



BIRMINGHAM SIX

COMMITTEE NEWSLETTER

September 1989, No. 5

Hugh Callaghan Richard McIlkenny
Paddy Joe Hill Billy Power
Gerry Hunter John Walker

Irish government takes tougher stand on Birmingham Six

Ireland's Foreign Affairs Minister Gerry Collins may call upon the British Home Secretary to reopen the case of the Birmingham Six, on the basis of a report now being compiled by the Irish Embassy in London.

The report, described by a Foreign Affairs spokesman as "comprehensive", was requested by Collins in mid-August following the dramatic disbandment of the West Midlands Serious Crimes Squad. The dossier is expected to clarify the links between recent cases in which West Midlands officers falsified prisoners' statements, and the case of the Birmingham Six, who were interrogated in 1974 by members of the Serious Crimes Squad.

The Embassy report, and the position that Collins decides to adopt with Douglas Hurd, could be of crucial importance to the Birmingham Six case as the British authorities are insisting that a police inquiry into the West Midlands force be limited to the years 1986-1988. Chris Millin, the British Labour MP, is demand-

ing a public inquiry that would include the 1975 convictions of the six men. A strong push by Minister Collins could lend the full weight of the Irish Government behind Mullins campaign (see page 3).

An Irish government statement of the 15 August welcomed the decision of the British authorities to investigate the "practices" of the squad, which was fully disbanded in early August. However, it noted that the terms of the police inquiry were limited to a two-year span between 1986 and 1988.

"The final report is expected very soon," according to a Foreign Affairs spokesman, who said the Birmingham Six case was receiving priority treatment. He declined to comment on reports that An Taoiseach, Charles Haughey, had personally expressed concern at the delay in receiving the report in Dublin.

Collins is expected to request a meeting with Douglas Hurd in early September, and government sources suggest that he may take the opportunity to call for a reopening of the men's case.

The government's apparently strong position was welcomed by Fine Gael but independent TDs, such as Tony Gregory, are anxious that this position be maintained. This view is shared by Paddy

Letter from the Committee

Fifteen years ago, in August 1975, six Irishmen were convicted of one of the biggest mass murders in British history. Hugh Callaghan, Paddy Joe Hill, Gerry Hunter, Richard McIlkenny, Billy Power and Johnny Walker were given life sentences for the Birmingham pub bombings which had claimed 21 lives in November 1974.

Fifteen years later the men are still in jail, and still protesting their innocence. Their "confessions" were signed after many hours in custody, during which the men were beaten, humiliated and deprived of sleep and food. Evidence is now emerging that some of their interrogators have since been involved in cases where other innocent men were wrongly convicted on the strength of statements doctored by the police.

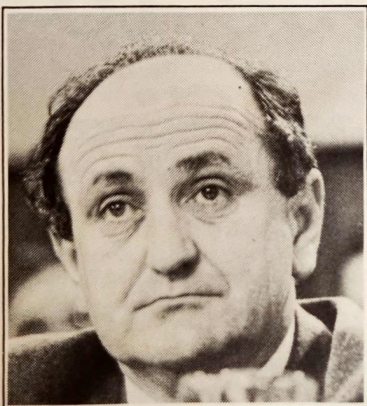
The forensic evidence, gathered by Dr. Frank Skuse, has also been severely discredited since the men's conviction in 1975.

Yet the British Appeals process has so far failed to exonerate these men. An Appeal, which opened in late 1987, failed to overturn the original convictions. This verdict came after a 28-day hearing in which the Appeal judges heard an overwhelming body of evidence in the men's favour.

Undiscouraged, the six are now trying to get their case heard in the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, but legal experts warn that this process could take several years. Far quicker, would be a decision by the British Home Secretary to reopen the case on the basis of facts now emerging about the West Midlands police force.

The Birmingham Six Committee, which was established in 1986 to help campaign on the men's behalf, is confident that the men will eventually be freed and exonerated. It needs your support.

Many Irish people, including Fianna Fail politicians, opposition deputies and leading Church figures, believe the Birmingham Six are victims of a miscarriage of justice. Remember the men on this, their fifteenth year in prison. And help join the campaign to set them free.



Gerry Collins, Foreign Affairs Minister

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Chris Mullin steps up campaign

In a hard-hitting letter, the British Labour MP Chris Mullin has urged the Home Secretary Rt Hon Douglas Hurd to send the case of the Birmingham Six back to the Court of Appeal.

Mullin has already concentrated minds in the British House of Commons with a volley of parliamentary questions aimed at the Home Secretary's office. More important, his persistence has established a direct link between the disgraced West Midlands Serious Crimes Squad and the case of the Birmingham Six who were convicted in August 1975 of the Birmingham pub bombings.

His letter, sent to Douglas Hurd on August 20th, points out that:

- Members of the Serious Crimes Squad extracted written confessions from four of the men during their first two days and nights in police custody.
- The confessions flatly contradicted each other as to the number of bombs; the location of the bombs; as to who planted the bombs in which pub; and the type of containers used.

The case against the men rested squarely on these 'confessions' which, Mullin argues, were obtained by a special police unit which has since been implicated in several cases where confessions were fabricated to obtain convictions. He adds that Detective Sergeant Brian Morton, who was sent to prison in November 1983 for assaulting a suspect with a view to obtaining a statement, was present at the police station where the six Irishmen were interrogated in 1974.

Mullin reminds Hurd that Lord Bridge, who presided over the original trial of the Birmingham Six, rejected suggestions that so many police officers could have conspired to fabricate confessions as "bizarre and grotesque".

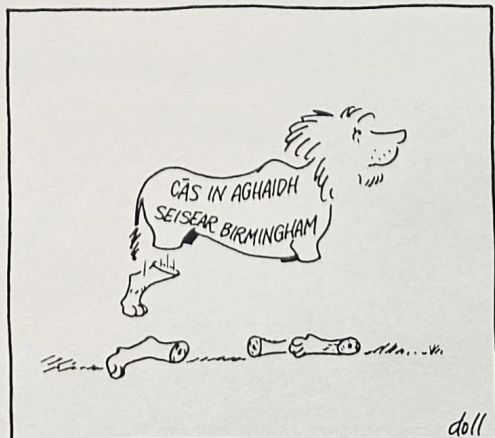
"Consider the scale of the conspiracy in terms of those involved," Lord Bridge said. "It ranges, does it not, from detective constables and police constables right up

through the police hierarchy to Chief Superintendent Robinson, in charge of the whole CID of the West Midlands."

Ironically, the senior echelon of the West Midlands entire Criminal Investigation Department (CID) was disbanded this August after key files went missing from the CID headquarters. To date, 53 officers have been either suspended or re-assigned to administrative roles in a purge of the force ordered by the West Midlands Chief Constable Geoffrey Dear.

"By August this year, nineteen cases brought by officers of the West Midlands Serious Crimes Squad had collapsed," Mullins points out. "Many more are said to be in the pipeline. Most involve allegations of fabricated confessions and of police misconduct at least as outrageous as that which Lord Bridge had such difficulty in believing at the pub bombings trial."

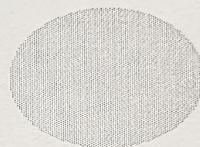
He concludes: "If the jury at the pub bombings trial had known what we know today, there is at least a reasonable chance that they would have rejected the police evidence. This being so I respectfully request that you again refer this case back to the Court of Appeal."



Help wanted

Can you spare a Friday or Saturday evening in the first week of each month? The Birmingham Six Committee urgently needs help from people to distribute the newsletter in Dublin city centre pubs. Distributors are also needed in Cork, Galway, Donegal, Limerick and other major towns. If you would like to join the campaign, please contact the Committee at Jarlath House to arrange an appointment.

The Committee has no political agenda beyond obtaining the release and vindication of the six men.



contd. from pg 1

McIlkenny, whose brother Richard is one of the Birmingham Six, and who has heard many a strong government statement disappear into thin air.

"I call on the Irish Government to put pressure on the British Home Secretary to ensure the men's immediate release," Mr McIlkenny told the Birmingham Six Committee. "After languishing in prison for the past 15 years it is time that Douglas Hurd took note of the public disquiet about the convictions and opened the gates. These revelations give the British government a 'way out' of the tangle they have got themselves into. They can release the men immediately without any blemish on themselves or the judiciary."

Source: *The Irish Times*,
Tuarascail,
August 23 1989

Pushing poster power

Robert Ballagh, the well-known modern artist, has designed an original poster in aid of the Birmingham Six campaign. The posters will be launched at a reception this September as part of a major fund-raising drive on behalf of the prisoners.

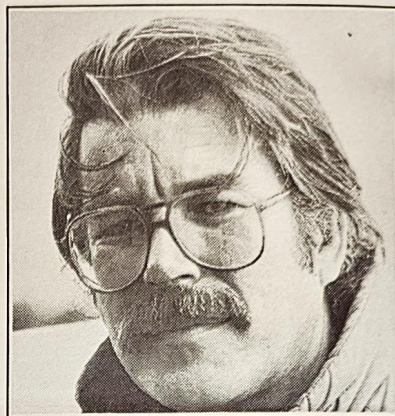
The poster is a simple but powerful design, depicting scales of justice hanging in the balance. A limited edition of 300 posters, signed by the artist, are available at £30 each. Robert Ballagh, who recently held an exhibition in the Soviet Union, is an Irish artist who lives in Dublin. He has supported the Birmingham Six for some time, and the Committee is grateful for his donation.

Orders for the poster may be forwarded to the Committee which is also planning to launch a special posters competition for vocational and secondary schools. Teachers and students can contact Jarlath House, tel. 775212, for further details.

• Christmas Cards

Every year, at Christmas and St. Patrick's Day, the Committee prints specially designed cards on the Birmingham Six theme. This year's Christmas cards will soon be available from Jarlath House at a knock-down price of four for £1.

Send them to your friends and relations at home and abroad. Or, better still, buy several and mail one to your local TD. They will be available from October at Jarlath House at 12 Brunswick Place, Dublin 2.



Artist Robert Ballagh

Stop Press.....

Marathon:

We are still looking for fit and willing bodies to run in the Dublin City Marathon on 30th October 1989. Each runner will get:-

- A tee-shirt marked "Justice for the Birmingham Six."
- Access to changing facilities in a Dublin City hotel.
- Sponsorship cards.
- Refreshments after the race

Contact the secretary at Jarlath House, tel. 775212. And hurry!

National Ad:

Funds are still urgently needed to finance a full-page advertisement in an Irish daily newspaper which is planned for early 1990 when Ireland takes the six-month presidency of the European communities. Approximately 900 signatures are needed in all to fill the page, at a cost of £10 per name. Contributions are still coming in, but we need more. Please send us a cheque, indicating whether or not you wish your name to appear in print.

Vigil:

Join in the evening candlelight vigil on September 23rd from 8pm to 12pm at the British Embassy, 31 Merrion Road, Dublin 4. The vigil is being organised by the Booterstown Support Group. Tel. 883798. A picket is also held every Saturday outside the British Embassy from 11.30 - 2.00pm. Please give your support.

Pub Quiz:

Brainy rather than brawny? There's a fund-raising pub quiz at the Club na Muinteoiri in Parnell Square, Dublin 1 on Thursday 28th September. It starts at 8.30 pm and costs £12 per table, with four people on each team. Contact Jarlath House for details.

Attention readers

We publish this newsletter on a monthly basis. Due to printing costs we can no longer afford to mail it free of charge to our readers. To ensure that you will receive a copy every month please send a minimum £5.00 donation to the Committee (if you have not already done so). Please fill in the form below. Thank you for your support.

Name

Address

Tel. no

Bank Account

You can also send donations directly into our bank account at:

Allied Irish Banks,
52 Upper Baggot Street
Dublin 2.

A/C number 36220028

Thank you

**The Birmingham Six
Committee
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12 Brunswick Place
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**Tel. (01) 775212
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Get Involved!

The Birmingham Six Committee is one of several groups working in Ireland, Britain and the US for the release and exoneration of the six men who were wrongly convicted in August 1975 of the Birmingham pub bombings.

The group has no aims or agenda beyond securing justice for the six men. You can help, either by sending a donation or getting involved. Write to your local representatives, TD, and Euro MP.

Write to the six men in jail, and express your support.

Paddy Joe Hill, 509496, HM Prison Gartree, Market Harborough, Leicester, England.

Gerry Hunter, 509495, HM Prison Long Lorton, Evesham, Wores, England.

John Walker, 509494, HM Prison Long Lorton, Evesham, Wores, England.

Hugh Callaghan, 509499, HM Prison Long Lorton, Evesham, Wores, England.

Richard McKenny, 509498, HM Prison Full Sutton, Stamford Bridge, Nr. York, England.

Billy Power, 509497, HM Prison Full Sutton, Stamford Bridge, Nr. York, England.