn Fein would not be willing to do business with. Several Sinn Fein reps said that the party membership would decide who would be worthy to coalesce with it, but no mention was made of the 2001 promise for a Special Ard Fheis to discuss the matter.

But in the end it will all come down to the sums, the 'coalition with Fianna Fail' option is based on an assumption that the SF 4.5% gain the 2004 local elections will translate into something around 9-12% in a general election, resulting in 10-15 Dail seats. Almost the entire Sinn Fein sweep in the local elections came from disaffected former Fianna Fail voters, so it is easy to see how that party would welcome back the lost tribe, even if in a Sinn

Fein guise. The touchy-feely Fianna Fail, newly interested in 'equality', would have a safe majority, free of the PD ideologues and the flakey Independents. But whither newly cleansed and IRA-less Sinn Féin when they have served their purpose? Just another ambitious party to be punished by the electorate for its broken promises? In 1992 a party doubled it's TDs on a radical manifesto and then entered coalition with Fianna Fail, before losing half the seats next time out. Martin Ferris does not need to be told this though, as he took Dick Spring's seat. But Dick didn't mind all that much - he's now a millionaire, maybe that is the whole point after all?

Not all prospering equally

In spite of the much vaunted Celtic Tiger, there is still an unacceptably high level of inequality in Ireland

By Margaret McKearney

The United Nations (UN) states that while the Irish are the third richest people in the world, only the USA has higher levels of inequality in the western world. Now as Celtic Tiger mark II begins to kick in and employment is predicted to rise by 50,000 per year in Ireland this second round of economic expansion will create huge budget surpluses for Ireland why do we still have the highest proportion of people at risk of poverty in the EU? The answer lies squarely in the policies of successive right wing government ministers, some who model their policies on those pioneered by Thatcher in Britain in the 1980s while others seek to protect the hedonistic lifestyles of the rich and privileged.

Since 2001 the EU has adopted indicators of social exclusion, these factors include indicators such as unemployment, housing and inadequate health care, however top of the list is relative poverty. Recently in a report which analysed relative incomes in Ireland in the year 2001 The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) found that relative income poverty is higher in Ireland than in any of the pre-enlargement EU states. The EU measures those "at risk of poverty" by calculating what percentage of the population earns less than 60 per cent of the average wage. In Ireland this percentage now rests at 21 per cent. This is the highest in any of the former EU states where the average "at risk of poverty" is 13 per cent.

The ESRI concluded that to keep relative poverty levels at bay two factors needed to kick in: first was a "high employment rate" and the second was "a comprehensive welfare system" It will be argued that we have a very high employment rate, but that statistic belies the prosperity of the average Irish wage earner. The average household income in 2001 (the latest year for which comparable figures are available) was €14,200. Research shows that one in five Irish people are classed as poor: taking home less than 60 per cent of the average wage. 15.3% of Irish people live in poverty and 237,000 children live in households below the poverty line. However in face of all the research by imminent bodies, government ministers collectively refused to accept the facts or to act to alleviate poverty, indeed some took their ignorance to extreme lengths. One such was the last Minister for Social Welfare, Ms Mary Coughlan who by seeking to enhance her own reputation as a good manager attempted to dismantle the already crumbling welfare state, that second pillar that the ESRI states is necessary to defeat relative poverty.

In attempt to save 1.3 million the Department of Social Welfare decided to cease paying the transitional half-rate payment for lone parents where earnings were in excess of €293 per week. This very low threshold for the withdrawal of State help to encourage lone parents back on the employment

ladder has actually backfired on the parsimonious government that fewer are attempting to return to work has resulted in a loss in revenue in income taxes greater than the proposed savings in welfare payments. The same constituency was again targeted when the same department discontinued crêche supplement . This has resulted in a dramatic decline in the number of disadvantaged children accessing pre-school, therefore denying them advantage in the educational race.

In an attack on supplementary benefits aimed at alleviating the poorest in our society maintain a home over their heads Ms Coughlan decreed that rent allowance applicants must pay their own rent for six months before being eligible for accommodation supplements. The implications of this move are immense, for example abused spouses and partners are left with no option but to stay put, it may leave the already vulnerable at risk from extortionist money lenders, it certainly does no impinge on the rich. It was estimated that this measure would save the government €10.5 million. In another slash at rent help the applicants share of the rent was increased, as was rent supplements to couples also attacked, couples earning over €317 were denied help. This in a state where house prices rises have left many with no hope of owning a home and rents are soaring out of the average earners reach. These measurers combined with attacks on eligibility to qualify for disability benefits, supplementary child allowances, a rise in length of time required to qualify for unemployment benefit have left the more vulnerable in our society reeling and certainly not feeling the fallout from the Celtic Tiger.

This attack by a government minister reflects only too well the divisions in Irish society today. Yes there are more people in work, but equally there are now more people who say they can't afford for their children to attend a doctor when they are sick. The income upper limit to be eligible for a medical card is ridiculously low, so low in fact life could not be sustained on it. Nor do we spend our money on education, Ireland in a table of the top 50 developed nations ranks 3rd in expenditure on education. The much vaunted abolishment of third level fees has done nothing the make these institutions more assessable to the poorer students. In addition accessibility to university for mature students has been dealt a death blow. The time needed to meet the criteria for Third Level Allowance has been extended from six months to fifteen, and students no longer are paid their allowance during the summer recess, thus leaving many second chance learners (invariably all of the same social order) with no option but to drop out of college and return to the poorly paid sector that they had went to college to escape. Nor do we extend millions to the visitors to our shore. Asylum seekers and immigrants who arrived with the boom years often live in sub-standard housing conditions and the young mothers are not eligible for even out modest Children Allowance scheme.

What then are this governments priorities if all boats are obviously going to rise in these unprecedented years of plenty. Well they have apparently refurbished a guest house, and last year some of the savings made by the enterprising Ms Coughlan contributed to the €250million ploughed in by the government into Greyhound and Horse racing. Even the needy GAA has recently received another grant to subsidise expenditure that

€60 ahead for a match ticket could not cover. These apparently are more deserving than lone parents wishing to avail of affordable crêche facilities in order to undertake probably a lowly paid job. However the real question is how long middle Ireland will tolerate this unfair division of wealth. How long will the fat cat financiers and lawyers be able to flash their cash earned at the altar of the greed of sordid public servants.

In a week when the Attorney General was caught flaunting the Roscommon Co. Co.'s planning department while building a €600,000 holiday home how long will our homeless and our poorly housed tolerate such a group of individuals continue to run our country.

Is care of the child a class issue?

By Maggie Brown

Increasingly more women are forging for themselves well paid responsible careers. At last the welcome sight of top female barristers or financiers are no longer a rare sight. Women head up the top positions in Irish newspapers, and are to the fore in political broadcasting, not to mention other less visible careers. This is a good and just development. However, often these women are also mothers and that is when the drive for equality and fair play often flies out the door. Parenting is in most cases a two person responsibility, but in many cases the onus to arrange adequate childcare fall to the women. Certainly more mothers discuss their arrangements between them and often mothers will be found writing about it or rather the cost of it.

Good childcare is expensive; recently a female columnist in a Sunday paper claimed that childcare payments amount to the cost of a second mortgage. Maybe so but many of the child care providers don't even have one mortgage. This is the crux of the matter. While these well educated career women earn in many cases excellent money, with which they are prepared to pay outlandish sums for a Prada outfit or Gucci shoes not to mention Botox or corrective surgery they are less than willing to pay an honest labourer an honest days pay. Many still hanker after the pre boom years for the " my little treasure" who is prepared to do all the house work as well as mind the children 14 hours a day for Euro 25, with a husband unemployed and not wanting to declare it.

Childcare is an indispensable part of a parents return to work and when a parent takes a decision to return to work then many factors must be considered. Amongst these factors is relative financial worth of returning to work. Therefore those for whom it is monetarily rewarding return to work often it is the parents in the less well paid work that are forced out of the market place to remain at home. There is no denying that now child care is expensive but then everything is. No one asks a plumber to work for next to nothing and these women certainly value their own labours why then should childcarers work for a pittance.

Women are committing the cardinal crime of undervaluing childcare; many career women consider those who mind their children while they pursue a career to be unskilled and often little less than their servants. It is only when the high earners and high status women appreciate that all that anybody has to sell is their labour and that it does not matter if you sell it in a home/ crêche or a boardroom. Until women stop dumping on other women then we will have no hope of an equal or just society.

British Labour Party moving away from welfare state concept

By Siobhan O'Dwyer

In the past few weeks there have been another run of stories and reports warning us that the future does not look rosy at all. The pensions report describes a situation where most people, despite the social security contributions they have paid throughout their working life, will not be able to live off the pension they are entitled to from the state. It is presented as if we are to blame for this situation and encourages us to take out private and stakeholder pensions while continuing of course, to pay our national insurance. Once again, the media and politicians accept this discourse at face value and no one questions how it is that despite working people paying for the welfare state and their future pension, they will no longer be able to live off it and why that is somehow our own fault. There is no discussion about how the funds are currently being used or why it is that the welfare state is being so undermined from within as to make it meaningless. No doubt that is why Tony Blair felt that he could use a speech on 12th October to say that he is proposing an "opportunity society replacing the traditional welfare state" without hardly a murmur of surprise or consternation. No one demanded to know exactly what he means and when we as a society decided that we no longer wanted a welfare state.

New Labour has so undermined the political discourse that there are hardly any voices of intellectual, political ability left. The climate of fear and individual responsibility for all ills plus the elevation of victimhood means that all political discussion takes place within this destructive paradigm. There are very few commentators, academics or organisations willing to put their heads above the parapet and demand a return to progressive political discourse and idea's. There are even fewer people who actually believe that the future can be better if society continues to trust in scientific development, medical advancement and the ongoing debate of ideas as to how society can be run in future.

Indeed, the really worrying aspect of today's politics of fear is that we are all affected by it and it has crept more and more into our own thought processes so that in effect we blame ourselves, our neighbours and particularly, the undeserving masses for the fear and foreboding about the future that we all feel. We don't need the police, social workers, health-information workers etc., to enforce all these new draconian laws and regulations because our own fear ensures that we police ourselves, our "communities" and blame each other for our predicament. In this climate it is more important than ever that organisations and individuals consider carefully their role in changing the parameters of the debate rather than being sucked into discussions whose starting point is part of the problem.

One example is the attempted destruction of the welfare state. Its opponents through the promotion of the idea that the welfare state is inherently wrong, unstable and untenable deviously set its replacement as the

starting point for this debate. The question is then about how to tinker around with it, erode it here, change it there and not as to whether the fact and ideals of a welfare state still hold some value and importance.

Do we believe that the welfare state is something that we want to hold onto and improve rather than dismantle and throw away? If so, we have to shake off the political stranglehold of the current politics of fear and to do so, we have to question everything that is currently being presented as politics in our society. We have to set our own parameters for the debate and the starting point is an affirmation that we believe in the inherent worth of humanity and that we are not afraid of one another.

Cuba under threat

Belfast Trades Council and the local Cuban Solidarity Society recently hosted an information-providing event in the Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre. Principal speaker at the meeting was Noel Carrello of the Cuban Communist Party's International Department who told the audience of the current situation in his country, the growing danger posed by the United States government and outlined how he felt that Ireland could best support the Cuban people.

Mr. Carrello told how the decades long blockade of his island had greatly damaged the economy of this small country. By aggressively implementing a policy of isolating the Caribbean republic, the US has created great difficulties for Cuba when it seeks to buy essential raw materials such as oil and steel and further impedes the country's economy by denying it the opportunity to upgrade its existing infrastructure by preventing it from accessing current technology on the world market. As a consequence of this, Cuba has struggled to escape from its dependence for economic survival on the production of raw materials such as sugar and tobacco. The Cuban speaker also told how the European Union has recently moved away from even the very qualified toleration it had shown to Cuba in the past. Prior to the invasion of Iraq, there was a small but important amount of trade between Cuba and the E.U. as many European governments were prepared to ignore some of the US instigated restrictions. However, in order to atone for the minor spat that occurred between Washington and some European states in the run-up to the invasion, the E.U. is now adopting a much more intolerant position towards Cuba.

Even more worrying is the fact that the USA has long ago established a well funded department within its governmental structures, tasked with the 'responsibility' for restructuring Cuba after the demise of its current president, Fidel Castro. This particular agency is already looking at options for replacing the police service and armed forces and has made extensive plans for restoring the old system of private property and returning the detested landlords to their former estates.

Anybody with even a passing acquaintance with Cuba and its history knows that to achieve such an outcome would entail massive military intervention and the inevitable bloodshed. Contemporary Cuban society is far from perfect and the government may not be as widely loved as the state's press office would like but there is little doubt that if offered a choice between living in a society that has provide its people with universal literacy and a surplus of doctors (the only one in Latin America) on one hand and the type of vicious society that US imperialism has produced across the rest of the continent on the the other hand, then Cuba will always opt for the former.

When asked how Ireland might best assist the Cuban people, Mr. Carrello said that there is no longer quite the same need for material assistance that there once was. It would be useful if in a more general sense if people in this country were encouraged to holiday in his country but the real need is for political support. He said that it is necessary that Irish people tell their elected representatives that they do not endorse the economic blockade of Cuba and we will not support any form of external intervention in the running of that country.

To Disappear in Nepal

By Al. MacRoibeard

Throughout most of the 60s, 70s, and 80s, the CIA project known as Operation Condor installed military juntas in Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay to protect the interests of the US in the region. Following the 1973 coup in Chile, the military, according to its official records, killed more than 3,000 people, tortured 60,000 and drove a million into exile, in a country of under 14 million. During the mid-late 70s, Argentina's period of "dirty war" also saw many thousands of people "disappeared" during the counter-revolutionary campaign. These state-sponsored attacks on the masses gave rise to such protest groups as the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, in Argentina and the Association of Relatives of Disappeared Prisoners in Chile. In cities across South America, family members demanding to know their whereabouts held up pictures of the "disappeared".

While such images have become hallmarks of the anti-imperialist struggle in Latin America, these fascistic methods remain in the arsenals of embattled reactionary states. The revolutionary war led by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), has in recent weeks gone over to the Strategic Offensive, the final stage of it's revolutionary struggle for victory. With the threat of Indian intervention, the Maoists, using lessons learned in Korea and Vietnam have begun training in tunnel warfare. As the monarchy is further weakened, its inherent fascistic nature increasingly comes to the surface.

While backpacking through Nepal last September and on getting caught up in the city-wide rioting that blew up in response to government inaction over the killing of twelve Nepali workers in Iraq, the monarchy's fragility became quite apparent. During the street fighting, live rounds were used, some proving fatal. In the aftermath, following a five-day curfew, the centre of Kathmandu still bore many of the scars of the riot, with piles of dug up rubble lying alongside the Kantipath road. Although several government buildings had been burnt-out, the context within which the workers had been slain led to some sectarian attacks on the city's Muslim community, simple messages condemning such attacks being affixed to the railings surrounding Ratna Park. Close by these hand-written messages, a large open tent-like shelter stood. Here, relatives of many of Nepal's "disappeared", like their counterparts in South America kept a constant vigil, the pictures of many of their family-members hung around the tent-walls. A Nepali man, sitting nearby, on seeing me approach the tent expressed his opinion that; "they are already under the ground".

As the revolutionary war intensifies, human rights organisations like Amnesty International, in report after report, have had to point out that the waves of violence inflicted on the masses has been by one side, that of the reactionary state. Amnesty itself has documented hundreds of cases where the Royal Nepal Army has "disappeared" people, many of whom are thought to have been killed in custody. Furthermore, thousands have been the victims of

“arbitrary arrests and detentions” often under laws that Amnesty describes as “in clear breach of the constitution, as well as international treaties to which Nepal is a state party”.

Groups like Amnesty however, are not known for sympathising with revolutionary struggles, attempting to balance evidence of human rights abuse by the state with hints at similar outrages by the revolutionaries. These vague footnotes to their reports are intended to make the overwhelming condemnation of the government more palatable to powerful Western reactionaries. This refusal to differentiate between reaction and revolution ensures that the arrest of a reactionary agent acting in the interests of the monarchy by revolutionary forces will be defined as an “abduction”. This denial of the two-state system that now exists also ensures that the conviction of a revolutionary by a royal court passes without comment. The likes of Amnesty therefore, in their claims of neutrality have an inherent bias towards accommodating with the established order however fascistic.

Review by John Nixon

MacDiarmada*...a dark horse come to light*

This is not a book for revisionist libraries. Without doubt it is the most comprehensive and definitive account of a man who has for almost ninety years remained almost an enigma. Relatively little has been written overall about Sean MacDiarmada whose pivotal role in organising the Easter Rising is now being acknowledged. On hearing in 1966 that a biography of Mac Diarmada (the biography by Michael Fox was not completed) was to be launched Kathleen Clarke, wife of Tom Clarke remarked "I am glad that Sean is about to get some credit for his work for freedom. As a worker he was head and shoulders above P.H. Pearse but not being a writer he is not known to the people of Ireland as he should be".

I listened to McAtasney outline the detailed research he had undertaken at the launch of the book in (appropriately) the Cardinal O Fiaich in Library and Archive in Armagh. It has taken him over six years to complete with much travelling and midnight oil burned in between. The pages of acknowledgments, end-notes and bibliography show the author's commitment to his work, his quest for new facts and material and ultimately his desire to put together all the parts of the jigsaw that make up the life of an inspirational and somewhat complex republican whom one 1916 volunteer described simply as 'the mind of the revolution'.

Ironically much was gleaned from RIC and British military intelligence papers released since 1960. Collins described him very aptly as a figure 'tramping through Ireland and preaching the Fenian gospel of a freedom which must be fought for, enrolled recruits and by his pure patriotism and loveable selfless character inspired all with whom he came in contact to emulate him to be worthy of his teaching.'

Born in Kiltyclogher, County Leitrim into a family of ten Mac Diarmada was steeped in the lore and history of his county and country. Stories of eviction, the Famine, of the Fenians of old all had an early and formidable impact on the creation of his rebel heart and mind as did the influence of his teacher Patrick McGaughan a native speaker and one who loved 'everything pertaining to Irish history and literature'. But it wasn't until he left Kiltyclogher in 1905, the year Griffith and co formed Sinn Fein, and headed to Belfast to find work did the young Fenian firebrand truly come of political age.

In 1907 he met Tom Clarke who had just arrived in Limerick. MacDiarmada was engrossed in elections and boasted to Clarke of the skulduggery he employed to gain votes. A sharp rebuke followed from Clarke admonishing Sean not to sully the cause of the Republic by indulging in such tricks 'No matter who else should indulge in them we should not, neither should we participate in any election to the British Parliament'. MacDiarmada replied 'I see now you are right. I promise never to take part in such proceedings again.' His transition was complete.

In Belfast he lived in Ardoyne with Frankie Wilson, a protestant IRB man. He became pro-active in the Dungannon Clubs and Sinn Fein and liaised with Bulmer Hobson and Denis McCullough. Interesting at this time almost one third of the Dungannon Clubs membership was Protestant.

The Dungannon Clubs had their origins in the 18th century when the Dungannon Resolutions of 1782 called for a sovereign independent Irish state. But it was

MacDiarmada's organisational skills that proved most effective. He had now drawn the attention of state and military intelligence and was kept under surveillance. His mail like that of many prominent IRB members and suspects was censored. By 1908 he was principal organiser of Aonach na Nollag which promoted Irish goods and to 'assure Irish manufacturers with a Christmas market', and this was a great success.

By now he was travelling throughout the country and abroad organising and recruiting. In Cranfield Co. Down he addressed a crowd of over 2000 'of all religious persuasions'. MacDiarmada visited Scotland and England organising and making use of his persuasive oratory effectively.

The split in the Irish Volunteers in 1914 was a major regression with Redmond laying down the ultimatum at Woodenbridge 'to go where the firing line extends' and fight for the British. Home Rule he believed would be granted. Bulmer Hobson and MacDiarmada divided as Hobson supported Redmond. Tom Clarke more nor less accused Hobson of being an agent and asked him how much he had been paid. Clarke somewhat paranoid also believed Casement was a spy. Undeterred by the split and against a backdrop of Home Rule politics, UVF gunrunning, (which republicans actually praised) and the inevitability of an imperialist war, MacDiarmada despite being afflicted constantly by illness and having spent time in prison worked more vigorously re-organising those volunteers who had opposed Redmond. He extolled the virtues of then Ulster Volunteer Force whom he maintained that by arming and drilling had 'led the way' in opposing the 'English Parliament'.

MacDiarmada had witnessed the shooting of men, women and children at Bachelor's Walk. He and Clarke actively took part in and co-ordinated the landing of two thousand rifles and munitions at Howth Harbour purchased by Casement and brought in by Childers and co on the Asgard. With the weapons safely stored the focus of MacDiarmada's (and Pearses') attention was to organise a strike against the British. This would come at Easter 1916. MacDiarmada was relentless. He helped organise the arms landing from the Aud, firearms and bomb making training in the garden of St Endas. He had become totally ruthless and was even prepared to arrange the kidnapping of Hobson who was opposed to the Rising. He was, as the author of this definitive biography commented 'up to the very last minute the main man'.

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