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Young people and drugs

By William McDonagh

Sadly the bitter reality of the issue of drug abuse has reached epidemic proportions in Ireland. The Traveller community and the settled community both experience the tragedy of drug abuse, especially among our youth.

The young people have a wide variety of drugs to choose from: cannabis, heroin, ecstasy, cocaine, solvents and alcohol. They start to take drugs for pleasure, and in no time they have become dependent on them to feel normal. Addiction is the need or want of a drug. It may involve physical and/or psychological dependence.

As a result of drug abuse, our youth are destroying themselves and their families. They are giving away their futures to the 'fix' and the pushers. This when they should be enjoying life and making plans for their future, working towards their hopes and dreams. Instead they are slowly destroying themselves.

How often do we read in the papers or see on TV young people killed by drug abuse or something in relation to it? How many of us know some young person we have seen grow up destroying themselves and the people who love them? These young people get involved in anti-social behaviour such as crime, prostitution and dealing to pay for their drug habit. When they are far-gone into the addiction there is little they will not do to support their drug habit.

The flip side of this misery is the people who are getting rich on the pain and death of others. These people have no conscience or remorse in relation to the horror that they help create.

Where is the wider responsibility of society in relation to young people? Many of our young people come from disadvantaged backgrounds. These young people are at risk of drifting into the world of drug abuse. They don't have equal opportunities in Irish society in relation to accommodation, education, and employment.

In reality, how much real support exists for these young people as they grow into young adults? How much support is there for them when they have become addicted to drugs? These young people live in a world that is full of risks, and they need more than a helping hand. They need a society that can see to relate to them. A society that has the ability to reach out and not leave them to the mercy of fear and depression in relation to their future. If these young people are left out in the cold, the road they travel is one of self-destruction, both for themselves, their families, and in the long run, "society".

Young people have many gifts and important things to say. We need to be able

'Young people have many gifts and important things to say. We need to be able to listen and engage with them. We need to work together to challenge the drug problem that is creating so much misery and death. We have to create a society where the children of today do not become the victims of tomorrow'

to listen and engage with them. To accept them as they are at this moment, and be able to talk with them. These are our youth, our future. We have the responsibility to safeguard and create a society where all people can live in peace and hope. A society where all will have their dignity recognised and respected. We need to work together to challenge the drug problem that is creating so much misery and death. We have to look for the truths behind the reasons for the drug abuse. We have to create a society where the children of today do not become the victims of tomorrow.

The world is what we make it. Our youth need to know they are more than a 'fix'. They deserve a chance to live in a world where they can be all that they could be. Not to die in pain before their time, leaving nothing behind but broken hearts. Drug abuse is not written in stone, the issue of drug abuse can be challenged. If we don't, the cost we pay is our youth.

William McDonagh is a Youth and Community Worker. He is also a member of the Travelling community.

Moral cowardice over Shannon

By Tony Hyland

In what amounted to a grotesque act of political obsequiousness, the Dublin government decided to allow US military aircraft to refuel at Shannon, in spite of the absence of a second UN resolution authorising the use of force in Iraq. The Anglo-American invasion is not only illegal under international law; it is an appalling crime against the people of Iraq. It is also the opening salvo in an Anglo-America design to re-colonise the Middle East, gaining control over the region's oil reserves while simultaneously subverting the authority of the UN.

On March 20, in a disgraceful speech justifying the government's decision, Mary Harney urged Irish people to support the British and American governments because they are 'putting their people in harm's way in a cause they believe is right'. It worth recalling the fact that 82 Irish people have died while on UN peace-keeping duties. Clearly, successive Dublin governments have had no difficulty in placing young Irish men and women 'in harm's way in a cause which they believe is right'. So perhaps as an act of decency Mary Harney should write and apologise to the families of these 82 Irish soldiers because the present Dublin government is colluding in the destruction of the UN - the very organisation for which these people have laid down their lives?

Let there be no doubt about US intentions towards the UN. Richard Perle recently stated that 'when the Iraqi regime falls, Saddam Hussein will take the UN down with him'. While mourning the fact that 'the chatterbox on the Hudson will continue to bleat', Perle happily pointed to the 'wreckage of the liberal conceit of safety through international law administered by international institutions'. He concluded by stating that 'the true alternative to the anarchy of the abject failure of the UN is the coalition of the willing'.

However, the Dublin government's recent decision on Shannon is now the subject of a High Court constitutional challenge. The plaintiff has argued that the provision of refueling facilities for US aircraft is tantamount to Ireland's involvement in the Iraqi war. The court was referred to George Bush's declaration of war of March 17, which stated that: 'more than 35 countries in this coalition are giving crucial support, from the use of naval and air bases to help with intelligence and logistics to the deployment of combat units.' However, under Article 28 of the Irish Constitution, the consent of the Dail must be acquired

before Ireland can participate in war. As this consent was never obtained, the plaintiff maintains that the government's decision is unconstitutional.

Secondly, the plaintiff believes that Ireland's participation in the war is also in breach of Article 29 of the Irish Constitution, which asserts Ireland's commitment to the peaceful settlement of international disputes. And thirdly, it was argued



Anti-war banner in Dublin

that the use of force is only justifiable when expressly provided for under the UN Charter and only within a political context which is consistent with the demands laid down in UN Resolutions. In relation to this point, the court heard an affidavit read on behalf of Dr. Ian Scobie, an expert in International Law from the University of Glasgow, who argued that a majority of international lawyers believe that the war is unlawful and, on this basis, the provision of overflight and refueling facilities is in direct breach of Ireland's neutral status. Dr. Scobie cited the Hague Convention which compels neutral states to abstain and exercise impartiality in relation to war, and Article 18 of the San Remo Manual on International Law which excludes belligerent military aircraft from entering neutral airspace. With respect to our neutral status, the plaintiff cited examples from the past fifty years which show how it was established practice to prohibit foreign military aircraft from entering Irish airspace if they were armed, carrying ammunitions, or engaged in intelligence gathering or military exercises.

The panel of judges has reserved judgement until the next law term. Clearly, their ruling will be of the utmost importance, as it will define how future Irish administrations must act with respect to our neutrality and our concomitant obligations under international law.

When deciding to allow US military aircraft refuel at Shannon - in spite of the absence of a second UN resolution - the Dublin government stated that it had acted in the national interest. They pointed to the need to maintain high levels of US investment in Ireland and the importance of Bush and Blair's continued involvement in the so-called 'peace process'.

Such justifications are spurious. It is ludicrous to suggest that US multinationals, which repatriate huge profits from Ireland each year, would close their factories in the event of refueling facilities at Shannon being withdrawn. Not even the IDA accepts this as a likely scenario. It is also misleading to suggest that Blair might cold-shoulder the Belfast Agreement in response to such a development. The stabilisation of the Belfast Agreement is a matter of considerable national self-interest to the British establishment. They are not in the business of looking a gift horse in the mouth.

However, even if serious consequences were to flow from such a decision, a self-respecting state must be prepared to take a moral stand on an issue which it believes to be correct. Never before has a government made such a profound decision with so little moral introspection.

In contrast to the spinelessness of Ahern and Harney, one needs to look no further than the governments of Mexico and Chile. These states are current members of the UN Security Council. Both are underdeveloped nations and heavily reliant on the US economy. Over recent weeks Mexico and Chile were placed under incessant US pressure to join the 'coalition of the willing'. So with far more at stake than Ireland, how did these underdeveloped nations respond? Answer: They refused to capitulate. Their courageous, principled stand is in stark contrast to submissive behaviour of the moral pygmies who govern the twenty-six county state.

Tony Hyland is a republican POW in Portlaoise Gaol.

Six county negotiations - peace at any price?

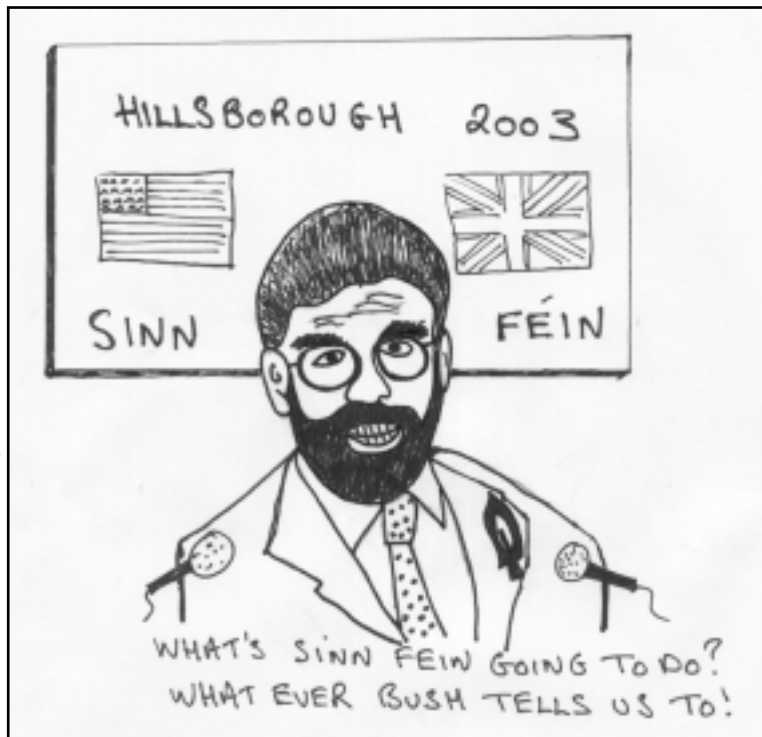
By James Burke

The political situation in the north, following George Bush's meeting with Blair at Hillsborough, has left everyone confused. After weeks of secret talks and negotiations between Sinn Féin and the Dublin, British and American governments, all seemed ready for the restart of Stormont. The Provisionals were expected to announce that they had more or less surrendered. In exchange, Blair and Ahern would announce that a few political crumbs would be given to Sinn Féin, allowing them to save face. The Agreement could be saved and Trimble could go back into government with Adams and Co. It's little wonder that there were a few angry faces when it didn't work out as planned.

The first sign that things might get embarrassing was the arrival of George W. Bush in the north. It has always been the case that any American political figure coming to the north would inform the Dublin government as a matter of courtesy. The Americans, not wanting to offend Dublin, have looked on the disputed territory as being, theoretically at least, a part of Ireland. This visit was very different. On this occasion, Dublin only found out about the President's impending arrival through Blair telling Ahern. In a further insult, Richard Armitage, US Deputy Secretary of State, referred to Belfast as being in the 'United Kingdom', just so no one would be confused. When Bush and Blair had their press conference, it was plain to see the American and British flags behind them. The symbolism was there for all to see. Bush even gave us a new perspective on the north when he talked about 'future generations of young Northern Irishers [who] can look forward to peace' etc. For Ahern to attend this meeting under these circumstances was shameful. Not alone was this a meeting to discuss their criminal aggression in Iraq, but also to tell the world that as a result of the Good Friday Agreement the six counties are and will remain a part of Britain. Of course Ahern is only too well aware that by signing away Articles 2 and 3 of the south's constitution, he was paving the way for just such a declaration.

With Bush and Blair flushed by the prospect of a quick and relatively painless victory in Iraq, they now think that they can

enforce a settlement on the north as well. As a result, we were treated to the humiliating spectacle of Adams and Co. standing like little boys being told off by their teacher. When Sinn Féin announced that they would attend the meeting, they were rightly criticised by anti-war campaigners for doing so. However, they were reminded by their friends in the US that any anti-war protest would cost them dearly. Congressman Peter King said, 'the US government has brought Gerry Adams and Sinn Féin onto the world stage, and they should bear that in mind'.



Bush was not in the north to discuss anything with Sinn Féin in any case. He was there to talk war with Blair, and to tell Adams this is what you and your friends in the Provos will do. So convinced were all concerned that it was a done deal that a statement was to be announced on Thursday April 10th outlining the new settlement. It was time for the Sinn Féin leadership to 'come clean' on what they had been at all along behind the backs of their supporters. They had dragged out this moment with one excuse after another, but now their time had run out. Of course, Adams thought it would be good if they could get Blair to state his case first, but Blair wasn't having any of it. Sinn Féin, meanwhile, had done everything to get to the feast but was refusing to lift the spoon and sup with the devil. The Dublin and London governments had to send for Richard Haass to tell Sinn Féin, once again, what would happen if they didn't cooperate.

The present situation is a long way from the hopes and dreams of so many young

men and women who, thirty odd years ago, took up arms to remove the British from Ireland and reunite their country. Many thousands spent years in jail, and hundreds more gave their lives for the cause they believed in. To quantify the suffering of families and friends as well would be impossible. But one thing is certain - it was not all done so that the British could remain in Ireland and our country remain divided. It certainly was not done so that American politicians could dictate what settlement we would or would not accept. And it was not

done under the banner of 'Peace At Any Price'. The blame for the current disaster rests firmly with Gerry Adams and his fellow leaders of Sinn Féin and the Provisional movement. They are prepared to accept British rule in the six counties and are prepared to be a part of its implementation. They have handed over IRA weaponry to war criminals who are at this very moment engaged in an illegal invasion of Iraq. These self-same war criminals would tell republicans that we have no right to use force to remove an army of occupation from our country, but are themselves advocates of 'pre-emptive strikes' against anyone who might even think of attacking them. For years

these people claimed that Ireland's war of liberation was wrong because it caused civilian casualties, yet they themselves have deliberately targeted civilians in their efforts to assassinate the political leadership of the Iraqi people. Yet, despite this blatant hypocrisy, Adams and McGuinness are hell bent on an abject surrender. This course of action was planned over many years, and at this stage there is little republicans can do to prevent it. We can, however, state firmly that we will never accept it. Self determination does not mean a settlement imposed by either Britain or America, and no matter who thinks otherwise or who is prepared to agree to it, republicans certainly won't. The Irish have no less a right to freedom than the Iraqi people. Neither should, nor will, accept the occupation of their countries meekly.

Provos' descent into gangsterism

By Malcolm Kerins

Over recent months there has been an upsurge in the activity of the Provisional IRA's so called 'punishment squads' in the South Armagh area. Local republicans have claimed that the PIRA was in the process of cleaning out what they termed 'criminal elements'. These attacks have been largely ignored by the media, and everyone concerned seemed willing to turn a blind eye to these activities. But during one confrontation, in the small village of Culloville, Co. Armagh on the 12th of March, things went badly wrong for a PIRA punishment squad. During an attempt to abduct a man from his car a shoot-out occurred which left 24-year-old Keith Rogers dead. Despite initial statements from Sinn Féin that there was no republican involvement, the PIRA later claimed Keith Rogers as one of its members. Amid accusations and counter-accusations as to who was responsible for the killing, the truth about why he died has slowly come to light.

The truth behind the death of Keith Rogers makes for a sad story, both for his family and also for republicans as a whole, regardless of what organisation they are a part of. What was once one of the most feared and sophisticated guerrilla armies in Europe has slowly degenerated into what can only be described as directionless gang, with its war now against republicans who oppose the Sinn Féin position and anyone who interferes with the now rampant gangsterism around the border area. Keith Rogers, it turns out, didn't die in the struggle to free Ireland from British occupation; he died because republicans were involved in a land dispute. The crux of the matter was the building of two houses on a road that was regularly used for cross-border smuggling; it was no reason for a young man to die.

At Keith Rogers' funeral in Crossmaglen, Brian Keenan told mourners that his killers were a 'band of vermin' who were 'criminals masquerading as republicans', and that the republican movement would soon 'no doubt make their position very clear.' Maybe what Brian Keenan should have called for, if he has any revolutionary ideology left, was an end to the feuding that is plaguing the South Armagh area, and also on those who hold leadership positions within the PIRA to stop using republicanism as a flag of convenience for their lucrative smuggling operations. But then again, the PIRA leadership in South Armagh is an important support base for the Belfast Agreement, and some republican sources have claimed that this support has been bought at a price. Money making operations would continue unim-

peded as long as support for the Belfast Agreement was forthcoming.

Grassroots republicans, many of whom bore the brunt of 30 years of war against the British presence in Ireland, must be asking themselves, Was it all worth it? Hundreds of men and women lost their lives fighting the British occupation, and thousands more found themselves behind the walls of Long Kesh, Portlaoise and various prisons across Britain. Was the price paid by these brave people worth it? It must be frustrating for genuinely committed republicans who want to see the struggle succeed, but instead see

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The only allegiance that any republican should have is to the struggle and to the 32 county socialist republic'

it dragged through the gutter by a failed political strategy and by elements whose greatest love is not Ireland but their bank balance. It's time for genuine republicans who are still part of the Provisional movement to say enough is enough.

But what alternative do republicans have to the Provisional movement? Both Republican Sinn Féin and the Continuity IRA have shown themselves incapable of challenging the dominance of the Provisional leadership. Too caught up with the personality clash between Ruairi Ó Brádaigh and Gerry Adams, and too eager to justify their campaign by paying lip service to the past instead of looking to the future, they have quickly lost their direction. Whilst founded on a sound ideology in 1986, since then, as both a political party and an army, they have failed to mount a credible campaign against British rule in Ireland. As with the PIRA and Sinn Féin, there are many genuine republicans in RSF and the CIRA, but again it is a failure of leadership that has seen them stagnate and remain only a small thorn in the side of the British government. Like the Provisionals, CIRA has also had its problems with corruption. Recent media reports have stated

that a number of its Dublin activists have been stood down because of racketeering, and further reports of a 'guns for hire' situation in Limerick don't help the cause of republicanism.

The last alternative left is the 32 County Sovereignty Movement and the 'Real IRA'. Again, like RSF, the 32 CSM and the RIRA were founded for the right reasons and for a time both organisations seemed to present the only credible resistance to British rule. Maybe it was for this reason that the RIRA was singled out by both the Gardai and RUC. A number of compromised operations, and the increased use of membership charges, seemed to do irreparable damage to the movement. But again it was the failure of a leadership who were incapable of dealing with increased security force pressure. But also like the Provisionals certain elements within the leadership of the RIRA seemed more concerned with the proceeds of criminal activity than rebuilding and strengthening their movement. Volunteers of the RIRA have continued to try to carry out operations against British forces, for which they must be commended, but either faulty equipment or security leaks have caused many of them to find themselves in Maghaberry Prison.

All would seem to be lost, but it's not so. In recent months republicans across the country, some not aligned to any group and others from various organisations, have begun to discuss and debate a way forward for the republican struggle. An encouraging development was the stand taken by RIRA prisoners in Portlaoise Prison in October of 2002. They released a statement calling on the RIRA leadership to stand down; one of the main reasons cited was corruption. It could be said that the republican prisoners in Portlaoise have raised the flag - it's now up to republicans, no matter what group they happen to belong to, to rise up to the challenge and engage with each other on the best way forward for the struggle.

The days of republicans giving their allegiance to any one individual or group must be brought to an end, especially if those individuals are motivated by selfish interests. The only allegiance that any republican should have is to the struggle and to the 32 county socialist republic. No longer should young men and women risk their lives and liberty for movements that show no chance of success, especially when that loyalty has been continually abused by a corrupt few who have a vested interest in seeing partition remain in place.

A world gone mad

By James Burke

Looking at the world today, you could easily be forgiven for thinking that either it or yourself had gone mad. The various political utterances which assault us daily, in both the written media as well as the televised, all add to the illusion that we have at long last all become actors in a Monty Python film. Over this past few months we have seen the ground prepared for, and the actual invasion of, Iraq, under the pretext of getting Saddam's weapons of mass destruction. We were told that it was necessary to kill countless men, women and children because if the 'free world' didn't kill them, then Saddam would. Robin Oakley, CNN's European correspondent, speaking on that television station, and reporting on the European Union's meeting in Athens, told the viewers that the war was intended to 'bring civilisation to Iraq'. While the EU was talking about bringing civilisation to Iraq, looters, with the help of the United States, were stealing 6,000 years of man's civilisation from its museums and burning down its libraries. We were also presented with the spectacle of various politicians, both at home and abroad, condemning Saddam for being an 'evil dictator' who must be got rid of at all costs and irrespective of the number of innocent victims by way of collateral damage. Given the fact that he hadn't attacked anyone in the past ten years, or engaged in any massive suppression of his people during that period either, we must assume that these people are referring to the years before the first Gulf War. But if my memory serves me right, didn't members of the present Irish government, as well as the US and British's ones, go to Iraq to do deals with Saddam during this very period. I thought it was Irish beef exports which enabled Iraq to wage its war with Iran for eight years. I also thought, for some mad reason, that Saddam was only able to gas the Kurds because Donald Rumsfeld helped in that area too.

If examples of the present madness sweeping the world are needed, we do not have to travel far in our own country to find them. Going by a report in the Sunday Times of April 13, it would appear that a Garda is being disciplined for an article he wrote in the Garda Magazine concerning 'human rights' abuses. What made the article all the stranger was that it dealt with a Chinese student being prevented from returning to Ireland. So concerned are some of the Gardai about the matter that they intend to take his case (the garda's) up with the new Human Rights Commission. After

all, if he wants to write about human rights in China, what's the problem? There is, however, something surreal about the words 'human rights' and 'An Garda Siochana' appearing in the same sentence. Pondering this paradox, my confusion was only worsened by the latest outburst from official Garda cheerleaders, the PDs. At the height of the so-called Celtic Tiger, Harney and Co. were telling us that the reason we needed so many immigrants in the country was to power our economic growth. Now we are being told that the Gardai need extra

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powers to deal with a new crime-wave which is being carried out by Mafia gangs entering the country from Eastern Europe. Perhaps, next year, all the problems in the country will have been caused by recent immigrants, and the politicians will urge us to remember the glory days before the land of milk and honey they had built was spoiled by funny-looking foreigners.

This form of madness has even spread to our long suffering six counties. A couple of weeks ago Gerry Adams, speaking on BBC television, told the world that 'we must remain true to our principles'. It was amazing to see him say this with a straight face. He and his fellow leaders in the Provisional movement said that they would love to do a deal with the British but there was a problem. The constitution of the Provisional IRA did not allow them to do it. For some strange reason I had thought that one of the criticisms of Mr. Adams was the fact that he never let a constitution stand in his way before. In fact, he has changed it more

times than one can remember. To this bizarre outburst of revisionism, we can add David Trimble's lecturing us all on democracy. For a number of years now Mr. Trimble and his fellow Unionists have demanded that republicans should embrace the 'democratic process' and renounce armed struggle. Can anyone remember when unionists embraced this process? Since the formation of the six county state, against the will of the vast majority of the Irish people, there never was any democracy in the north, or any democratic process to go with it. No unionist ever got with in an ass's roar of the word democracy, never mind putting it into practice. When we now consider that the RUC and British Intelligence were colluding with loyalist killers to maintain that undemocratic state of affairs, we would be forgiven for taking anything Trimble says with a pinch of salt. It was also very noticeable that, in the House of Commons debate on whether Britain should attack Iraq in an illegal war or not, Trimble and Co. were some of those baying the most for Iraqi blood.

The double standards apparently permeating the world's politics today are either a sign of a new mental illness sweeping the planet, or a more sinister attempt to brainwash us all. Iraq can be attacked, but Israel, which is known to have 'weapons of mass destruction', is not even mentioned. It is wrong to use force to drive out an invader, but all right to use force if the invasion was ten years ago and over and done with. It is all right to abandon what you believe in and sell out what people struggled thirty years for, once you keep telling them that you will stick to your principles no matter what. It probably is a ploy by the political elite to con us all into accepting whatever goes, but I will continue to think that perhaps it is a form of mental illness. The idea that the barbarians are at the gates once again, and that we have learnt nothing since they were last there, scares me even more. Considering that the last time Baghdad was sacked, plundered and its people slaughtered, it was done by Ghenis Khan and his Mongol hordes, I am probably wrong. And as we all know, they had little time for civilisation, the democratic process or peaceful means of settling disputes. I don't imagine that the 'new barbarians' will have much time for them either.

Stevens Inquiry - collusion verified

By Malcolm Kerins

For many years republicans and nationalists have claimed that British Military Intelligence and the RUC were actively colluding with Loyalist murder gangs. But these claims fell on deaf ears in both Dublin and London; after all the British army was a so-called 'peacekeeping force' having the unenviable task of keeping two warring factions apart. At last this myth has finally been destroyed by the publication of an overview of the Stevens' Inquiry report on April 17. It remains to be seen if the Stevens' Inquiry can provide the justice demanded by the relatives of murder victims - it could, as with many inquiries before, just turn out to be another white-wash. With John Stevens' investigation now finished, the minimum demand must be a public inquiry, as the only possible way of finding the full truth about state sponsored murder in Ireland.

Since the early 1970s there have been many allegations of collusion between loyalist paramilitaries and British forces in the six county area. But these allegations were rubbished by state-controlled media both north and south, passed off as mere republican propaganda, despite strong evidence to the contrary. But British military intelligence made a blunder on the 12th February 1989 when they allowed the UDA to murder solicitor Pat Finucane. With such a high profile killing, which seemed to be sanctioned from the highest echelons of the British political system - namely when a former British minister Douglas Hogg stood in the House of Commons only weeks before the killing of Pat Finucane and stated that 'some solicitors were unduly sympathetic to the IRA' - the calls for an inquiry could no longer be ignored, and so in September of 1989 John Stevens was appointed to investigate collusion between the British military and Loyalists.

The fact that it has taken 14 years to compile the Stevens report only highlights the obstructionist tactics used by both the political and military establishments in Britain. John Stevens has said himself that his investigation has been 'wilfully obstructed and misled'. The army's Force Research Unit and RUC Special Branch were singled out for particularly harsh criticism. He cited cases where informers were allowed, by their RUC and Army handlers, 'to operate without effective control and to participate in terrorist crimes'. Also, a security breach within the British Army conveniently caused the planned arrest of Brian Nelson, an army agent who passed intelligence information about Pat Finucane and others to the UDA, to be postponed. The

fire at the Stevens Inquiry incident room before another arrest was in Stevens' words, 'a deliberate act of arson'. These revelations only highlight the fact that the British occupation of the six counties is fundamentally illegal, and the only way that the British establishment could maintain that occupation was by waging a war against the nationalist and republican people of the six counties, using loyalist murder gangs as a proxy army, so that the republican struggle could be passed off as sectarian warfare



Pat Finucane - murdered by British agents

with Britain 'unfortunately' caught in the middle.

With Britain's 'Irish Policy' in the dock, it's hard to foresee how the British establishment can afford to allow a public inquiry to take place, and even with the release of this overview report there has been some controversy. Why was it that the publication was delayed until one day after the British parliament had begun a recess? Also, at the release of the report, in the Europa Hotel Belfast, the families of some victims of controversial killings were barred from the press conference; one woman was even dragged away by the RUC. Why was the report only 20 pages long while the full, and private, version runs to 3,000 pages, and why was it that John Stevens refused to meet with the Relatives for Justice campaign? Hardly a promising start to a process that is supposed to be striving for the truth.

Whilst any exposing of collusion has to be welcomed, it's not enough that only army and RUC operatives are held accountable, even if they ever are. To date some 57 files have been sent to the DPP for consideration. While Stevens has declined to say that collusion was institutionalised, which beggars belief, the people who need to be exposed and held accountable are the very people who formulated and ordered the col-

lusion to take place. At what level was the decision to murder innocent civilians and republican activists taken? Did Margaret Thatcher know of, or sanction the killing of Pat Finucane? Was John Major part of the attempt to cover-up state sponsored killings? And, more recently, did Tony Blair know in advance of the killing of William Stobie, the only person to be charged in connection with the murder of Pat Finucane? A man who was also a British agent, and probably someone who knew too much.

Collusion could very well be, and probably is, continuing to this very day, something that the Stevens Inquiry team are not tasked with investigating. All the inquiry can do is recommend changes in the operation and structure of the RUC. In fact, 21 recommendations have been made to chief Constable Hugh Orde and the policing board. All address shortcomings within the RUC such as the sharing of information between Special Branch and investigating officers, and proper guidelines on the use of informants. All seems well with the world, but sadly the truth is probably somewhat different. Whilst there have been some cosmetic changes to the RUC, such as a name change and new uniforms to make the police more 'community friendly', the recommendations made fail to address the issue of continued British army intelligence and MI5 operations in Ireland. The police could very well be reformed with the help of the nationalist SDLP and former republicans in Sinn Féin, but it means nothing if the covert operations, once undertaken by the RUC, are now carried out by the intelligence services. In fact it could easily make the situation much worse instead of better because of the complete lack of transparency that envelops the intelligence community.

Politicians both North and South have been quick to call for an independent inquiry. Even the Dublin government has been forced to break its usual uncritical view of the British presence in Ireland and jump on the collusion bandwagon. But maybe the best way of finally establishing what the truth behind Britain's dirty war is would be some kind of United Nations inquiry, where all acts of collusion could be investigated, from the murder of Pat Finucane to the Dublin and Monaghan bombings. Wouldn't it be a fitting sight to see members of the British political and military establishments squirm as they stand in the dock of the International Criminal Court? It would be a sight too good to be true.

Sinn Féin: A catalogue of failures

By Liam Sheridan

As the Provisionals lock themselves into a game of stalemate chess in an effort to see how many millimetres they can haggle the Unionists into ceding, true Republicans will continue to organise resistance to British rule in their communities and throughout the country. In every generation there will be a group of men and women who believe that to take up arms against the British and their imperialist agents (in whatever form or guise they take) is the only realistic road to the creation of a sovereign socialist republic.

Adams and his cohorts have made a choice. Their choice is to 'work' the system from within in an effort to dismantle it. But how often have we seen this dilution of politics before. To all intents and purposes we see Sinn Féin's place in the Stormont executive as them conjoining with the other middle-of-the-road parties to administer British rule over the six counties. The irony of this whole chapter in Irish history for the Provisional movement is that the Assembly they have slithered up to is a toothless sectarian-based talking shop with little or no actual power.

With the Provisional movement's determination to lurch on with the current so-called 'peace process' becoming increasingly evident, we must ask ourselves who is setting the agenda and what exactly the outcome of these endless deliberations will be.

It appears quite evident that Sinn Féin is being led a merry dance in this, the latest instalment of the GFA. Having the agenda set by Trimble's penchant for walk-outs does not really seem to bother Messers Adams and McGuinness, nor does the fact that (and all intelligent observers agree) this partitionist assembly constituted on sectarian lines will never be able to sustain itself. It is worth noting that whenever the Sinn Féin hierarchy is presented with the criticism that they are administering British rule from a partitionist assembly they often ask, 'What is your alternative?' Not to administer British rule over the Six Counties should be answer enough for them.

The Provisional movement still maintains a stranglehold on many communities here in the six counties. As it edges ever closer to joining the policing boards we may see the two corrupt entities that attempt to police our communities being replaced by just one - a re-titled RUC with Sinn Féin backing. Moreover, the belligerent attitude displayed towards those of us who disagree is evidence of the place the

Provisionals believe they still hold in our communities.

The stepping stone argument is one that has been trotted out continually over the past few years - The Good Friday Agreement is only a 'stepping stone' to a united Ireland and all that it entails. However, the lessons that history has taught us speak volumes on this subject and the evidence is plain for all to see - 'stepping stone' is the exact term used by Collins to describe the Treaty signed in London and



Who remembers the old days? SF are now on the verge of backing the 'reformed' RUC

ratified by the Dáil in January 1922. Furthermore this argument intrinsically contravenes the nature of Republicanism in that it neuters any nature of revolutionary struggle and allows a movement only to stagger from one bargaining table to the next ceding ground as you go. Our aim as Republicans has never been the stepping stone extension of the Twenty-six over the Six but a revolutionary Thirty-two, with no semblance or residue of that insidious evil that is Imperialist Capitalism - an evil which cripples all the people on this island.

With the promise of demilitarisation the Provos go running back to their electorate claiming they are making inroads, but the reality of this 'demilitarisation' is that it will only be a token gesture to placate the Sinn Féin electorate. In truth, this is the continuation of a policy pursued by successive British governments - Normalisation. If the British government can reduce troop levels

and remove controversial watch-towers to placate the greener elements of the Sinn Féin electorate, yet still continue with its implementation of draconian legislation designed to persecute republicans and extend further its low-intensity security operations, ultimately, it can only be seen as a consolidation of the British position in the Six Counties.

In places such as Omagh or Lurgan on any given day (or every given day) you will encounter British army patrols and checkpoints; this is not demilitarisation. Moreover, the only acceptable reduction in troop levels is a complete withdrawal of all British troops from the island of Ireland and a systematic dismantling of the sectarian security force which has only one purpose - to uphold the sectarian basis of a falsified British statelet. What we see in the Six Counties today is not peace, it's simply war on a less obvious level in a heavily militarised state still rife with collusion, death squads, and a full British army presence.

In the process of 'acts of completion' the Provisional movement will surely have to come up with some form of public decommissioning. I wonder if they will travel round Belfast and remove all the 'Not one bullet, not one ounce' slogans that they had Ógra Shinn Féin so industriously paint up. Their catalogue of reversals is almost complete:

Stormont;
Decommissioning; and soon Policing.

So now in March as we've seen many of the larger political parties roll over on the White House lawn to have their bellies tickled by American Dollars let us remember Terence McSwiney's assertion: 'In matters of principle there can be no compromise'. This is an adage that true Republicans will hold firm to in these difficult times.

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FORUM MAGAZINE

'Independence' in a new age of empire

coalition n. the cooperation between two thieves who have their hands so deep in each others pockets that they cannot rob a third person separately.

(Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*)

As Forum Magazine goes to press, the US-UK 'coalition' is claiming victory in Iraq. Baghdad and Basra have fallen; Mosul and Kirkuk are (temporarily at least) in Kurdish hands. The result, we are told, is a vindication of US military strategy; that we were initially promised a six-day war has already been conveniently forgotten. In reality, the tenacity of the Iraqi resistance was as much a surprise to the Americans as it was to the Iraqi regime itself. It will be many months before we learn the true extent of the carnage visited on the Iraqi people to secure their 'freedom'. What is already clear, however, is that many thousands of ordinary Iraqis have given their lives in what they surely knew was a hopeless defence of their homeland. Their courage should be saluted.

The American victory, of course, should surprise nobody. The question was never *could* the Americans invade Iraq, but *should* they. That question is now academic, but the implications of the American victory, for both the Iraqi people and for the international order, remain to be resolved. All that can be said with certainty is that we are entering a new era in world history - the age of the nation state is over, the age of empire has returned.

We've been here before of course. Prior to 1914, most of the world's population was ruled by a handful of aging empires. The carnage of World War I changed all that. The hideous expense of industrial warfare proved too much for a system already rotten to the core. Three great empires - the Russian, the Austro-Hungarian and the Ottoman - fell, and one more - the British - was fatally wounded. The world of the nation state was born, with the Irish one of the first oppressed peoples to claim statehood. The developing Cold War provided both space and opportunity for others to follow suit, and nation after nation secured its independence. Imperialism did not disappear, of course. The Soviet regime existed as a bizarre throwback to earlier times, while the Americans perfected the art of 'imperialism without empire'.

The fall of the Soviet Union marked an equally dramatic sea change in the political landscape, although its effects are only now becoming clear. Soviet power had acted as a brake on American imperialism, providing support for nationalist governments across the globe. China, Cuba, Vietnam and Nicaragua, among many others, all benefited at one time or another from Soviet protection.

Today, with the Soviet Union gone, American hegemony is unchallenged, and, for the time being at least, unchallengeable. This state of affairs will not last. China and India, with their vast

populations and resources, along with their growing nuclear arsenals, are superpowers of the future. The US elite is well aware of this, and current US policy can be interpreted as a last minute grab for power and resources - America positioning itself for the struggle ahead. This can be seen most clearly along China's eastern border, where the 'War on Terror' has enabled the Americans to install Mohammed Karzi - a former CIA 'asset' - as president of Afghanistan, as well as establishing military bases in a host of Central Asian dictatorships.

The conquest of Iraq, with its enormous oil reserves, forms part of the same strategic manoeuvring.

Let no one be under any illusion as to the motivation behind this conflict. Many of the most influential figures in the US government - including Vice-President Cheney and Secretary of Defence Rumsfeld - are founder members of the Project for the New American Century, a right-wing think-tank that, in 1998, urged President Clinton to invade Iraq to secure US interests in the region. With the installation of ex-general Jay Garner as US Proconsul, their policies

are reaching fulfilment. Already, the US is preparing to expand its control of the region. Both Syria and Iran have been threatened, and few doubt that another war is imminent.

The implications of this US expansionism are becoming clear. A recent statement from the North Korean foreign ministry noted that 'The Iraqi war shows that to allow disarmament through inspections does not help avert a war, but rather sparks it'. 'Only a tremendous military deterrent force' can safeguard any meaningful form of independence. North Korea is practicing what it preaches, and, along with Iran, is investing heavily in a nuclear weapons program. As the case of Iraq shows, only nuclear weapons can provide a serious deterrent against American aggression.

So, where does all this leave Ireland and Irish 'independence'? Ireland is incapable of defending itself - its independence is therefore meaningless. We are independent only to the extent that nobody wishes to invade us, and our economic dependence on US companies makes a mockery of our democratic process. Republicans have long resisted the notion of European integration, rightly so given the anti-democratic institutions of the current EU. This may have to change. In a world where even large nations such as France and Germany find it difficult to pursue independent policies, the only genuine 'independence' Ireland can have may be as part of a radically overhauled and genuinely democratic European federation.

Many will disagree, and there are of course alternatives. Forum Magazine exists as a venue for debate, and a serious debate among republicans on this issue is urgently needed. All contributions are welcome.



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Liberation - American style

Portlaoise POW Liam Grogan analyses the aftermath of America's latest imperial adventure

It wasn't quite the cake-walk many predicted. The American military, political and media leaders, along with their British allies, expected that the Iraqi army would fail to fight and that the Saddam Hussein regime would implode within a couple of days. In the event there was determined resistance almost everywhere.

But determination counts for little against an enemy whose planes can drop tonnes of explosives in one attack, whose ships can fire hundreds of cruise missiles in a single night, whose air force completely controls the skies and whose army has developed the most sophisticated means in the world for killing people. And this against an opponent devastated by an eight year war with Iran that killed one million people, by the first Gulf war that killed thousands more and by twelve years of murderous sanctions that meant it was often impossible to import vital medicines never mind modern military hardware. It was a slaughter. What was surprising was not that so many Iraqi soldiers surrendered but that, against such overwhelming odds, so many fought so bravely.

People should not be surprised that many Iraqi civilians - particularly among the Shia community - welcomed the arrival of American and British soldiers. Iraqis suffered dreadfully under the monstrous regime of Saddam Hussein and the one benefit of the American invasion is that his rule is now at an end. But if the Americans mistake joy at Hussein's downfall for joy at American occupation they may well pay a price for this miscalculation in the months ahead.

Parallels can be drawn with Belfast in 1969 when many Catholics under siege from sectarian pogroms initially welcomed the British army. And like Belfast, the mood in Baghdad will change too. The reason for this is simple: both invasions were built on a lie. In the six counties, the lie was that the British army was there to 'defend' Catholic areas. When it quickly became apparent that the truth was somewhat different the people responded and thirty years of war followed. Similarly, in Baghdad, the lie is that the Americans and British are there to 'liberate' the Iraqi people. Anyone with even the most rudimentary grasp of American foreign policy over the past several decades realises that liberation is a word often used but seldom meant.

Other American 'liberations'

In the 1960s, Americans went in to Vietnam to 'liberate' the Vietnamese. In the subsequent war, including the spillover into Cambodia and Laos, several million were indeed 'liberated' by the Americans. Liberated from their lives, that is. They were murdered. In Indonesia, another million people were 'liberated' when President Suharto, with American support, slaughtered students, trade unionists and communists. In the 1970s and 80s, right-wing death squads were 'liberating' hundreds of thousands of poor people in Central America at the behest of successive American governments. And let's not forget Chile where the democratically elected President Salvador Allende was overthrown and killed by the US-supported General Pinochet. So much for American champi-

oning of democracy. Thousands of Chileans were subsequently 'liberated'. We may never know exactly how many Iraqis have been liberated/killed over the past decade or so but an estimate based on UN figures and including those killed in the last Gulf War, plus those killed as a result of sanctions and the thousands killed in this latest war would put the figure conservatively at over one million.

Every invader in history has claimed to be either liberating someone or spreading civilisation as they butcher and slaughter their way across countries. For those amnesiacs who still think the Americans and British are acting altruistically, a quick reminder of US involvement in Iraq over the past twenty years should dispel such notions.

After the 1979 Iranian Islamic revolution overthrew the US-backed Shah, Iran became America's biggest foe in the Middle East. When, in 1980, Saddam Hussein invaded Iran the US saw a chance for gaining revenge. In the beginning, Iraq pushed the numerically superior but poorly equipped Iranians further and further back. However, the Iranians regrouped and by 1983 had actually forced the Iraqi army onto the defensive. The city of Basra was in danger of falling and the long-term prospects for Baghdad itself did not look good. Iraq needed something special and it needed it fast.

Western companies - American, British, German and French - with the approval of their governments duly obliged and began selling components for chemical weapons to Iraq.

In and around the same time, then President Reagan sent a special envoy to Baghdad to further improve relations with the Saddam Hussein regime. That envoy was Donald Rumsfeld, the present US Secretary of Defence. On the day in 1984 when the United Nations issued a report (the US State Department had already issued a similar one) proving Iraq was using chemical weapons - weapons of mass destruction - against Iranian troops, Rumsfeld was meeting Tariq Aziz, Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister, in Baghdad. Rumsfeld brought with him a pair of cowboy boots with gold spurs - a gift from Reagan to Hussein.

The inescapable truth of all this is that on the very days when Saddam Hussein's regime was at its most brutal and vicious, the American government was only too willing to meet and offer it assistance. In some cases - such as Donald Rumsfeld's - the same people who colluded with Saddam Hussein have now been telling us that Hussein is the biggest threat to world security since Hitler. America is occupying Iraq for a variety of reasons - oil being the most obvious - but none of these have anything to do with making the world a better place.

Iraq's future prospects

What are the prospects for the Iraqi people? In a perfect example of good old-fashioned colonialism, the country will be governed, in the short-term, by a retired US General, Jay Garner, which Oxfam has described as a 'worst case scenario'. And if history is anything to go by (Italy, Germany, Japan and other countries after World War



Iraq will take decades to recover from its 'liberation'

II) America will put back into power the middle-leadership of the Ba'ath party - Saddam Hussein's thugs who did most of the actual day-to-day oppressing and brutalising. The rationale for this is simple: America wants to assert control over Iraq's population as quickly as possible and who is better placed to achieve this than those thugs who've already made a career out of it?

Invaders invariably put some native-born puppet into power in order to give their occupying regime a semblance of legitimacy. Hitler used Petain in France. Bush will use Ahmed Chalabi in Iraq. The Americans conveniently ignore the fact that Chalabi is wanted by the authorities in Jordan over a multi-million dollar fraud. This lack of concern among the Bush administration for those with a dodgy financial background is hardly surprising given the number of similar scandals that have hit the US government in recent years.

It is certain that Iraq's vast oil wealth will not be used for the benefit of its people. Naturally, there will be token gestures. Expect to see pictures of some school or hospital being built, but like the arrival of the pitiful amount of aid on the ship, the Sir Gallahad, these will be nothing more than gimmicks that fail to cover a fraction of Iraq's needs. The real money will be going to the mainly American and British companies who will get awarded massive reconstruction contracts and who will also get their hands on Iraq's oil. As an American official said, 'Why the hell should the French and Germans be rewarded when we did all the fighting?'

The UN, in the same way that Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany effectively eviscerated the League of Nations, has been destroyed by US unilateralism

and despite assurances to the contrary the UN will play no meaningful role in the future of Iraq (or the rest of the world for that matter). Its only job will be to pick up the bill for much of the enormous humanitarian costs. The American government are happy to spend billions on cruise missiles and cluster bombs, less willing to spend money on food and medicine. As for the Iraqi people, in time, they may even be allowed to vote for their new leader. Will it be a free election though? Of course not. Whoever the Americans propose will win, simply because of the carrot and stick power they now possess. Besides the Iraqi people know the penalty to be paid for having a leader who has fallen foul of Washington.

As for the rest of the Arab world - they have even more to fear. For the Palestinians, American-made bombs and bullets will continue to kill their young for many more years to come. And for people in other Middle-Eastern countries, the buildings have barely stopped smouldering in Baghdad and the Americans are already sabre-rattling about the next war. Will it be Syria? Iran? Further afield to North Korea? Time will tell but it seems certain that the US will once again soon be marching over the borders of another country in order to 'liberate' its people.

There has been much talk by commentators that America is in danger of winning the war and losing the peace. This misses a crucial fact. There will be no peace. America is gearing itself up for permanent war. They don't care whether the Arab street is incensed by pictures of massacred civilians in Kabul, Baghdad or Gaza. They don't care because Arab regimes faced with the awesome military capability of the US are impotent to do anything about it. Perhaps the US government should listen to President Mubarak of Egypt - an American ally - who has warned that the war on Iraq will create 100 new bin Ladens. While the Americans can easily win a

war against another state and another army, can it seal its borders to well-financed, well-motivated, well-educated young Arabs who are willing to fly planes into its buildings? The American government may be able to beef up security at its airports but there are limitless other methods of killing large numbers of people (as America itself has shown the world). America cannot possibly protect itself from all of these threats. If the American government genuinely wants to stop people attacking its country it would be best advised to stop treating the rest of the world like a colonial possession.

American arrogance

Such is the extent of the arrogance and cockiness of the American elite that they barely even bother to hide their intentions anymore. Imperialism, long a dirty word with its evocation of a sordid past, is now acceptable again. The white man's burden of the twenty-first century is to rid the world of fanatical Islam. And who are those leading the charge? Fanatical Christians led by George W. Bush.

In a recent article reprinted in The Guardian, James Woolsey, director of the CIA between 1993-95, and the man tipped as Iraq's new Information Minister, outlined his hellish vision of the new world order. We are in the midst of World War Four, he tells us (WWIII was the Cold War). 'It may last decades,' he goes on to warn. 'The terror war is not going to go away until we change the face of the Middle East'. The message is clear: Iraq is only the beginning.

The current American administration represents the single biggest threat to international peace and development. But George W. Bush is not only waging war on the Arab world, he is waging a war at home, on the poor, the sick, the elderly, the most vulnerable sections of American society. He has slashed expenditure on health, education, public housing, childcare provision, environmental controls and a host of other services while giving the wealthiest Americans their biggest tax cuts in history. Americans are also beginning to realise that their civil liberties, supposedly enshrined in the constitution, are increasingly under attack. One can only hope that next year enough Americans wake up to this and vote him out. His replacement, no matter how bad, cannot possibly do as much damage as this man has done in only two years.

But of course the American empire is much bigger than George W. Bush. Longer term, people - particularly the American people - are going to have to reclaim the democratic process and take it back from the big-business interests that currently have their stranglehold on it and whose actions are holding the world to ransom. The American empire's overwhelming economic and military superiority makes this the most daunting of tasks but one only needs to look at history to see similar examples of supposedly unbeatable empires - Britain in the nineteenth century, Germany in the summer of 1940 - to have renewed hope. All empires eventually collapse. So too will America's. Nothing less is contemplable.



Old friends : US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld brokered arms deals with Saddam in the mid-1980s

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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