

Republican SINN FÉIN Poblachtach

28 Carysfort Road,
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PRESS RELEASE

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SEAN SABHAT COMMEMORATION

75 Páirc Dhún Éanna,
Ráth Eanaigh,
B.Á.C. 5.
Tel. 316851

The 30th. anniversary of the deaths of Sean Sabhat and Fergal O'Hanlon was remembered in Limerick yesterday (Sunday) by a commemoration attended by branches of Republican Sinn Féin in Munster.

Sean Sabhat and Fergal O'Hanlon were killed in an I.R.A. attack on Brookeboro R.U.C. barracks on New Year's Day 1957. The main oration was delivered by Daithi O Conaill who was a comrade of Sabhat and O'Hanlon and who participated in the Brookeboro raid.

In the course of his oration, Mr. O Conaill said:

"By all accounts the two volunteers who died in Brookeboro were exceptional people. Fergal O'Hanlon was a young, talented and courageous soldier. Barely twenty years of age, he was a popular figure in his native town of Monaghan having made a mark as a sportsman and a promising employee of the local county council.

Sean Sabhat was an older more experienced soldier. He had served as an officer in the F.C.A. but eventually found his way into the ranks of the I.R.A. A brilliant writer and speaker of the Irish language, he organised a number of organisations in his native city to promote the language and his deep Christian beliefs. A radical social thinker, he wrote and published his own magazine "AN GATH" highlighting the social ills of Limerick and putting forward solutions which can now be seen as advanced for their time.

Both volunteers reflected the idealism and dedication of the 1956 Campaign. Sabhat and O'Hanlon became disillusioned with the hypocritical statements and actions of party politicians and were drawn to the I.R.A. as they saw it as the vehicle through which full freedom and sovereignty could be secured and maintained.

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The organisation they joined had an unbroken tradition of resistance to British rule. Originating from the fusion of the Irish Volunteers and Irish Citizen Army in 1916, the I.R.A. went on to become the precursor of many guerrilla armies throughout the world. The campaign of 1919-1921 sounded the death knell of the British Empire but not the establishing of Irish independence.

Through treachery and deceit, the Republic of Pearse and Connolly was overthrown in the brutal war of '22-23. Though bowed but not beaten, the I.R.A. lived on to strike again in 1939 and survived the severe coercion of the 1940's.

It was volunteers like Sabhat and O'Hanlon who gave the I.R.A. the verve and dash of the 1950's. Their deaths moved a nation; the funerals were the largest in Ireland since the time of Parnell. The heightened national consciousness resulted in an upsurge in Sinn Fein and the winning of four seats, on an abstentionist basis, in the election of 1957.

The sacrifices^{ic} of Sabhat and O'Hanlon were not to bear fruit in the Fifties but their example of dedication to duty and principle became the motivating force when it came to reorganising a revitalised I.R.A. in the late Sixties. An awkened people in the North needed an army to meet and defeat British and loyalist aggression and guided by the true spirit of Republicanism, they brought the struggle for freedom to an unprecedented pitch. An army which had known many vicissitudes developed to the point where the British government was forced to recognise and meet its leadership on two occasions.

In 1972 top representatives of the British government met the I.R.A. leadership to discuss a British withdrawal from Ireland. These talks were not successful but following a phase of intensified military activity, the British again sued for peace in 1975. Devising measures of British disengagement from Ireland were the terms of reference for those talks. They were carried on in the face of

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a vicious campaign of sectarian murder by loyalist forces and outright opposition of the Dublin government. As in '72, the British government again wilted before loyalist and Free State blackmail and the most promising opportunity in decades to resolve the national question was lost to the great detriment of the whole people of Ireland.

Many traumas have struck the Republican Movement since then. The epic struggle in the H-Blocks and subsequent loss of ten lives on hunger strike is still a vivid memory. The 'shoot-to-kill' policy of the R.U.C. took its deadly toll in true Black and Tan fashion. The degrading treatment of the women prisoners in Armagh brought shame on what was once believed to be a civilised people. The Dublin government continues its policy of super collaboration culminating in the recent Extradition Act which no self-respecting government would entertain.

Unfortunately, there have been problems within the movement itself. There were those who propagated a theory of a war lasting twenty to thirty years thereby condemning prisoners and people alike to indefinite suffering and damaging the single-minded approach necessary to bring conflict to a speedy and successful end as soon as possible.

A naive belief in the power of parliamentary politics has resulted in a reneging on fundamental principles with the consequent confusion and demoralisation among republican supporters. Regrettable as these developments are, Republican Sinn Féin must recognise their existence and point a way forward.

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The three major objectives defined in 1971 are as valid now as they were then:-

1. Declaration of Intent on Britain's part to withdraw from Ireland;
2. Establishing the right of the Irish people, acting as a unit, to determine their own institutions of government, and
3. The release of all political prisoners.

There are many prisoners in the North, South and in England who are well in to the second decade of imprisonment. It is inhuman to keep people in jail for so long a period as it is to perpetuate the injustice done to the Birmingham Six, the Guildford Four and the Maguire family. The abolition of the Diplock Courts and not their reform is an objective to be secured and all imprisoned under that discredited system released forthwith.

The need for the Irish people to assert their right and ability to be masters of their own destiny was never more urgent than it is to-day. Our people are burdened with two non-viable States the rulers of which have lost the power to redress the economic and social disintegration now staring us all in the face. Our youth are leaving in their thousands and people in general are despairing of ever seeing a future in their own land again.

The unresolved national question of British interference in Irish affairs is the root cause of the political, economic and social ills which beset our country. History has taught us that there can be no compromise with aggression; it must be confronted and defeated and we stand by the right of this nation to use force, a right enshrined in the 1916 Proclamation, to win our country's freedom.

Restoring faith and confidence in themselves is now a vital necessity for the whole people of Ireland. That faith can only be built on the tried and true principles of Irish Republicanism. Living up to Republican principles has never been easy and never will be but it is the only course open to the followers of Sabhat and O'Hanlon.