

Irish Republican Information Service.

VOL. 3

No. 57

DECEMBER 6th 1978

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THE IRISH VOTE IN BRITAIN

Recently a British Labour M.P. from Hull, Kevin McNamara, spoke out against the proposal to increase the N.I. electoral representation at Westminster. According to McNamara "the offer of extra seats represents a remarkable and irreversible distribution of political strength to the Unionist majority in N.I. . . . it would diminish any influence which might be brought to bear on Unionists to share power in devolved government. . . . it was a complete reversal of the Parliamentary Labour Party's policy on the issue of extra seats and a giant's step towards closer integration of the Six Counties with the U.K. . . . a step which is not in the best interests of Britain or of the Six Counties". In a Radio Eireann interview on the same subject McNamara described the promise of extra seats at Westminster as a bribe to the Unionists from the Labour Government to procure a voting pact agreement. "The Labour Government", he said, "had reneged . . . they had drifted . . . they had made these agreements from the best of motives but the long-term consequences of such agreements had not been thought out". It might be best "to integrate N.I. into the U.K., he mused, but he himself thought it might be best "to hold the ring".

"Holding the ring" is good—as if any British Government had any policy for the past sixty years other than "holding the ring" while power-feeding the Unionists within, hoping the latter would clobber the Nationalist people into final and total submission. The whole set-up was based on and maintained by "a remarkable distribution of political strength to the Unionist majority" and considered "irreversible" by virtue of British guarantees. Where is the renege, the reversal, the drift? Even the SDLP no longer believe in the power-sharing intentions of a British Government. If there is British power to be shared it will be strictly Unionist-unionist.

If the "best of motives" for political bribery is clear, the long-term consequences of such were not spelt out by McNamara though his concern was evident. Perhaps he has reason to be concerned as a Parliamentary member of the British Labour Party and his own background would sharpen his awareness of short-term as well as long-term consequences. Or so it would seem from the views expressed in an article published in the *Irish Press* on November 14th last. Entitled *Exile Unity*, written by an Irish author and journalist, Donall Mac Amhlaigh (himself an exile of many years resident in England), the article describes the more than usual pre-occupation of the Irish in Britain with the forthcoming British general election. It deals with the changing attitudes of the Irish in Britain towards British politicians in general and towards British Labour Party politicians in particular and the increasingly vigorous debate among the Irish, as to how they should cast their votes if they vote at all. "If I were a member of the Labour Party", Mac Amhlaigh writes, "I should certainly pay attention—it has become quite obvious that the Irish here have now no illusions about the Labour Party". To Roy Mason is given the credit for dispelling the illusions and he, more than any other Minister of State at Westminster, in or out of office, has earned their hatred. Mac Amhlaigh points out that while Mason holds a safe seat, the same cannot be said of many of his fellow-members in the Labour Party and a goodly portion of these are quite disturbed by the manner in which the Irish have been turned against them, and Irish electoral support is no longer the strong certainty it has been in the past.

The present attitude of the Irish is that the Tories are, and always were, their enemy and the Labour Party (in relation to Ireland) is an enemy but an enemy in the guise of a friend and no longer to be depended on. When it comes to voting there is little to choose between them. Mac Amhlaigh points out that that attitude relates to the Six Counties—a matter that remains very much alive for the exile. As these exiles are mostly workers they cannot but be alive to the social and economic factors in Britain relating to their work conditions—factors which traditionally bound the workers to the Labour Party. But here, too, there is a questioning and the workers see themselves as hostages to economic policies of government regardless of party in power—the beneficiary of such policies is Big Business.

That some Irish exiles in Britain have already shifted their political allegiance adds to the evidence, according to Mac Amhlaigh. That the Irish vote in Britain can no longer be looked on as a bloc support for the Labour Party and this attitude has become more than a mere subject for conversation or argument. He concludes that there are many, many Irish in Britain who will not vote for

the Labour Party in the next general election, mainly because of that party's policy, or lack of policy, in regard to Ireland and particularly because of H-Block and Long Kesh. There will be others, a sizeable percentage, who will, for other reasons, even vote for the Tories.

The effects of this change are uncertain but there is one thing, the writer says, which is very certain and that is that not for many a day have the Irish in Britain been so dissatisfied with the Labour Party—even to the *Irish Democrat*. The *Irish Democrat* is a newspaper which has constantly called for support for the Labour Party, claiming that only through that party could Peace and Justice be established in Ireland. Even that paper can now no longer hide its bitterness and its disappointment.

THE EUROPEAN MONETARY SYSTEM

Ireland is a small country on the fringe of the European continent. It lies at the periphery of the great capitalist centres of the world. The long history of the domination of Ireland and of the Irish people by Britain, intent on extracting the maximum amount of profit out of the island — no matter what the cost in human or cultural terms — has naturally left a train of nasty marks. Ireland is still enmeshed in the aftermath of a colonial situation. Against the overwhelming majority wish of the people of Ireland, British troops and politicians arrogantly assert their 'right' to rule over part of the island, thereby dividing the people.

The establishment under Partition of the twenty-six county state in the south in 1922 did untold damage to the Irish nation both culturally and economically. The national issue became totally confused by the fact that the six North-eastern counties remained a colony of Britain. The southern state, though nominally independent, remained tied to the imperial system. Its industries were stifled, agriculture weakened, culture and nationality constantly eroded. Throughout the years where leadership was called for the partitionist politicians of all parties, north and south, have been equally disastrous as far as national interests are concerned.

Economic Disaster

The feeble attempts of the 26-county state to develop an independent Irish economy were formally abandoned in 1958 and since then the state has been pursuing a policy of economic "development" that can only end in disaster. The policy of handing over the control of Irish business to international speculators, and in particular of directing all future development efforts towards a programme of attracting foreign capital, brought some short-term benefits, but of course, could not go on. You can sell everything in the house until, alas, you no longer own the house itself. Yet, this was, we were told, the answer to all our problems. Becoming obvious that it

was not, we had the Anglo-Irish Free Trade Agreement of 1965 which was then sold to the public as the magic wand. When this venture began to hurt we were told that the European Economic Community would secure our salvation.

The E.E.C. Fiasco

The Republican movement in Ireland takes no pleasure in the fact that full membership of the EEC, which Republicans strenuously opposed, has brought hardship to many sections of the Irish people, North and South. Unfortunately, worse has yet to come unless the politicians face the consequences soon of their tragic error in committing the nation to full membership. The political branch of the Republican movement, Sinn Fein, the only nationally organised group that has consistently opposed the EEC has this year adopted the tactic of active boycott and is determined to lead the opposition to the EEC in 1979, as in 1972 and 1975.

The outstanding effects of the EEC in Ireland have been:

- * Huge increases in the cost of living;
- * Inability of native Irish industries to compete (clothing, furniture, footwear);
- * Increased multinational foreign investments resulting in branch factories which make only component parts;
- * Initial benefits to the farming community, as promised. (approx. 45 per cent of population make their living directly or indirectly from the land). The Farm modernisation Scheme (directive 159) for the restructuring of holdings has not been implemented yet and the CAP itself is coming under threat;
- * 200-mile fishing limit around Ireland thrown open to superior EEC fleets;
- * Steady undermining of Irish neutrality (Ireland is the only EEC country not a member of NATO);
- * Increase in cultural domination of minorities, including Irish-speaking communities along the Western seaboard;
- * Increasing EEC control over the exploitation of mineral resources and offshore wealth.

The E.M.S.

But the main debate at the present moment of time centres around the E.M.S. or the European Monetary System. Like the initial debate on the question of entry into the EEC, this is not one for the 'ordinary' people as far as the Dublin government is concerned. That is, those ordinary people as distinct from the 'upper' level of impressive international conferences that, as one paper put it, create an air of purposeful confidence and an image that things are under control. It is bureaucracy, learned quickly from the Common Market bureaucracy at its ugliest.

Over the past couple of weeks reports were lavishly recorded by the media of 'upper' level activities, that is, the flights, the landings and the receptions. All else, negotiations and their intricacies, were for the Cabinet appointed by the Taoiseach Jack Lynch who ruled without question regarding what deal he would bring home from Brussels. The choice of entry to the E.M.S. was his and his only.

The European Monetary System is being pushed mainly by the West German government to bring all EEC currencies, more or less, into line with the exchange rate of the Deutchmark which is currently the strongest in the EEC. A stark warning as to the sort of poker game that is the EEC came this week in the way the "hopes" of the Dublin gov. were dashed at the very last minute having been led up the traditional garden paths of Europe. All the promises became worthless overnight, as far as Dublin was concerned. The E.M.C. was shown the debacle that it is, a deception as is the whole EEC on the part of the Eurocrats.

Certainly, the EMS would have had far reaching effects on the Irish economy, especially that of the 26 counties where the government has always been influenced by its almost total dependence on British and Common Market domination. Ireland's currency has been tied to the British pound since 1826. Whether or not Britain had herself joined the proposed E.M.S. Ireland's lack of economic independence would continue and grow. What we need is to break with the system which calls for a European Monetary System that benefits only the exploiters and profit makers - the EEC.

Sinn Fein is opposed to the whole philosophy of the EEC and we view the EEC as a retrogressive force for the peoples of Europe and for all humanity, especially for the Third World.

The Irish Republican Movement views it as an imperialist, capitalist and neo-colonialist manifestation and, this being so, we are determined not to reform it but, acting in co-operation with kindred organisations in Europe, to dismantle the EEC totally.

EEC membership has its effects on the War of Liberation against British imperialism in Ireland in the following ways:

NATO support for British occupation forces in Ireland.

Pressure from Bonn and the EEC generally on Britain not to yield to the Liberation forces' demand that the British withdraw from Ireland.

Extra-territorial courts, north and south, which provide a model for the "European Convention of Repression";

Unification of monetary system will be followed by unification of police and military.

NEWS FROM THE NORTH

Belfast - November 17th

There was total disruption and traffic chaos when British Army units and RUC were tied down dealing with over thirty hoax bomb scares in various parts of the city. The day began with a hijacked bus being left outside City Hall on the main traffic thoroughfare. The area had to be cleared in order to carry out a controlled explosion on a device left on board. Other commandeered vehicles were placed at Boucher Road, Donegal Road and outside the King's Hall at Balmoral. Hoax bombs brought traffic to a standstill on the Grosvenor Road and Gresham Street and closed the M.1. Motorway between the Birches and Lurgan. To complete the day in Belfast an actual bomb exploded at the Northern Bank on Crumlin Road.

Tyrone - November 18th

Two bombs exploded at Strabane Golf Club, badly damaging the premises. A third bomb was located and defused by a British Army patrol.

Derry City - November 19th

Nine incendiary bombs exploded in business premises on the Abercorn Road, Butcher Street and Strand Road.

Down - November 19th

A further nine incendiaries went off in shops in the Hill Street area of Newry.

Another incendiary device caused damage to a store in Downpatrick. At Castlewellan a bomb hung on a grill outside a furniture shop in the main street exploded after the area was evacuated, starting a fire which destroyed the building.

Tyrone - November 19th

Cookstown: Incendiaries planted in business premises in William Street and the Old Town Complex. One furniture store completely destroyed.

Omagh: Fire bombs exploded in a number of stores in the town centre.

Coalisland: Bombs went off at a timber yard and a sand plant.

Dungannon: A paint store was gutted by fire when a bomb exploded.

Belfast - November 19th

The British Army base at New Barnsley came under fire on two occasions. No hits were claimed on either side.

South Armagh - November 20th-23rd

The main Dublin/Belfast rail line is still blocked as we go to press. A CIE goods train was flagged down, shortly after it crossed the border, by armed men who placed cylinder type bombs on board. British army helicopters have continued to survey the area but have not moved in yet for fear of radio-controlled bombs which are fitted with devices to prevent British army personnel detonating them.

Belfast - November 23rd

Bombs exploded on the Lisburn Road destroying two business premises.

Belfast - November 25th

The Assistant Governor of Long Kesh with special responsibility for the 'H' Block was shot dead. The IRA in a supplied statement claiming responsibility for the execution said:

"This man was fully aware of the beatings and torture of the men "on the blanket" and was in fact instrumental in sentencing political prisoners to solitary confinement and dietary punishments. Roy Mason has related the execution to an RAC protest in Armagh. The contradictions of this insinuation show Mason up as a political idiot. The most amateurish student of IRA logistics would know that such an operation would be planned well in advance and independent of any street protest.

"If Mason's assertion were correct - that at a moment's notice we could execute the Deputy Governor of Long Kesh - then we certainly are in contradiction to Mason's ailing predictions) an efficient guerrilla organisation.

We justly executed Miles for his responsibility over H-Block."

Derry - November 25th

Paddy Duffy an auxiliary IRA Volunteer was gunned down by an undercover joint British Army and RUC unit. He died instantly with nine bullets in his body. The shooting took place when Mr. Cuffy entered a house in Maureen Avenue in Derry's Bogside.

In a statement the Derry Brigade of the IRA explained the circumstances of Paddy Duffy's death.

"Patrick Duffy, an Auxiliary member of the Irish Republican Army was shot dead by members of the SAS backed by the RUC as he walked unarmed into a house in Maureen Avenue. Undisputed reports have reached us that British personnel in civilian clothes were seen leaving the house and making off in a red van. We wish to stress that Patrick Duffy was unarmed at the time of his death. We further stress that since the British were in the house lying in wait, they had ample opportunity to arrest and capture him. This is further evidence of the Brit "kill, don't question" policy, previously witnessed in Ballysillan, Coalisland, Dunloy, Derry and Ballygoney. It is obvious that the British were acting on information received and carefully planned a political assassination. We hope that those who inform, and especially those who use their position to encourage others to inform, are aware of the very important part they played in the death of Patrick Duffy."

Belfast - November 27th

In a carefully planned and precisely timed operation the IRA shot dead a part-time member of the UDR. The ambush took place in Hamill Street off the Lower Falls.

Newry - November 27th

The former President of the Methodist Church in Ireland, Rev. Dr. Hedley Plunkett, appealed to the IRA to have a six-day Xmas ceasefire. In a supplied statement the Irish Republican Army re-affirmed their previous statement that "The IRA will NOT be observing a Christmas ceasefire."

Belfast - November 28th

Three bombs were planted at the Windsor carpet showroom on the Donegal Road by a man and a woman. One bomb exploded causing damage, the remaining two bombs were defused by the British Army.

Fermanagh - November 29th

Three RUC men were wounded when their patrol car was ambushed in Rosslea on the Fermanagh border.

Eleven towns in Bombwave - November 30th

Another wave of IRA bombing last week rocked eleven towns in the occupied zone costing the British exchequer millions of pounds. Economic targets, including shops, business property, banks and railway installations were the targets of the 19-bomb barrage. The wave of bombing was the biggest since the IRA offensive two weeks ago which caused millions of pounds worth of damage. In the co-ordinated bombing raids on the last day of November car bombs and blast-incendiaries were used. They took place mainly in County Tyrone and County Armagh with a few

in Fermanagh. In Lurgan there were five explosions, one in a signal box on the railway line to Belfast. Armagh's Scotch Street was badly damaged by two explosions in which two RUC men were injured.

Other towns

Other towns hit were Cookstown, where a garage was damaged by two bombs, Stewartstown, Coagh, Gortin, Moy, Dungannon, Lisnaskea and Belleek.

The bombings, which began at about 8.30 p.m. continued the recently renewed series of IRA bombings of commercial targets and although the RUC said that they were expecting such a bombing wave after the gardai had intercepted four men and a woman carrying bombing equipment across the border between Buncrana and Derry, their security clamp-down was unable to prevent the attacks.

The current campaign began on November 14th with the car-bombing of six mid-Ulster towns. Cookstown and Dungannon were both targets on that occasion also. Dungannon suffered the most damage with more than 60 business premises in Scotch Street and its environs damaged by a 200-lb car-bomb.

The centre of Scotch Street, Armagh, was blasted in last week's attacks by a massive car bomb which started a fire. A hi-jacked vehicle was left outside Clarke's paintshop and when it exploded the store went up in flames. The fire spread quickly to Woolworths and both buildings were wrecked. Extensive damage was caused to three adjoining shops and buildings on the opposite side of the street were also damaged.

This was the third time Woolworths in Armagh has been destroyed by bombing. Radio and TV stations flashed warnings of the bombings.

Three bombs exploded in Co. Fermanagh, one starting a fire in a shop in Lisnaskea and two exploding in Belleek main street. The M1 from Lurgan to Portadown was closed when a suspect vehicle was spotted and the Belfast-to-Bangor rail-line was closed after a telephone caller said there were four bombs on the track. In Stewartstown, a general store and several other shops were badly damaged by a car bomb.

In Coagh, Co. Tyrone, a bomb devastated a public house and a bank while in Cookstown a number of public houses and shops were destroyed by bombs.

IRA REPLY TO BISHOP'S CRITICISM

The bomb blitz launched by the IRA recently, which was dealt with in our last week's issue, was followed by further attacks across the six counties. The latest of these was the crippling of a goods train in South Armagh by an active service unit of the IRA who planted a number of bombs on board. Already in many towns there has been a reversal of the British government's "normalisation" policy. This policy was one of lifting some of the so-called "security restrictions in towns and telling the world how "normal" the Six Counties was again. In fact, the British Secretary to the occupied North-East of Ireland was in America at the very

height of the attacks preaching the "normality" of things in Ireland and trying to exploit American investment as a tool of counter-insurgency. As *Republican News* put it: "Mason's hopes were seriously dashed by last week's IRA operations and American businessmen have shied off, convinced that not even the minimum conditions of stability exist".

Soon the British apologists were rushing into print. Among them was Bishop Edward Daly of Derry. He condemned the IRA and, not for the first time, attempted to bargain the rights of prisoners against the actions of the IRA. All in all it seemed a downright apology for British action in Ireland and particularly their treatment of the prisoners-of-war in H-Block.

The IRA in a supplied statement replied as follows to Bishop Daly's criticism:

"Certainly we can be criticised, and if we stand indicted we stand indicted before the people, not before those who rule us with their 15,000 foreign soldiers, their torture and repressive laws; nor before those who collaborate with our rulers. We take criticism when that criticism is in context; but let us get one point clear—it is not how we conduct the armed struggle which is under attack from Bishop Daly, but the armed struggle itself.

"Bishop Daly's judgement comes down on the side of the cause of violence—the British presence, and he holds no sway with us or our supporters who ultimately determine the course of the struggle. Our people remember well the hope Bishop Daly gave Frank Stagg, exhausted by a long hunger strike, by supporting his repatriation to Ireland. But after a few words from Merlyn Rees, and after a NIO newspapers advertisement outlining the "superior" British rationale, Bishop Daly not only withdrew his call for repatriation but supported the British Government's position. That somersault was one nail in Frank Stagg's coffin.

"He speaks about his concern for prison conditions, no doubt referring to the Blanket-men in the H-Blocks. Yet, not for the first time, he repugnantly attempts to bargain humanity for men on the inside conditional on an ending of the struggle on the outside. This is cynical opportunism not a concerned principle.

"We don't resist and fight without the support of those oppressed by the British occupation of our country, which, we must remind Bishop Daly, is still with us. Why not call on the British Government to end their war, and close down their prison camps in Ireland? Why not call on them to leave the Irish people in peace?" the statement ended.

We doubt very much if Bishop Daly will answer the last two questions: we doubt very much if he can.

PRIESTS AND PRISONERS

Contrasting with the attitude of Bishop Daly of Derry towards the Republican prisoners-of-war are the recent statements by Irish clergymen on behalf of our prisoners. In a letter this week to the press, Frs. Brian Smeaton (Belfast),

Des Wilson (Belfast), Joe McVeigh (Monaghan) and Raymond Murray (Armagh) say:

"We are deeply ashamed that the Christian community so allows the suffering of prisoners to continue. The Christian community, to which a majority of people in Ireland belong, is rich. It has music and literature, education, finance, buildings, worship and respect. The Christian community also claims the spirit of God to be worth more than all these things.

"Why is it that with all these resources, the suffering of prisoners continues?"

"Why is it that the Christian community is content to depend upon statements, letters, visits and television appearances by a few Church leaders as its action on behalf of prisoners? Where is the openness to society and especially to prisoners?"

"What is wrong that the rich resources of the Christian community cannot be put at the disposal of prisoners? Do we have to wait for people to die before positive action is taken? How can we justify the continuing disregard? We call upon the Christian community to use the rich and varied resources it has *on behalf of prisoners*. If they are not used on behalf of prisoners they will be increasingly used against them".

At a recent public meeting in Dublin on the conditions in H-Block, Long Kesh prison, Fr. Piaras O Duill said: "One has no right whatever to attempt to give the impression that torture and ill-treatment of captives or the deprivation of human respect and dignity of prisoners is justified for any reason whatsoever, much less for the actions of others not in prison. No Irishman, whether bishop or politician, can be justified in bargaining the fundamental rights of prisoners for reduced aggression towards the British presence.

"Such an attitude has never been acceptable in Irish history. To say, therefore, that it is difficult to have sympathy with the men in H-Block may be underestimating by a long shot the deep-seated sentiments of the Irish people that is rooted in centuries of foreign oppression and denial of Irish sovereignty".

That Archbishop Tomas O Fiaich spoke out strongly on the H-Blocks of Long Kesh is widely known. But how deeply has his words penetrated the body politic? Were they too strong for digestion even though they are true? :

"Having spent the whole of Sunday in the prison I was shocked by the inhuman conditions prevailing in H-Blocks 3, 4 and 5, where over 300 prisoners are incarcerated. One would hardly allow an animal to remain in such conditions, let alone a human being. The nearest to it I have seen was the spectacle of hundreds of homeless people living in sewer-pipes in the slums of Calcutta. The stench and filth in some of the cells, with the remains of rotten food and human

excretia scattered around the walls, was almost unbearable. In two of them I was unable to speak for fear of vomiting.

"The prisoners' cells are without beds, chairs or tables. They sleep on mattresses on the floor and in some cases I noticed that these were quite wet. The prisoners are naked. They have no covering except a towel or blanket, no books, newspapers or reading material except the Bible (even religious magazines have been banned since my last visit); no pens or writing material, no TV or radio, no hobbies or handicrafts, no exercise or recreation. They are locked in their cells for almost the whole of every day and some of them have been in this condition for more than a year and a half.

"The authorities refuse to admit that these prisoners are in a different category from the ordinary, yet everything about their trials and family background indicates that they are different. They were sentenced by special courts without juries. The vast majority were convicted on allegedly voluntary confessions obtained in circumstances which are now placed under grave suspicion by the recent report of Amnesty International. Many are very youthful and come from families which had never been in trouble with the law, though they lived in areas which suffered discrimination in housing and jobs. How can one explain the jump in prison population of Northern Ireland from 500 to 3,000 unless a new type of prisoner has emerged?"

"The problem of these prisoners is one of the great obstacles to peace in our community. As long as it continues it will be a potent cause of resentment in the prisoners themselves, breeding frustration among their relatives and friends and leading to bitterness between the prisoners and the prison staff. It is only sowing the seeds of future conflict.

"Pending the full resolution of the deadlock, I feel it essential to urge that everything required by the normal man to maintain his physical and mental health and to live a life which is tolerably human should be restored to these prisoners without delay".

A petition calling for parole for a Catholic priest currently serving a 12-year sentence in Britain for his alleged part in controlling the Coventry unit of the IRA was handed in to the British Embassy in Dublin recently. The petition was signed by 500 students at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, and over 40 members of the academic staff, including the college's President, the Rev. Michael Diden.

The priest, Father Patrick Fell, now 38, was sentenced in 1973. Previously he was assistant priest at All Souls' Church in Coventry. Among those sentenced with him was Frank Stagg, who later died while on hunger strike in England.

According to the petition, Father Fell has been eligible for parole since April of last year.

Irish Republican
Information Service

Kevin Barry House,
44 Parnell Square,
Dublin 1, Ireland