

Troops Out

MAGAZINE OF THE TROOPS OUT MOVEMENT.

£1

Inside...

- Exclusive Martin McGuinness Interview
- Security Factsheet
- Prison Conditions Update
- Commemorating the Ceasefire

Vol 18 No. 4 Autumn 1995

British Brutality in Ireland Today



Peace Talks Now!

Troops Out Movement

The **Troops Out Movement** is made up of people who believe that the cause of the 'Troubles' in the north of Ireland is the continuing British presence there, both military and political. We believe that British troops are in Ireland not as a peacekeeping force, but in order to maintain British rule. Their presence in Ireland is the most serious obstacle to any progress towards peace. We have been working as an organisation for immediate British withdrawal since the early 1970s. We have numerous branches working locally in whatever way circumstances allow. Membership or affiliation is open to any individual or group that supports our demands.

- **Troops Out Now!**
- **Self Determination for the Irish people as a whole**

The **Troops Out Movement** is an open, democratic organisation that is not aligned with any political party or faction. Policy and strategy are determined by the annual conference at which all members can vote. The movement is co-ordinated regionally by elected representatives, and nationally by the Steering Committee, elected at annual conference.

The **Troops Out Movement** office in London provides support and information to members and branches; distributes books, videos, magazines, pamphlets and papers. It is open every weekday from 12:30 to 5:30pm (British time).

We need your support in challenging media censorship, anti-Irish racism, state violence and any of the other issues that arise from the British occupation of Ireland.

The cost of annual membership (in Britain) is:

- Unwaged: £3 (£13 including *Troops Out*).
- Waged: £12 (£21 including *Troops Out*).
- High waged: £20 (£28 including *Troops Out*).

The cost of annual supporting membership (outside Britain) is:

- Europe: £12 (£27 including *Troops Out*).
- World: £12 (£32 including *Troops Out*).

Troops Out is produced by the Magazine Group of the Troops Out Movement. Readers' views, articles and letters are always welcome, though we cannot guarantee to publish everything we receive.

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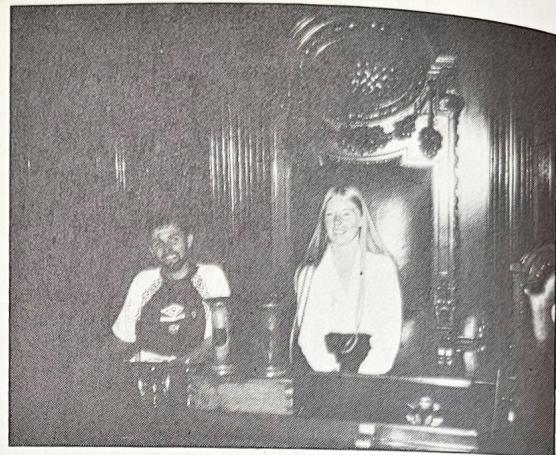
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"Is this microphone on?" - Sinn Féin councillor Annie Armstrong and Danny Power from the British Desk rehearsing for their future roles as Lord Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Belfast City Council.

Photo: Jill Baker

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Signed articles represent the views of the author, not necessarily the views of the Troops Out Movement.

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TOM on Labour on Ireland

Comment

That you can judge a British socialist by their attitude to Ireland was again proved at this year's Labour Party conference in Brighton. Labour's NEC unanimously endorsed the composite motion which reaffirmed existing policy in favour of a united Ireland by the consent of its people, and also declared that a Labour government should act as "persuaders for a balanced constitutional settlement". It also pledged support for all-party talks. Yet before the debate had even taken place, Blair's spin-doctors were clarifying the leadership's position, to mesh it with the (current) position of the British government. By the time Mo Mowlam had addressed conference, the Tory press were noting with approval that "Mowlam stands firm over IRA weapons". Those papers such as the Telegraph which noted that the Labour leadership line on weapons' surrender fell short of an explicit precondition for talks concluded that this was merely a getout in case the Tories backed down on the issue.

More than anything it is this senseless shadowing of every twist and turn of Tory policy which exposes the Labour leadership of being bereft of both ideas and principle on Ireland. Given the hole that Major has dug for himself over IRA weapons' surrender, it seems that New Labour would rather see the cease-fire collapse than advance a single independent positive proposal for breaking the logjam. This was in stark contrast to the conference speech by South Africa's Deputy President, Thabo Mbeki. What could be more damning for Labour's credibility than a South African leader raising more positive proposals regarding the peace process in Ireland in one speech than Labour have been able to come up with in over a year?

As we go to press, the Tories are holding their own conference. One wonders what daft and dangerous ideas they will generate on the peace process. You cannot also help but wonder to which of those Tony Blair will sign up New Labour. If this cosy bi-partisan cooperation is to be stopped, then it will be because the electorate in Britain are shown to be against playing war-games with the peace process. New Labour should realise that losing the peace is no vote-winner.

Without Preconditions

As part of the TOM delegation to Belfast last August, Mary Pearson addressed the annual internment commemoration rally on behalf of the Troops Out Movement. This is the message she took to Belfast.

I'd like to bring the greetings of the Troops Out Movement to the struggling people of the north of Ireland. We extend our greetings, our congratulations and our admiration for you in your struggle. I also bring the greetings of the Troops Out Movement to all the political prisoners in the north of Ireland, and also extend our greetings to the political prisoners and their families who are in England. I would like to say to the families of the prisoners incarcerated in England that our homes are your homes - you are always welcome with us.

Since the ceasefire, people in England have said to us "why do you carry on with the Troops Out Movement?" We have to say there is no peace in the north of Ireland, only ceasefires. There will be no peace until the root cause of all the violence here is removed, and the root cause of all the violence is the British presence.

There will be no peace in Ireland until the Irish people have the right to determine their own future, free from British interference. Yesterday's events in the Ormeau Road and Derry proved this. The perpetrators of the violence may have had a different uniform from the army, but they are still British thugs.

Coming over here these last few days, we have noticed the difference of no uniformed soldiers patrolling the streets, but we have noticed the army helicopters in your skies and the patrols of your streets by the armoured vehicles. And the RUC stations we passed were hardly an example of community policing.

Since the 31st of August last year we have seen, on the part of the republican and nationalist communities, total commitment to peace. We have seen the British government behave like a stubborn mule, refusing to go forward on the issues of either talks or prisoners. We see John Major behaving like a little boy who's losing the cricket match and so takes his bat home.

The Troops Out Movement and other activists in England, Scotland and Wales have a responsibility to put pressure on the British government to move forward. Our conference decided to focus our work this year on the demand for peace in Ireland through British withdrawal. Part of that campaign is to demand all-party peace talks, without preconditions.

The phrase 'without preconditions' is what determines whether people are really committed to peace. The government should learn from its own history, which shows that people struggling for freedom are not going to be subjugated by demands for preconditions. In England, Scotland and Wales, we are asking the people to petition the government for genuine all-party peace talks and to recognise that the Irish people as a whole can decide the country's future.

For peace in Ireland, Get Britain Out!

TOM Security Factsheet

Now that we are into the second year of the IRA and loyalist paramilitary cease-fires, many of those who campaign around Ireland have dismissed any thought of police and/or security forces harassment. As the article in the last issue demonstrated though, harassment by the security forces continues to be experienced by Ireland activists, and it may help to bear the following in mind.

Harassment may take different forms: you may believe your telephone is tapped; you are being followed, etc. If this is the case, ensure that you keep a record of what is happening and approach a solicitor so that your treatment is documented independently.

If someone approaches you in the street, or calls at your home, and asks questions specifically about your political activities, they are likely to be part of the security forces. Remember the following:

- Ask for some identification, and take a note of it if possible.
- You don't have to answer questions. Whilst your "right to silence" has been removed, this doesn't generally apply until you have been arrested and cautioned.
- The police have no power to detain someone short of arrest, or to detain someone "to help with their enquiries".
- If the police want to question you, they can arrest you. They must have reasonable grounds for suspecting you of committing or being about to commit an offence in order to arrest you (otherwise they lay themselves open to a claim for false imprisonment).

- Once you are arrested, at least you will have the (albeit limited) protection of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.
- The police do have the power to stop you to search for stolen or prohibited articles, but again they must have "reasonable grounds" to believe that they will find stolen/prohibited articles on you.
- After the incident, go to see a solicitor who can document what has happened to you and who can, if you wish, write to the police about the harassment.
- Let the TOM office know what has happened. (We will not publicise any incident without your agreement).

If you do not co-operate with the police, it is unlikely that they will arrest you - they are merely trying to gather information, and it is not worth their leaving themselves open to a civil claim by arresting you. There is always the possibility of this, though, and it may be advisable to familiarise yourself with the telephone number of a solicitor who deals with "political" cases.

In Memory of Clare Connor

In July this year Clare Connor died after a brave fight against cancer. Clare was a very active member of Women and Ireland and a champion of the right for the people of Ireland to determine their own lives and for British withdrawal. She was renowned for talking about the conflict in Ireland at every opportunity even though it was sometimes difficult and unpopular.

Clare was supportive and encouraging to women who wanted to go on the delegation to Ireland and kept the struggle going even when there was little support around her. She gave her time and energy organising speaking tours with women from Ireland and was loved and respected both in Ireland and in Britain.

Her sense of humour and kindness, her energy and spirit, her fearlessness in speaking out against injustice, are deeply missed.

Clare, your light shines on. Tiofaidh Ár Lá.

CAROL BIGGS

Martin McGuinness Interview



Martin McGuinness speaks on the cease-fire anniversary Photo: Sass Tuffin

On the first anniversary of the IRA cease-fire, Sinn Féin Ard Chomhairle member Martin McGuinness spoke to us about the current state of the peace process.

TOM: What do you think about Britain's latest attempt to stall the peace process with its talk of international commissions to oversee decommissioning.

MM: Well, our attitude to the international commission, and of course we have yet to get clarification as to whether or not it is actually going to happen, is that we believe any attempt by the British government to use the international commission as a device to secure an IRA surrender is doomed to failure before it even begins.

TOM: What do you think about James Molyneaux's resignation?

MM: Well our position on that is that that is more a matter for the Ulster Unionist Party than it is for ourselves, but of course there would be an air of anticipation that whatever leader is selected as the new leader of the Ulster Unionist Party would adopt a much more imaginative approach to the peace process than Mr Molyneaux did.

TOM: What do you think about Britain's recent announcement that it intends to restore fifty per cent remission to political prisoners?

MM: It was an insult to our intelligence. All they're basically doing is restoring a measure which they had taken away some six years ago. In fact, we have analysed it, and it means - number one - it won't come into effect until next year, and - number two - when it does, in the first year only twenty five or thirty prisoners will be released. So it's totally unacceptable.

TOM: Why do you think that Britain has refused even to transfer prisoners back to Ireland?

MM: Well, it has been a common belief within republican circles and nationalist circles that the British government WILL attempt to use the prisoners as political hostages. That has always been the case, and I think that the particular vindictive and humiliating treatment of Irish prisoners, particularly in Britain, has actually exposed the British government throughout the civilised world as a government which is prepared to persecute defenceless prisoners.

TOM: Could you comment on the treatment of Michael O'Brien and especially Patrick Kelly who are currently on the blanket protest?

MM: Well, obviously at this time all our thoughts are with those prisoners who are suffering as a result of their vindictive treatment by the British Home Office, and of course our particular thoughts are with Michael O'Brien on the dirty protest and Patrick Kelly who obviously is very seriously ill. Our attitude to political prisoners is very straightforward: we believe all of them should be released. The British government released Lee Clegg. One out - all out.

TOM: Could you also please comment on Michael McCartney, Tony McNeil and Paddy Walls who are now on their third week of hunger strike in Portlaoise gaol?

MM: Well, Sinn Féin fully supports the equality demand of those prisoners. We recognise that there is an imbalance in the treatment between IRA prisoners and INLA prisoners. We believe that is totally wrong, and we believe that the Dublin government should change its policy. [Editor's note: the hunger strike in Portlaoise ended on August 31st. See One Day at Time].

TOM: How can the people of Britain best assist the peace process?

MM: By continuing to be interested in the process; by coming along to rallies such as we've seen tonight - a very successful rally; and by continuing to exert pressure, particularly on the British Labour Party, to take a more proactive position in relation to the peace process.

MARTIN MCGUINNESS
INTERVIEWER: JILL BAKER

The Background to Saoirse

Michael Brown is a member of the national Saoirse committee in Ireland, and a member of the Sinn Féin POW department. In this article he writes about the background to, and the aims of, the Saoirse campaign.

The Saoirse Campaign was Launched

The idea that political prisoners should be released as part of an ongoing peace process was first mooted last September 1st by Gerry Adams at a Sinn Féin press conference in Dublin. A short while after that, the Saoirse campaign was launched. The thrust behind the campaign at that time came from former prisoners and relatives of serving prisoners, and the argument was quite simple. What we said was that in order to enhance the peace process, people that were in gaol for no reason other than the conflict must be released. Prisoners are a legacy of war and before we can look to the future we have to address all legacies of war. For republicans, it is inconceivable that this peace process can be advanced to the point of a permanent settlement unless the issue of prisoners has been addressed. So it is against that background that the Saoirse campaign was launched. At that time - just before Christmas last year - things got under way in this country [Ireland]. Now there are Saoirse committees in all major centres in Britain and Ireland, and the campaign certainly has picked up quite dramatically. Traditionally we have found that the issue of prisoners is an emotive issue, and one for which we can draw support from beyond the republican community. There's a lot of goodwill for it.

The Green Ribbon

The green ribbon, as the symbol of Saoirse, is certainly very useful. When you launch any new campaign, you want to let people know that it's there. The green ribbon was just a simple idea that somebody came up with, and we were actually surprised at the way it took off. I wouldn't say it was central to the campaign but it was initially the first couple of months we were wearing green ribbons, and people were coming up to us, awareness, and asking what they were for.

Distractions and Side-Issues

On the subject of the transfer of prisoners from Britain back to Ireland, if we get into the business of accepting that there will be no prisoner releases in the short term we would be sending a message to the British government that we're prepared to compromise, and there is no room for compromise here. The issue of repatriation is a side-issue. It is something we have campaigned for for the best part of twenty years. Legislation has been passed now ratifying the European Convention on the Transfer of Sentenced Prisoners, so within a couple of months, the facility will exist to allow the transfer of prisoners from Britain to the 26 counties. So that's there. That's not a Saoirse demand. We have to stick to the ultimate demand, the release of prisoners.

The same applies to prison conditions, closed visits, and so on. We recognise that the British government would like us to bog ourselves down on prison issues and nothing else. As far as they are concerned, problems arising around prisoners are problems that they can contain quite easily. The difficulty for the British government is that what they are doing at the moment is being done against the background of the peace process. The best and most effective weapon in our arsenal at the moment is publicity, because we can point to the fact that there's blatant evidence that the British government have worsened the situation in English gaols since the 31st of August last year. They are coming under international pressure to resolve this. The belatedness of the transfers that have taken place show that the British government has no interest in transferring prisoners, but when the pressure reached the point where it was too great to withstand they have had to move. So I think we're going to have to keep doing what we're doing at the moment. It is inconceivable to most people that, given the international peace process, the British government should deliberately worsen conditions for prisoners at a time when the rest of the world is telling them that prisoners have to be released.

Political Prisoners Must Be Released

Our prisoners are political prisoners. I think that the British government sow the line to the media - and they're still sticking to it - that there are no political prisoners in British gaols. The rest of the world accepts that that's not true, that British gaols are full of political prisoners, that British gaols in Ireland are full of political prisoners. Those prisoners must be released.

All Political Prisoners

And prisoners across the board will have to be released, not merely republican prisoners. We don't really focus on loyalist prisoners - we have a responsibility to republican prisoners - but we accept that loyalist

prisoners will have to be released. Our argument is that in order to advance the peace process *all* political prisoners are going to have to be released.

Take, for instance, Michael Stone. It's difficult for me to equate the murder of three mourners at a funeral with a political action, but if the loyalist community are holding these people up as political prisoners it's not to anybody's advantage for people like ourselves to be arguing with them. They will identify their own political prisoners, and we have to accept that these people will be released.

It has to be all-embracing. We accepted that Lee Clegg was going to have to be released. But the British government were warned that no one group of prisoners can be released in isolation of a movement toward the general release of other prisoners. The British government ignored that. It was very dangerous because it had the effect of increasing tension. I think the reaction to Clegg's release in nationalist parts of this country was an example of just how things could easily get out of control, because we were just ignored.

The Best Opportunity For Peace in Ireland in 75 Years

We are often asked the question "What about the relatives of the victims?". We do have people working in Saoirse that are relatives of victims. We would be fairly quick to let people know that we won't be dismissive of the reasons people have suffered and the hurt that they may still be suffering. At the same time we have got an opportunity that has been described as the best opportunity for peace in Ireland for 75 years. If we move this thing on to the point of a settlement that would mean that nobody else should die as a result of the conflict in Ireland. That's what's up for grabs at the moment. So we're saying that people will have to accept a compromise, and they'll have to accept the introduction or application of measures that would otherwise be totally opposed to what they feel should be done. The vast majority have come to the conclusion that, like it or not, this is something that is going to have to be done if this is to be moved along. And, as I say, we at all times have to make sure that this Saoirse campaign is placed within the context of a bigger peace process, and when you put it against that background, it becomes clear to them. This peace process should not be jeopardised because of other issues.

MICHAEL BROWNE

To Prisoners Of War...

Waiting for a Celebration (of your freedom)

It is supposed to be pleasurable
but postponed, can turn sour.

Time is supposed to go faster with age
But why, then can the minutes, seconds
stretch so that our minds can lose themselves
in the confusion of their numbers?

That must be Exhaustion:
the exhaustion of Contemplation;
of the contemplation of others contemplations;
of the contemplation of our own contemplations;
of contemplation itself.

Twin, double-edged swords:
Exhaustion and Contemplation;
the one, often necessary for the vitality of the other;
the other, often a trap for fragile, inscrutable psyches
when subject to enforced infertility,
(by Them or by our mistaken selves.)

So let's offer some of our innocent offspring
in words, themselves deeds
that can span the gulf of this waiting.

© TOM 1995



Saoirse members step up campaign at Whitemoor Photo: Nick Craske

Saoirse Cavalcade and Picket

London Saoirse organised a cavalcade to Whitemoor prison where a picket was held on Sunday 6th August. Saoirse campaigners assembled at Archway in north London. Twenty five cars and a large minibus left London at 11am. The cars were adorned with tricolours and each car conspicuously displayed Saoirse posters for the release of all Irish political prisoners. It was a sign of the times in that the Irish community would not be driven underground or intimidated and that they were prepared to address the issue of our prisoners. The commitment of those who participated and gave up their time on a beautiful hot sunny day was a clear indication that the issue of prisoners is both emotive and urgent.

The cavalcade of cars stayed together on the long journey to Cambridgeshire. When we reached our destination we were met by our Saoirse friends and comrades from Birmingham and Liverpool. The cavalcade made a noisy entrance into the prison car park with each car blasting its horn, alerting the police and the prison service that "we are here, and we are protesting about the way you are treating our prisoners".

An hour-long picket took place in the prison car park, with chants and speeches from prisoners' relatives and campaigners. The police, prison guards and their dogs took the opportunity to observe us.

PATRICIA CAMPBELL

Smoked Salmon and Lobster?

Patricia Campbell is a prisoner's relative. She is the partner of Peter Sherry who is currently incarcerated in Belmarsh gaol. In this article she describes how the conditions in which Irish political prisoners are held in British gaols have deteriorated since the IRA cease-fire of August 1994.

Britain's response to the cease-fire and the peace process is the worsening of prison conditions for Irish political prisoners held in Special Secure Units (SSUs).

The SSUs were first introduced in the 1960s and their use was to be reviewed on a regular basis. It is unclear what reviews, if any, have been carried out, or what conclusions have been reached. Prisoners are monitored at all times, both by prison guards and by closed circuit camera. They are segregated from the rest of the prison population and cannot participate in any of the normal gaol activities such as going to the library, church, the main gym or playing fields. The SSU exercise yard is in fact a cage as there is a wire mesh over the top and the prisoners' only view is that of grey concrete surrounded by more wire mesh. A number of observers have expressed concern at the oppressive nature of the SSUs. Prolonged detention in such units can only be detrimental to a person's mental and physical state.

It is these Units that the British media sought to portray as 'hotels', with reports of smoked salmon and lobster being purchased by prisoners who got prison officers to shop for them. Such reporting is absurd and no-one knows that better than the prisoners themselves and their relatives who have endured the long years of visiting their loved ones in such dungeons.

The British government deny that they have political prisoners, yet every decision made about an Irish political prisoner is a political one and made at a ministerial level. The reintroduction of closed visits for prisoners held in the SSUs was blatantly political. A restricted regime effectively means that the prisoners are denied basic rights, eg. the denial of association rights, the denial of an adequate diet, the denial of proper exercise facilities. The prisoners are allowed one hour's exercise per day in the outside prison yard which is described above.

When the SSU at Whitemoor prison reopened at the beginning of July, five Irish POWs were moved into it. Gareth Peirce, their acting solicitor, described it as a "concrete coffin". They were blatantly ill-treated and closed visits imposed. Michael O'Brien was assaulted by prison wardens. Patrick Kelly, who was suffering from cancer, was denied medical treatment. Phone cards and stamps were withheld from them if they did not cooperate with the provocatively restrictive regime. Some of the prisoners embarked upon a dirty protest to protest about the conditions and demand their right to a transfer to prisons in Ireland. The situation was cause for grave concern prompting Irish Embassy officials and Irish TDs to visit the prison and publicly voice their concern.

Some of the prisoners who had been granted transfer to Maghaberry prison in the north of Ireland as a legal right were repatriated, however Patrick Kelly and Michael O'Brien are not entitled to a transfer as they are from the south of Ireland.

Patrick Kelly was eventually moved to an outside hospital in Peterborough for the long-awaited urgent medical treatment he required. During his treatment he was chained to prison guards 24 hours a day. He was chained while he was undergoing surgery. Patrick was moved back into the hospital wing of the prison on August 26th. Michael O'Brien remains in solitary confinement and is still on the blanket and dirty protest.

PATRICIA CAMPBELL

Following the balloon release at the August 31st rally at Trafalgar Square (see centre pages) Peter Sherry held in Belmarsh prison has received a letter of support from a French nun who found a balloon which travelled to Brittany in Francell 30 French monks are now praying for his release.

Irish Political Prisoners in Britain

Since the last issue, Felim Ó hAdhmaill, Martin McMonagle and Liam Heffernan have been transferred from Whitemoor to Maghaberry in Ireland, and so are no longer included in this list. Felim Ó hAdhmaill becomes the first person to have been repatriated whilst on blanket protest. Michael O'Brien has been transferred from Full Sutton to Whitemoor, and Sean McNulty from Full Sutton to Frankland. Paul Norrey, the longest serving Irish political prisoner, has now been transferred to Maghaberry. We apologise for the error in the last issue which erroneously placed Thomas Jack in Belmarsh - he is in fact in Frankland.

Since the last issue, Michael O'Brien has joined the blanket protest, and remains on protest to this day (8th October 1995). Patrick Kelly is seriously ill with cancer and is currently in the hospital wing of Whitemoor gaol. (See article to left).

Please send birthday cards to all of the political prisoners below, and especially letters of support to Michael O'Brien and Patrick Kelly. Cards are always welcome at any time.

NAME	PRISON	NUMBER	BIRTHDAY
Liam McCotter	Belmarsh	LB83693	2 January
Jan Taylor	Whitemoor	EN1977	18 January
Paul (Dingus) Magee	Belmarsh	BT3783	30 January
Nicholas Mullen	Whitemoor	MR0639	2 February
Liam Quinn	Whitemoor	49930	6 February
Joe McKenny	Frankland	L46486	7 February
Pat Hayes	Frankland	EN1978	27 February
Pat McGlynn	Frankland	EN1946	25 March
Patrick Kelly	Full Sutton	EN1194	12 April
Denis Kinsella	Full Sutton	EN1944	12 April
Eddie Butler	Full Sutton	338637	17 April
Gerard Mackin	Frankland	EN3885	30 April
Joe O'Connell	Full Sutton	338635	15 May
Michael O'Brien	Whitemoor	BT3782	11 June
Peter Sherry	Belmarsh	B75880	30 June
Stephen Nordone	Frankland	758663	2 August
Vincent Wood	Full Sutton	EN1049	7 August
Thomas Jack	Frankland	EN3177	10 September
Vincent Donnelly	Frankland	274064	25 September
Sean McNulty	Frankland	CL3440	13 October
Harry Duggan	Frankland	338638	31 October
Sean Kinsella	Full Sutton	758661	5 November
Brendan Dowd	Whitemoor	758662	17 November
Hugh Doherty	Full Sutton	338636	7 December
Noel Gibson	Full Sutton	879225	11 December
Liam O'Dwyer	Belmarsh	MT2485	14 December
Derek Docherty	Full Sutton	EN3887	31 December

Framed Prisoner

Danny McNamee Belmarsh L481616 29 September

HMP Frankland, Finchdale Avenue, Brasside, Durham, DH1 5YD
HMP Full Sutton, York, YO4 1PS

HMP Whitemoor, Longhill Road, March, Cambridge, PE15 0PR
HMP Belmarsh, Western Way, Thamesmead, London, SE28 0EB

List compiled: 8th October 1995



Carol and Keith, two Troops Out Movement members pictured with Gerry Adams, displaying just one of the many TOM banners.

Photo: Jill Baker

Why Visit West Belfast in August?

Well apart from the fact that the West Belfast Festival (Feile an Phobail) is one of the biggest festivals in Ireland and that it's one of the times of year when groups of people from all over the world visit to join in the festivities...

...it's also traditionally the time of year that the Troops Out Movement organises a delegation (and have done for over twenty years now) to nationalist West Belfast. This visit gives the people of England, Scotland and Wales the opportunity to find out first-hand what effect the occupation by the British government has in nationalist areas of the Six Counties of the north of Ireland.

Because we only get bits of information via the British media and what we do get is biased or a complete fabrication, the delegation actually gives you the chance to see what the British presence means as part of day to day life. Actually seeing things and experiencing things for yourself makes an impact in a way that nothing else really can.

The delegation is made up of people who are involved in many different arenas in their lives where having an informed and critical opinion on Ireland is of great importance. However, this year there was more emphasis on getting Troops Out Movement members

and other activists who work around British withdrawal from Ireland to go. This gave everyone an opportunity to discuss current developments in the peace process and propose future work that could be done after returning home.

So why go now - now that the troops are not on the streets of Belfast?

While there is a feeling of relief and optimism, it is in a way even more sinister to have an air of calm. Everything is much the same - from day to day discrimination (eg. policing, health-care, education, housing) all the way through to the way the legal system oppresses the nationalist population.

The release of Lee Clegg was an issue that was raised several times during the delegation. This was soul-destroying event for people who have so much at stake in the cease-fire and have taken such a risk. But the determination not to give in to government tactics was evident in the conversations and activities of the people in the nationalist communities.

To see what was happening in other areas of the Six Counties, most of the delegation were taken on a tour of the border area and to a village there called Crossmaglen. This was especially important this year, as it showed how strong the military occupation remains. In fact, the British army are more active and have reinforced their fortifications in these border areas since the cease-fire.

For the first time, the delegation had a tour of Belfast City Hall. After the standard 'tour' by an official guide which underlined the selective version of Belfast council, we heard about the struggle of local

government politics from a Sinn Fein perspective. The consistent ill-treatment of Sinn Fein members and a lack of accommodation of political views other than unionism was striking. Hearing a Sinn Fein councillor's experiences first-hand put things in perspective and what was so powerful was hearing this information actually in one of the chambers where it happens - living history.

Some of the delegates visited republican prisoners. This happens every year and gives delegates an opportunity to have an insight into the views and ideas of the prisoners who are so central to the struggle for Irish freedom. A past delegate said "meeting her made me realise how much she had given up for her beliefs".

The Troops Out Movement delegation also has a significant presence on the annual internment commemoration march. While the loyalist marches this summer forced themselves through nationalist areas, being both confrontational and violent, it was with a great sense of dignity that the march organisers re-routed this year's march through nationalist areas and avoided passing alongside a non-nationalist area. Participating in this march not only shows solidarity with the local communities through which the march passes, but also shows the delegates



Heavily fortified installation beside local house in Crossmaglen town centre. August 1995.

Photo: Jill Baker

how much the Troops Out Movement in turn is appreciated with applause from the onlooking crowds.

There are so many activities that make up the West Belfast festival that it is quite hard to juggle the delegation agenda with what is on offer every day, but other activities included a visit to Milltown cemetery and a visit to Ardoyne and workshops on Saoirse and policing. There were also lots of opportunities to join in with the events laid on by and for the local communities.

Which brings us to another really important aspect of the delegation. You get to stay with local families in their homes. People are very welcoming and appreciative of the fact that the delegates have come to find out from them what life under British rule is like - to hear their stories. Information and ideas are exchanged both ways - communication develops, and it gives strength to people who live here and there to know that each other are working towards a lasting peace in Ireland.

The trip to Belfast facilitates 'activism' on British withdrawal from Ireland, therefore it is a crucial part of the work of the Troops Out Movement.

DELEGATION ORGANISING
COMMITTEE



Banner depicting the words of Mairead Farrell, victim of Britain's shoot-to-kill policy

Photo: Jill Baker



Angie Birtill chairing the rally at Trafalgar Square

Photo: Sass Tuffin

To commemorate the first anniversary of the IRA cease-fire, events were held all around the world. The central event in Britain was a rally in Trafalgar Square which was attended by over five hundred people. Chaired by Angie Birtill from the London Women's Irish Centre, the rally allowed a number of prominent speakers to make their views known. We present here a selection of some choice quotes from some of the speakers at that rally.

Tony Benn, Labour MP:

I was in the cabinet in 1969 when the troops were sent in to Ireland and we were told then "this was the way to peace". Can anyone doubt that there is no military answer by Britain to what is not an Irish problem but a British problem?

...

I think that the reason Britain welcomed the cease-fire was because they knew they could not win the war in a partitioned Ireland.

...

In my opinion it is for the British Labour movement to come out very strongly - and what should we be saying? We should be saying what is on the placards here this evening: we should be saying first there must be all-party talks, and if the British are to leave Northern Ireland, which they *will*, and they *must*, then the most important of all the talks are talks between the two communities in the north, and I strongly congratulate Sinn Féin on trying to bring about some understanding with the loyalist community there, because what is proposed is not a threat to anyone, it is an attempt to bring about - for the first time ever - an Irish settlement of the Irish future.

The second thing the Labour Party should be coming out for quite clearly now is that there should be a

Commemo

release of the Prisoners of War. Now the word "terrorist" is a funny word - it depends whose side you're on. But this has been a war in Ireland, and at the end of a war it is the normal practice that Prisoners of War on both sides should be released and I strongly favour that. When Private Clegg was released from prison, Gerry Adams said everybody else should be released as well, and he was right. And there are many people who write to me - some of them may be here tonight - about their relatives in British prisons who want to transfer, but I'm not just for a transfer from British prisons to Irish prisons, I'm for a transfer from prisons to home, because that is where these people should be.

Now then you come to the question of demilitarisation. And I think it must be obvious to anybody that the whole problem in the Six Counties has been the militarisation of the Six Counties by the British government and the British troops, and nobody can argue for a moment that there is some inherent advantage in having a highly militarised Six Counties. But if there is to be a peaceful solution then it has to be a mutual solution that reduces what has been a war-zone to a zone where people who live there can resolve their own questions free from interference from London.

**Patricia Campbell,
Prisoners' relative:**

For me personally it was a very emotional time, because I reflected on all the years of visiting prisons; on all the torture and persecution from British Crown Forces both in Ireland and here in London. I reflected on all the years of visiting my brothers, and my partner here in England in gaol. I reflected on all those who didn't make it, on all those who were killed. And I thought about all the coffins that I have walked behind. Indeed, coming from County Tyrone, there were weeks that you walked behind more coffins than most people would walk behind in their whole lives. It was also a time for hope. And that day I thought: no more walking



Balloon Release at Trafalgar Square. Each balloon carried the name and address of each of the Irish political prisoners held, and called for their release.

Rating the Ceasefire

behind coffins; no more torture; no more persecution; and no more visiting prisons. That really was a big hope for me personally, because it's all I have known for most of my life. As the months moved on, Christmas came and went, and we awaited the imaginative, generous response from the British government. There was nothing.

Frank O'Neill, Chair of Saoirse (England/Wales):

That last week's statement by Mayhew was a blunder is putting it mildly. He announced that we would have remissions which would return us to the situation in the early eighties when the war was at its height. How is that progress?



Photo: Sass Tuffin

Mayhew speaks with the voice of war. He speaks with the voice of armoured tanks and guns. He is treating the prisoners in a warlike manner. He is not speaking in terms of peace after a year of cease-fire. We are standing here opposite South Africa House. It is not hard for Mayhew and the government to see the example of South Africa: how political prisoners played a major and important part in that peace process; how political prisoners were released as a prerequisite to that process. And we call on

the British government to do the same.

Martin McGuinness, Sinn Féin Ard Chomhairle:

We stand here, a proud people, an undefeated people, and we are brothers and sisters to many tens of thousands in Belfast, in Derry, in Tyrone, in Down, Fermanagh and Armagh, and they are proud and undefeated Irish republican people. When the IRA cease-fire was called last year, there was common acclaim throughout the world that the Irish republican people stood as a proud, unbroken people, that the Irish republican people and the Irish Republican Army had acted from a position of strength rather than a position of weakness. The Irish Republican Army and the Irish republican people placed a challenge before the British government and our fellow countrymen who regard themselves as being unionist - and that challenge was:

come to the table; talk to us about peace; let us resolve this age-old conflict.

And in the course of the last twelve months, we have reached a situation on our island where all those parties on the nationalist and republican side are in total agreement that all-party peace talks are required, and are needed NOW.

And what have we seen during the course of that year? We have seen a minimalist approach. We have seen Patrick Mayhew say "We have not done anything we cannot reverse in 24 hours".

...the British government have failed to rise to that challenge. The British government stand exposed. The British government stand isolated before the world.

Our challenge to him [John Major] is to tackle the root causes of the conflict in Ireland, to take away the reason why people in Ireland feel the need to resort to armed force. We can only do that at the negotiating table. All of the issues to be discussed will be discussed in all-party peace talks. We are prepared to discuss them all. We'll discuss IRA guns, but we'll also discuss the guns of the British army, we will also discuss the guns of the RUC, we will also discuss the guns of the Royal Irish Regiment, we will also discuss the guns of the loyalist death squads, many of which were given to them by British military intelligence.

Denis Goldberg, ex political prisoner, South Africa:

I spent 22 years in prison in South Africa. For me, the moving moment of this rally tonight was the balloon release for the 600 prisoners in Ireland, because I want to tell you that in every one of those 22 years, every day



Martin McGuinness and Tony Benn

Photo: Jill Baker



Torchlit Vigil outside Birmingham City Council Chambers by Birmingham TOM and supported by Birmingham Saoirse.

Photo: Stalingrad O'Neill

of those 22 years, nothing, nothing, nothing could stop our spirits flying over the walls of the prison.

Judith Ward, framed ex-POW:

Earlier today I was doing a radio interview, and the interviewer said to me "Why is it that you bother with the prisoners when you've been in eighteen years yourself? Why don't you just walk away from it all?" And I said "I do it because it has to be done".

...

I would just like to pass on the message to Mr Major from all of us here that however long it takes, we will still be here because it has to be done. And we will continue, to hopefully get peace for Ireland, self-determination for the Irish people. It's nothing to do with Mr Major - he should keep his nose out. Let the Irish people determine their own future. Release all political prisoners. And I'd just like to say to him: We are going to be here in future because it has to be done.

Pat Arrowsmith, CND peace campaigner:

My sympathies have always been with the Troops Out Movement. I believe in British withdrawal from Ireland, and self-determination for the Irish people.

...

I think it is quite ridiculous to demand preconditions before negotiations. ... This seems to me to be completely absurd.

Another thing I find absurd, and I say this as a pacifist, an active pacifist who's been on many pacifist ventures abroad, peace camps over the Gulf war and so forth, that I think it is quite ridiculous to designate Prisoners of War "terrorists". That has been said again and again. And when I served my 18 month sentence for giving British troops leaflets urging them to desert rather than fight in Northern Ireland, they refused to accept that I was a political prisoner. It took Amnesty International to decide I was a prisoner of conscience. It is quite ridiculous to call Prisoners of War "terrorists". As a

pacifist, I am against violence of any and every sort, but I do not accept that Prisoners of War are "terrorists", and the precondition of peace is releasing Prisoners of War. I therefore support totally the objectives of this action tonight.

Events Around Britain

Leeds. 5am - banners calling for all-party peace talks were dropped off bridges around the city. Radio interviews and TV. At lunchtime they had a big banner which people signed with the peace pledge on it, and in the evening they had a social.

Birmingham. Banners off bridges. Radio: Radio WM and Heart FM. In the evening they had a candlelit vigil supported by Saoirse with 40 people. There was a formal reception in the town hall with women councillors. Public meeting in the Union Club with supporters and interested people. Local paper and radio.

Bristol. Banner drop.

Brighton. Street event with 40 people at it, organised by Irish Peace Initiative.

Sheffield. Street vigil with pageant of mock all-party talks, supported by the different groups in Sheffield.

Manchester (with Saoirse). Tied big green ribbons around the city. Large cardboard posters on main roads into town demanding all-party talks and the release of prisoners. Signing of the peace pledge on the street event. They met with the Workers Film Association, and they went to the town hall and met with Trade Unionists and peace campaigners. Press: Manchester Evening News and GMER.

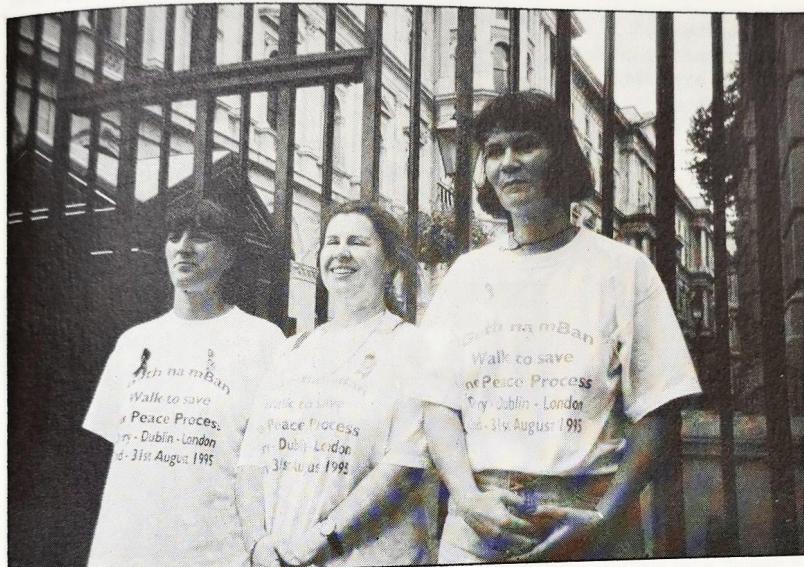
Liverpool. Mainly a Saoirse event but TOM supported it. Picket of army recruitment office for release of prisoners. Interview with Liverpool Echo.

In **Chesterfield** they had an event on the Saturday. Stall calling for all-party talks, peace pledges and leaflets on Saoirse. They went to the Labour Club Meeting and met with the Deputy Leader of Chesterfield Council, and met with people in the unemployed centre. Interview with Women's Hour

London. In the morning there was a press conference with Martin McGuinness. In the afternoon Guth na mBan handed in a petition at Downing Street and did a radio interview. In the evening there was a rally attended by at least 500 people. Radio and other media coverage including Women's Hour, Viva Radio and local radio.

Women's Voice

In 1993, a group of women calling themselves Guth na mBan (Women's Voice) marched from Derry to Dublin to petition the Dublin government on the peace process. In 1995 they repeated that march, calling for all-party talks, and three women flew to London to carry their petition on to 10 Downing Street, on the anniversary of the IRA cease-fire, they spoke to us about their experiences.



Braid, Padraigin and Paula outside 10 Downing Street.

Photo: Jill Baker

Guth na mBan were a group of about fourteen people, just a group of friends who came together on a social basis first and foremost, and during those kinds of socialising occasions in one another's houses, there were several different issues starting to come to the fore - social issues that affected women, possibly like being battered by men or rape or the strip search issue, being arrested, that type of thing were issues that we talked about. But then whenever it was brought to our attention that John Hume and Gerry Adams were having talks about a peace process, we started to think about what we could possibly do to play our part as women within this struggle. We decided we would do what we were always used to, which was using our feet, and hence the initial 1993 November march from Derry to Dublin. En route we gathered a petition and handed it in to Albert Reynolds, the then Taoiseach. Then came the cease-fires, which we felt was a very courageous step, but within the last year there has really been nothing happening, and we as women felt that we still had a part to play and we still felt that we ought to be listened to. So the Derry - Dublin - London walk to save the peace process came about, which started on the 22nd of August.

We were waved off from the Guild Hall in Derry. Mary Nelis, a legend herself walked with us for about two miles, then we were left to our own devices. We walked through various different small villages to Belfast, meeting women from the different areas. We went through Belfast, Newry, Monaghan, Dundalk, and eventually joined the ANC rally in Dublin. We

then came to England, to Manchester, and we had various different discussions, both formally and informally, with trade councils and councillors. We moved into Chesterfield and Birmingham, and had similar discussions with people there, and of course in London, August 31st, the culmination of our walk when we were able to hand in the petition to number 10 Downing Street.

We found along the way that people were under this illusion of great peace in Ireland since the cease-fire, so obviously we had to tell them the truth about things. We told them that people are still being harassed on the streets; their homes are still being raided; people are still being shot with plastic bullets; children are still being knocked over by landrovers; anyone involved in a peaceful protest usually ends up being charged with assault against the police. People are just totally, totally frustrated - I could even say disgusted - at the lack of initiative shown by the British government toward the people in Ireland. We're fed up with all these excuses that they're making for not engaging in all-party talks: first of all you had the word "permanent", whether the cease-fire was permanent or not, and then they went on to use the excuse that they weren't talking unless the arms were decommissioned. And as far as we're concerned the decommissioning of arms is just a small, small factor in the whole process, as long as lives are being saved and the guns are silent, that's the most important

thing. The only "D" word that our group have been concerned with is "dialogue". That's our main concern - get the British government to acknowledge that all representatives should be engaged in all-party talks as soon as possible.

The other thing is that if you look at any other country in the world that has been engaged in conflict, and you look at their examples of conflict resolution, never ever at any stage has decommissioning been a precondition before talks. So we feel that this decommissioning issue is a ploy being used by the British government to stall, and that if decommissioning happened tomorrow they would find something else. The British government have been dragged kicking and screaming to every single stage in this peace process since it began. They have shown reluctance round every corner. The thing about it is that if John Major doesn't wake up and realise that he has to engage in all-party talks NOW, as opposed to next month or the month after, he's going to be in for a big shock.

August 31st has been tremendous - the real boost that we needed. The acknowledgements that we've received from people have been great, and it gives me this wee turn in my stomach whenever I know that there are people out there who are genuinely concerned about what's going on in Ireland, that if the British government felt the same way as the English people do we'd be flying.

PAULA DOCHERTY
PADRAIGIN NI MHAONAIGH
BRAID NI CORRAIN

Troops Out Movement on the Internet

Jill Baker is a member of the Troops Out Movement, and a member of the TOM "Computer Group" which advises Steering Committee on computer-related matters. The TOM went on-line on the Internet last August, and in this article Jill explains what this means for the TOM, and how Internet users can benefit from this.

The "Internet" is the collective name for a number of different, seemingly unrelated things, which all share a common communication medium. Perhaps the most interesting of these is the World Wide Web.

The World Wide Web

The World Wide Web is like a huge book containing millions of pages. On these pages you will find information on just about every topic imaginable. You can explore these pages using a program called a "Web Browser". Web Browsers are easy to use, and behave very much like any bog standard word processor (though web pages are read-only of course). Most pages contain "links" to other pages. These are words or pictures which are highlighted. If you click on such a link, using a mouse, then you are automatically taken to a new page (or perhaps a different part of the same page). This makes it very very easy to navigate around any subject of interest.

Every page on the web has its own address - the electronic equivalent of a page number. (Our own page is "<http://pobox.com/~tom1>"). Most web browsers allow you to store these electronic addresses as "bookmarks", allowing you to return to any page you happen to like at any time in the future.

When you have a group of related pages, there is often a "home page" connecting them all. This means that you only need to set a single bookmark for the entire set of pages. From the home page, you just follow the links through to the related pages.

Last August, the Troops Out Movement established a presence on the World Wide Web. Since the start of October, our site has been fully up and running. We have our own home page, and from there, you can find every other TOM page. Remember - this can be accessed from anywhere in the world, instantly, so our web site can actually reach far more people than the printed *Troops Out* magazine.

So what does the TOM have on the web? Well, we have a few pages about the TOM itself, including information on how to join, what merchandise is available, and so on. Predominantly, all back issues of *Troops Out* magazine will be made available on the web, starting with Volume 18 no 1 (Spring 1995), and it is planned to extend the "One Day At A Time" feature back through time to the very formation of TOM twenty one years ago. There is information on who we are, what we do, and our place in the struggle for Irish self-determination and freedom. Other groups the TOM is involved with, such as the Irish Peace Initiative and Saoirse, also get a mention, and we also publish, in conjunction with Saoirse, a list of all Irish political prisoners in British gaols - this list will be kept up to date, and so will become the definitive source of information on where prisoners are being held *right now*.

There is much to look forward to in this exciting development for the Troops Out Movement. The Internet is an arena we are only beginning to explore.

JILL BAKER



Here is a small list of just a few interesting pages on the World Wide Web. Where there are two lines of information under a particular heading, the first line is the web page, and the second line is the email address.

Organisations

Troops Out Movement

<http://pobox.com/~tom1>
tom1@pobox.com

Sinn Féin

<http://uts.cc.utexas.edu/~sponge/aprn/SFhome.html>
datanet@mail.utexas.edu

Forum for Peace and Reconciliation:

<http://server1.internet-eireann.ie/web1/forum>
forum@internet-eireann.ie

and if you want to see what the unionists are up to...

Ulster Unionist Party:

<http://www.gpl.net/customers/uup>

Alliance Party:

<http://www.unite.net/customers/alliance>
alliance_party@cix.compulink.co.uk

Newspapers

An Phoblacht/Republican News:

<http://uts.cc.utexas.edu/~sponge/aprn/current/news>

The Irish News

http://www.unite.net/unite/customers/irish_news

The Irish Times

<http://www.ieunet.ie/cgi-bin/IThome>



Beating the Fascists

Stephen O'Neill of the Celtic Anti-Fascists, describes Celtic Fans - Beating the Fascists in Birmingham!

On Saturday 29 July 1995, thousands of Celtic fans converged in Birmingham to watch the boys take on Birmingham City in a pre-season friendly match which ended in the home side winning 1-0. Off the park, before the match had even begun, there were clashes between the fascist-led Birmingham hooligans and Celtic supporters. Celtic supporters had been drinking in the Dubliner Public House and meeting up in Birmingham's "Irish Quarter", Digbeth, when they came under attack from a several hundred strong group of casuals and fascists. The attacking group appeared to be a united group of hooligans from various sides in Birmingham and the West Midlands and under the leadership of well-known fascist organisers from the area. Obviously the nazis were intent on building upon their recent "success" in Dublin where they managed to have the friendly match between Ireland and England abandoned. Celtic Anti-Fascists, casuals and ordinary supporters had other ideas.

After initial surprise, Celtic supporters fought back and ran their attackers out of the area. Clashes continued throughout the day and into the evening with the fascists and hooligans from Birmingham taking a thorough beating. Despite the violence being obviously inspired by the fascists, the Birmingham Police decided to wade into the Celtic fans, whose actions had been purely defensive.

At least four Celtic fans were treated for serious head injuries as a result of police baton charges. Some fans who were arrested during these charges were later released under caution after threatening to press charges against the police for their violent behaviour. A BBC journalist was later quoted in the local press saying, "The police baton-charged the Celtic fans for no reason."

Celtic fans arrested complained of sectarian abuse by the police. One man was spat upon, had his nose bust open and was constantly referred to as a "Fenian bastard" by the police in the van which took him to the station. With England's finest fascists having taken a surprise beating, the police appeared prepared to make amends.

Inside Birmingham City's ground, the home support continued to taunt Celtic supporters with cries of "No Surrender to the IRA" and waving Red Hand Flags at them. This so incensed Birmingham's Managing Director, Karen Brady, that, at one point during the



match, she left her seat in the director's box and snatched one of the offending flags from a Birmingham fan who had been waving it provocatively and giving Nazi salutes. Ms Brady, who hails from a London-Irish background herself, was later quoted as saying, "It had to be done and as no-one else seemed to be prepared to do it, I did it!" Her statement is also an obvious criticism of the stewarding and policing within the ground.

"It's a Party Atmosphere"

The local media have continued to criticise the heavy handed approach of the police to the Celtic fans. A police spokesman even suggested that it was not the Celtic supporters who were the instigators of the violence when he said, "We know of the reputation of Celtic fans when they travel away - it's a party atmosphere. But we also know of their reputation that if they come under attack they will stand and fight."

Serious questions have to be asked about the policing of the fans inside and outside of the ground and throughout the day. Publicans were able to tell us that Irish bars in Birmingham had been approached at least two weeks ago and warned to expect trouble from fascists and other hooligans who might be preparing attacks upon their bars and the Celtic fans. If the police had serious intelligence reports that there was likely to be fascist inspired violence, why did they fail to keep the fascists out of Digbeth - or do the Birmingham police have their own agenda regarding such matters?

In the end it was the magnificent supporters of Celtic who managed to turn the tables on the nazis. It is clear that the fascist hooligans are using these games as practice for next year's European Championships to be held in England. Celtic Anti-Fascists together with Anti-Fascist Action are determined to reclaim the game from the nazis on the terraces. Next year's championships will not be a showdown between various international hooligan groups as the championships have been in the past. Rather, they will be a showdown between the forces of fascism and anti-fascism in Europe. We are in no doubt which side Celtic fans will be on and we are determined that the anti-fascists will win.

STEPHEN O'NEILL

Celtic Anti-Fascists can be contacted at
the following address:
Celtic Anti-Fascists, PO Box 266,
Glasgow, G42 8EA, Scotland

Letters

Whilst on the delegation in Belfast this August, we were privy to the disinformation machine of the British media at first hand. We were seeing and hearing for ourselves the peaceful protests by the nationalist communities to the Apprentice Boys marches and then observing the reality of the situation distorted and completely inverted by the media.

According to the press and the TV, the nationalist community was on the brink of breaking the cease-fire. Were they? How was this, when we had seen for ourselves how they had silently and peacefully protested at the Apprentice Boys passing and had then been set upon by the RUC, who eventually opened fire with plastic bullets? How is it that plastic bullets have not been silent during the cease-fire? At least seventeen people have been killed by them during the war. They are machines that kill and maim. Why are there not orders from the British government for the RUC to disarm, as they are the only ones still blatantly welding and using their weaponry and so presenting a very serious threat to peace?

The punishment and brutality that the nationalist community was subjected to during the marching season was poorly covered by the British media. Instead, the victims became the perpetrators, the fired

upon became the ones threatening the cease-fire.

Yet, in spite of this continuous physical and psychological assault by the British government and their agents, the RUC, and the British media, the nationalist community made the delegation welcome, and gave us the opportunity to experience their strength and courage which hopefully will encourage everyone to challenge the lies and speak out on their return home.

It is also interesting to note that, despite a number of reporters and photographers turning up to events on 31st August in Britain, nothing was shown on TV or in the national press, although there was much coverage of the situation in Ireland. It is essential that we increase the pressure and to make it known that many of us want the British government to stop shifting the goalposts and to get on with all-party talks with no prerequisites - NOW.

CAROL BIGGS



Reviews

Ireland : new beginnings?

Race & Class
Volume 37 #1 1995.
Guest editor Bill
Rolston with various
contributors.

With just over one year since the ceasefire/s this is a timely release for this compendium of individual articles.

Reflecting this, in their joint introduction, Bill Rolston and Hazel Walters (deputy editor of *Race & Class*) refer to one article (Mike Tomlinson's 'Can Britain leave Ireland') to illustrate 'the British government's grudging handling of the peace process'.

Mike shows that even with over 3400 deaths 'the conflict in Ireland is dwarfed by events in Algeria, or the suppression of the Kurds' and yet 'the resources devoted to its management are remarkable by the standards of the European Union'. Whilst 'little over 1.5 million people live in Ireland presently under British jurisdiction (the conflict) has cost at least £23.5 billion ... equivalent to the total British defence budget for one year' Coca-Cola marketing department united Ireland some time ago, as did Unilever and Mars too, he mentions. [Big business in South Africa took a similarly pragmatic approach remember the unofficial

meetings with the ANC across the border in Zimbabwe] and this is more than the reality of the EEC 'no borders' policy, he observes.

Peace is breaking out all over according to the Irish tourist industry (ignore those army helicopters and hill-forts Mike refers too!), in Bill Rolston's funny and telling contribution.

Margaret Ward and Eilish Rooney discuss Women and the peace process and Women in political conflict respectively - read both these. As Eilish says 'All of the parties are becoming sensitised to the question of women in politics. All want to be seen as woman-friendly. How far will they go?'

One of the few omissions in this collection, however, is the absence of any article on the experience of being a person of colour in Ireland. Unfortunately this has happened before, as mentioned on the inside cover, 'readers have pointed out our failure to include the experience of black women in our previous issue on sport, race and politics.'

Hopefully, this will be rectified, as the contributions in this issue are lucid and informative.

£5.00 from the Institute of Race Relations, 2-6 Leeke Street, London WC1X 9HS (£1.50 p&p)

NICK CRASKE

Clár Nua - A New Agenda

Niamh Flannigan, from the West Belfast Economic Forum, and Kieran Quin, from the Falls Community Council, discuss the economics of the "peace dividend". This talk was given as part of the Delegation, and was chaired by Danny Power from Sinn Féin.

The West Belfast Economic Forum started as a group of community activists and academics in 1992, who got together and organised a conference called "Is West Belfast Working?". About 150 people attended the conference including civil servants, political parties, community workers and health service individuals. The conference was based around discussions on social policy issues in West Belfast, in particular unemployment, which in some of the areas was as high as 70%, compared with 30% overall in the north of Ireland. West Belfast has one of the highest rates of unemployment, along with Fermanagh and South Tyrone, which are primarily all nationalist areas. So the conference set up a small independent research unit to monitor conditions of the local economy in West Belfast and lobby for change.

It took a long time to get funding, but eventually the West Belfast Economic Forum was set up to lobby for inward investment to the area, and to lobby against previous bad practices. So what we do is we produce publications on issues with any economic slant affecting West Belfast. We used to produce articles and research pamphlets. We would also work alongside disability groups and lobby on their behalf. We produce an economic bulletin which contains short, topical articles every quarter, on such issues as disability, travellers, the local economy, and the wider issue as well in terms of the island of Ireland.

We produce documents on the economics of the peace dividend, and last year we produced "The Cost of the War and the Dividend of Peace" by Mike Tomlinson. That was a very timely pamphlet because it was just before the IRA cease-fire and it was basically saying that the economy of the north of Ireland is absolutely rubbish. The economy is backed up by a subvention of four billion pounds per year, and a large percentage of that is security costs. For example there are around 38000 people employed in the RUC. It is still a war economy essentially, and there are a high percentage of people living on social security. A large majority of those people living on social security are nationalists. Also it costs, for example, £70000 per year to keep a prisoner in Long Kesh. So the premise of the argument basically was that since the war is over, that money could be put back into areas where unemployment is high and there is a great deal of poverty. So rather than withdraw the troops and just forget about the savings, we want that money put back into West Belfast.

So as part of that as well we've been involved with other community groups in the Clár Nua initiative. We represent the economic slant of the Clár Nua initiative. We have also made a submission to the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation, and we argue that any investment into the North of Ireland has to have, for example, local labour clauses built in; those investments have to be directed into the most deprived areas. And there have to be fair employment policies implemented.

So that's the West Belfast Economic Forum, basically a monitor and research organisation. In West Belfast we have strong community links, and we have had a really busy year since the cease-fires, lobbying around the peace dividend.

Danny Power stated that "If those issues are not tackled effectively, then we have a continuation of the very discriminatory state which gave rise to the armed struggle in the first place."



The Falls Community Council is a network and resource centre for local community groups. What is central to West Belfast, and what sets it apart from other communities particularly (and this is typical of nationalist communities), is that it has evolved a very strong community infrastructure. And that has come about because the levels of deprivation are extreme here. Greater West Belfast covers approximately 100,000 people, of which unemployment is an average 60%, and rises in areas to 80% or 90%. There has been a lack of social policy or direction from the British government who have tended to impose rules on this community, so initiatives that we have tried to set up have been vetted. The overt political vetting was lifted at the end of July, but there is still very much a covert agenda, covert vetting, which means that our in community, although we have a number of very successful initiatives, we can't actually get funded. Any funding that we do get is at drip-feed level, so you can't actually get to develop anything.

Central to the whole problems of West Belfast, the whole problems of this state is that the British government refuse to recognise that the people in areas

such as West Belfast have the initiative, the ability to develop their own areas, to work together. The British government don't want to see that happen.

With the IRA cease-fire in August, we were told that we were now moving into a new situation, that the rules of how our community was held at arm's length by the British Government had changed, that that whole relationship had changed. So we got all the community groups together, and for six weeks ran an intensive consultation period, looking at ten areas which we thought need to be addressed if there is to be any change in the situation in West Belfast. They include human rights, housing, the economy, the environment, and so on. For those six weeks we ran an intensive consultation throughout West Belfast. This was the first time anything like this had ever been undertaken at the level that we had been involved in. We then drew up policy statements, and through a series of conferences, we defined the movement known as Clár Nua, which is New Agenda.

Clár Nua is representative of all the groups in West Belfast. What is unusual about it is it's the first time ever our community has said - right 'we will define what our community is, define what policies we want, define our own regeneration strategy.' So we are actually at that level defining strategy and policy. The response that we've had from the British government and the Northern Ireland Office is very very negative. We are constantly being told no - the work that we've put in for the past year will not be recognised; that the only way forward coming out of the cease-fires, the only change that will take place, will be the at pace of change that they dictate. The only funding that will come down will be through the channels that they will authorise.

So, for example, there's a prisoners' project at the minute, which was launched on the 11th of August, called Tar Anall. This is a support group for prisoners and their families, and provides things like counselling services, education services, and tries to reintegrate people who have been in gaol for twenty odd years back into this community. Even though these are our prisoners, and we are their community, there is still a lot of friction there, even at a personal level, for someone who has served twenty years in gaol to get back into the family environment. Maybe when they went into gaol they had a child who was only a year old, and who's now an adult, that can be very difficult. That structure and support can actually take place within our community, but what Tar Anall are being told is they won't get any funding because they're not the acceptable face, they're not the vehicle which the British government wants to use.

What actually happened with the Clár Nua project was that a group of prisoners had got together and put up a research proposal from themselves and their families and some ex-prisoners. The research project was through one of the European programmes in Brussels. We were dealing directly with Brussels and what happened we're not quite sure. There's a group who actually promised the funding for the projects for the

research to see what the requirements were for Tar Anall - they pulled the funding. For a year we were waiting, faxing to Brussels constantly, talking to people there constantly about the project, and were getting the go-ahead for the whole works. The next thing they just pulled it out and a tender appeared in the paper saying that this project was being funded by NIACRO and the probation board, and there was nothing being said about our proposal at all. So the actual proposal was taken from the prisoners.

Basically they took the idea that we had, refused to fund us, and then put it through a vehicle of their choice to do the same project. I suppose it's a back-handed complement to us, but it's not what we want. Because of these problems there is a built-in frustration within communities.

No matter what you think, and no matter when it's going to happen, prisoners will be released yet the British government are still refusing, through the NIO, to actually offer any support to them. It's the same with youth projects. There are a number of these dealing with young people who are at risk from anti-social behaviour which we have devised, and funded through our own short-term funds. These are successful, but because there are unacceptable faces involved with it they cannot get funding.

So when we talk about the discrimination we don't just talk about economic discrimination - there is discrimination which totally disenfranchises the whole nationalist community. It's overt in West Belfast. But we have been constantly told, no - you have to come up with suggestions, you should be responsible for regenerating your area, but actually, when we went along that course for the past year, constant obstacles were put in our path. When it should be a time of great optimism and great change especially since the cease-fire, what's actually happening is that we are being frustrated in our endeavours. When we have tried to make advances there are obstacles constantly being put in our way.

An example being the festival this year. After eight years, and two years of lobbying, we received acknowledgement that there would be funding for it in August of last year. It's taken us ten months to actually get that funding. So that's the level of it. Once they do agree to some sort of funding for a development, it's done in such a way and with such an attitude that it's very frustrating. It almost like they're trying to snub you, even when they do know they have to accept some of the arguments that you've put forward.

The policies that we are now proposing have been ignored. The peace dividend, we were assured would filter down to the grass roots and impact on areas which have felt the brunt of the conflict. It has now been shown that that's not the case. The filter mechanisms are now being put in place, and we will be at the very bottom of it, getting the crumbs of the meal.

NIAMH FLANNIGAN AND KIERAN QUIN

"The parallels with the struggle in Ireland are clear."

Mizgin Sen of the Kurdish Information Centre speaks about the ongoing struggle for Kurdish independence:

On 20 August around 10,000 Kurdish prisoners in Turkish gaols and their supporters outside ended a month long hunger strike which has claimed four victims. None of their demands for prisoner of war status were gained, nor was their plea for international monitoring of the situation in Kurdistan taken up. All efforts by the Kurdistan National Liberation Front, led by the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), to open up negotiations to end the eleven year long war have been rebuffed by the Turkish state. On 12 April a Kurdistan Parliament in exile was inaugurated at a meeting in the Hague in order to seek international recognition for the national rights of the Kurdish people in the same way that the first Dail attempted to put Ireland on the international agenda in 1920. But Turkey, backed by its NATO allies, continues to refuse any overtures from Kurdish political organisations, condemning all resistance as 'terrorism'. The parallels with the struggle in Ireland are clear. Mizgin Sen of the Kurdistan Solidarity Committee brought a message of solidarity to the Irish Peace Initiative rally in Trafalgar Square which marked the anniversary of the IRA cease-fire.

"The KSC extends its support to all those seeking a just and lasting peace settlement to the conflict in Ireland. We call upon the British government to respond to the historic IRA cease-fire by opening up all-party talks involving the political representatives of every section of the community.

We believe that the time has come for the British government to recognise that those imprisoned for actions during the conflict are victims of the political situation in the occupied Six Counties and should be accorded prisoner of war status. Any permanent peace settlement must involve the release of all POWs.

The Kurdish people sympathise with those denied their national and democratic rights in Ireland. Like

The Troops Out Movement offers a platform in *Troops Out* to anti-racist and anti-imperialist campaigns. Groups wishing to take advantage of this facility should contact

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the Irish they have seen their land partitioned by Britain. They have been treated like second class citizens in their own country and suffered generations of military occupation, harassment, political discrimination

and ongoing cultural repression.

The Kurdish community in Britain has been subject to an intensifying black-propaganda campaign, intended to criminalise all those who support the Kurdistan National Liberation Front led by the PKK. Like the Republicans in Ireland they have been stigmatised as terrorists and racketeers.

Last year three Kurds here in London were sentenced to long prison sentences for an alleged petrol bombing in which no one was killed. Meanwhile a British soldier convicted of murder has been released after only four years in gaol. He has returned to a job in the army. When released the Kurds will probably be deported to Turkey where they will suffer further gaol and torture.

Presently the PKK European spokesman Kani Yilmaz is in Belmarsh gaol where he has been held since last October. He has been interned without trial by the British government in order to appease the Turkish state. He awaits extradition to Germany and perhaps thence to Turkey.

The PKK has called on Turkey to enter into negotiations about a peaceful solution to the war in Kurdistan. The British government is obstructing this peace initiative by backing Turkey's war 'against terrorism'.

The British government used to say, like the Turkish government does now. That it would never talk to terrorists. Now it has been forced to talk to republicans. It must admit that Britain has no role in Ireland. This will be a victory for those the world over struggling for their freedom."

MIZGIN SEN

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