

Fourthwrite

For a democratic socialist Irish republic

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Editorial

Policing the North

During a recent television debate on the future of policing in the north of Ireland, both PSNI Chief Constable Hugh Orde and NIO minister with responsibility for health, Shaun Woodward, made it very clear that there would be no place in the police force for what they described as former paramilitaries. It was further pointed out by Hugh Orde that this barring order is not confined to those who have served a prison sentence but also extends to those who have been identified by British Intelligence as members of such organisations. Sinn Fein's spokesperson on policing, Gerry Kelly, was sitting in the audience and make the non committal point that he knew of no former prisoner who actually wanted to become a police officer in the 6-Counties.

It is not at all surprising that few if any republican former prisoners want to join the PSNI. Policing is not a value free business in any country. Support for the police - and joining the police is one of the greatest acts of support possible - is always support for the regime and the status quo. In the 6-Counties, this simply means endorsing the political union with Britain and whatever party governs us from London. No amount of 'lets pretend' will get around this fact. If some republicans believe they can infiltrate and thereafter manipulate the PSNI, they are very much mistaken. For one thing, this type of conspiracy is always misunderstood since to remain undetected it must remain secret and unexplained. The consequence is that what the general public believes it is seeing is republicans joining, not undermining, the police force.

Moreover, it is naive in the extreme to think that the British have not prepared for this contingency. They have dealt with similar situations in Ireland before. Long before any party could hope to have meaningful influence over policing, its support for the force will have been used to justify a plethora of coercive operations such as breaking trade union pickets, searching the homes of suspected 'subversives', deporting asylum seekers or assisting the Loyal Orders parade through contested areas.

Of course, some may argue that under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement, a new order prevails and that it is time to move forward. Setting aside whatever reservations we have about the Agreement, it can only hope to work if all sides, including the British, are willing to 'park' the past and work with each other on the basis of unqualified equality. How can there possibly be anything approaching equality if institutions of state in Northern Ireland continue to insist that Bobby Sands, his cause and his comrades were criminal (and this is what prohibiting IRA participation in the state amounts to).

Any short-term gains got from side-stepping this issue will eventually prove illusory and come back to bite those who act opportunistically. It's one thing being treated as second class but accepting it willingly is quite another. Better to have no agreement on policing than sign up for the criminalisation we resisted twenty-five years ago.

A cry from France

It would be very easy to lose a sense of perspective and view the recent events in France as similar in import to those of May 1968. The times and situations are different in many respects. There are differences in that the USA is not experiencing the type of inflationary pressure or economic turn-down that damaged the Nixon presidency almost as much as the Vietnam war and Watergate. Well not yet at any rate and when a country is governed by such short-sighted people as those holding power in Washington, nothing should be ruled out. Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that while the French government is experiencing difficulties in the social and economic field, the United States government is encountering problems at home over the conduct of the Iraq war. If the engine-house of the New World order were to flop spectacularly in the Middle East, there is no telling where the ripples might come to end.

Assessment

Blair's Britain

Someone once said that the nice thing about living in a free society is that you can lie in bed in the early morning and hear a knock on the front door and happily think that it is most likely the postman or the newspaper boy but never fear that it is the secret police. This simple pleasure was something many Irish republicans longed for throughout the dangerous years of the 1970's and 1980's. It is also, now becoming an increasingly rare luxury for many in Britain's Muslim community.

Britain has never been the shining beacon of civil liberties that her admirers and apologists have sometimes claimed. No great and exploitative empire is ever built on virtue and august moral principles and Britain proved no exception to the rule. Nevertheless, for a variety of historic and even geographic reasons, there was a much greater degree of tolerance and respect for a subject's rights within Britain than in many other European countries. While never slow or reluctant to use coercion in Ireland or other parts of the empire, London preferred to maintain a degree of government by consensus on the island of Britain. To an extent this helped nurture a sense of nationalism that benefited the ruling class but it also reflected the real sense of confidence felt by that same class since their victory at Waterloo at least.

Now that is changing. Tony Blair and his New Labour Party are hell bent on introducing ever more reactionary policies to compliment their reactionary commitment to the imperialist and expansionist ambitions of George Bush and neo-Conservatives in the USA.

For a considerable time now the Blair government has been indicating its intention to introduce identity cards, alter the legal process to the disadvantage of a defendant, implement ASBOs and tagging of suspects and increase the time permitted for the police to hold people without charge. The fact that Blair suffered a personal defeat on the 90-day detention order does not alter the overall drift of British government thinking over the past number of years. There is an authoritarianism abroad in Britain that has not been experienced in peacetime (and for all the talk about a war on terror, Britain is at peace) for over a century.

The reason for this strange departure from more normal British practice goes much deeper than a fear of Al-Qaeda. The problem for the British ruling class is, that having accepted the politics and policies of Margaret Thatcher and her advisers and having reinforced them by having them administered by what passes for a Labour Party, the social consequences are now unavoidable. For those who care to look, Britain is a deeply divide society and the ruling class is more afraid of its own population than it is of any threat from abroad.

Legislation that is now being introduced under the guise of dealing with the threat of so called Islamic fundamentalism is very likely designed for use to control the very population it is supposed to protect. The Thatcherite legacy is one of bitter division and ruthless disregard for the weak and the old and the unfortunate. Winners and those fortunate enough to have work may be content with British society but many are not.

The American model is instructive. It has resulted in an explosion of the prison population as the judiciary and prison services are increasingly used to quell the effects of social alienation in the USA. Britain now follows where Washington leads. The question must surely be how strong is a system that requires such measures to contain its own people because make no mistake, that is what this legislation is designed to do.

British and loyalists at odds over concessions from republicans

By John McAnulty

As time passes it is becoming clearer that the loyalist September uprising was very far from being a spontaneous reaction to the restriction on an Orange parade on Belfast's Springfield Road.

It is in fact an inevitable outcome of the Paisleyite victory in May's elections. That election saw off Trimble and his argument that unionists had to fight change from within the Good Friday structures set up by Britain and gave victory to Paisley and his strategy of mobilising to directly confront the British. Now Paisley has to turn his promises into a campaign of sectarian reaction.

The result has been an uprising based on a standard loyalist stratagem best described as the Holy Trinity, when all the component elements of the Unionist alliance are drawn together and the Orange rabble are let loose to enforce their programme of sectarian reaction.

In the mechanism of the Holy Trinity the Unionist political parties articulate the demands for sectarian supremacy. The Orange Order demonstrate that supremacy and attempt mass sectarian intimidation on the streets, and the Loyalist paramilitaries translate that into a programme of violence and ethnic cleansing directed at the nationalist population.

The Holy trinity has been reborn time and time again in the course of the current Irish troubles. The British attempt to save the Loyalists from themselves by agreeing 'reform' that co-opts nationalism in the task of preserving the Orange state while stopping well short of tackling the endemic sectarianism on which the state is based. The loyalists balk at even the slightest sign of concession and stage a revolt. The British retreat in order to maintain the loyalist base on which their occupation of Ireland rests. The Loyalists then counterattack in the hope of enforcing their own programme of apartheid and absolute sectarian privilege. They fail, but win further concessions.

The new atmosphere began to be visible immediately after the DUP victory with a sharp rise on sectarian attacks on Catholics. It has grown day after day since then, amounting almost to a silent pogrom across the North and an actual full-scale pogrom in the village of Ahoghill, where the tiny Catholic population are being driven from their homes and the village is adorned with posters urging unionists to prevent the 'dilution of their strength' by 'exterminating the enemies of Ulster'. The DUP stronghold of North Antrim is the focus of nightly attack on schools, churches and homes. The pattern is replicated at the sectarian interfaces in Belfast, culminating in the random sectarian killing of a young Catholic schoolboy by the UVF and an attack on a Catholic postman leaving him close to death. The Orange demonstrations in July saw a fresh upsurge and the North was plastered with the Union Jack and the flags of the Loyalist death squads. In the background the new, DUP majority councils enforce a more rigid division of sectarian spoils at local level and raw exhibitions of sectarian hatred – a recent example is when the freedom of the city of Lisburn was conferred on Prison screws. One councillor recounted the sadistic delight that his prison officer friends had taken in the suffering of republican hunger strikers and cited this as a primary motive for the honour!

Intimidation moved on towards revolt with a vicious 'Love Ulster' campaign at the beginning of September, opening with a special edition of the Loyalist paper the Shankill Mirror, presenting Catholics as blood-drenched animals and calling for a crude sectarian unity to defend the good old days of full-blown unionist rule. The paper was landed at Larne harbour in a mawkish reenactment of the guns landed by the UVF in the 1920s drive to secure the sectarian state and partition Ireland. The DUP members wept crocodile tears while Jackie McDonald, UDA 'brigadier' and notorious sectarian thug unloaded the papers, the various component parts of hypocrisy and thuggery held together by their common allegiance to Orangism had now been bound and the 'Holy Trinity' was born anew.

Other elements of the loyalist family began to board the bandwagon. The new leader of the Official Unionists, Reg Empey, declared that the parades issue must be resolved (in favour of the sectarians) before any political deal had been struck. At the same time the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), which had provided muscle for the Official unionists, had also to re-establish their roots as the most hard line sectarian organisation. This they did by

waging all-out war on the rival UVF while at the same time carrying out ethnic cleansing and the sectarian murder of Catholic civilians.

The British response has been containment and conciliation and an attempt to divide and rule. The Unionists claim that there has been state savagery and attempted repression, but the mob do not determine the policy of the sectarian state and history is full of examples of the police, in the guise of the RUC, finding themselves in vicious armed conflict with the Orange mob when they overstep the role assigned to them. In fact the evidence on this occasion is in the other direction. The period before and after the Orange march involved loyalist protests that halted traffic all over Belfast. In most cases the demonstrations were tiny and it was the police who prevented the movement of traffic. During the demonstration, when loyalist gunmen attacked the state forces, fire was not returned and the police and army waited for the riot to play itself out.

The UVF was specified as being no longer on ceasefire, but it has been on full war footing for several months without government action. The UDA escaped any action by issuing a statement saying that it opposed violence! The specification does not seem to mean that the UVF will be cut off from the state funds that sustain its front organisation the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) or that the ranks of 'community workers' will lose funding.

Politically the Police chief, Hugh Orde, launched a savage attack on the Orange rabble, while British secretary of state Peter Hain complained that it was 'not loyalism but gangsterism'. (Hain must have sense of humour. How can he tell the difference? Certainly the Loyalists can't – when they hijacked a coach during the violence they could not resist robbing the pensioners that were being carried on it).

However condemnation was followed by appeasement – the violence was the result of unionist demoralisation and these must be addressed. Appeasement was followed by appeals for leadership to rein in the rabble and Hain saw this is coming from the 'from the Orange Order, from loyalist groups, from the unionist parties' – that is the trinity that had launched the uprising!

The Loyalist offensive is intended to come to a peak in October, but is very unlikely to be able to force the British to abandon their attempts to set up a coalition administration. The protests are on a tiny scale compared to those that followed the Drumcree stand-off. Already the campaign is showing the political incoherence that blind bigotry generates. After the siege of Catholic schoolchildren at Holy Cross it became difficult to end the siege because the British couldn't get any coherent demands from the bigots. Today they have a demand from Paisley for lots of money and one from one of his henchmen for the abolition of the Parades commission but no coherent programme has emerged. Also Paisley has won a political majority among unionist voters, but many have abstained in the vote and, of those who did vote the majority have not supported the miniature uprising.

But to see this is to see only half the story. In the same way that in Catholic theology the holy trinity are subsumed into one godhead so the sectarian trinity of Party, Orange Order and paramilitary group is supported and maintained by British imperialism. The current spat is very far from changing this relationship.

The Months preceding the Springfield march, and the week since, show British anxiety to conciliate Unionism. Above all we have seen a police force, the PSNI, identical to its old sectarian alter ego, the RUC.

* A killing spree by the UVF went largely unremarked.

* Hundreds of UVF thugs were able to take over the loyalist estate of Garnerville while the police looked on (the estate is beside the police headquarters).

* Sectarian attacks in Ballymena were ascribed by the local RUC/PSNI commander to

* the decision by local republicans to hold a march – the attacks had been going on for months before the march announcement.

* The RUC/PSNI Deputy Chief Constable Paul Leighton saw sectarianism as "an element" of in the Ahoghill pogrom but so too was "people not getting on with each other". The police offered fire-blankets to Catholic residents – a not so subtle message that they should not look to the police for protection

* The murder of Catholic schoolboy Tom Devlin was never affirmed as sectarian by the police.

* The period before during and after the loyalist riots were marked by conciliation and police co-operation in blocking roads. Savage criticism was delivered at the Orange rabble and was always linked to fervent pleas to the leaders of the parties, the Orangemen and the paramilitaries to show leadership and support law and order – a request the leaders had no problem in refusing.

Already Paisley has won a tactical victory. Whatever the British promised the Provos, the uprising guarantees that Paisley will not be in government with them anytime in the near future. This tactical victory has not halted the decay of unionism. The class alliances of the past have weakened. Many unionists do not vote and those who do have little enthusiasm for being led up the hill once again by the arch-bigot who has led them there so many times in the past. The danger comes not from the victory of Paisley, but from the determination of the British to preserve and invigorate the rotting corpse. Not for one moment will the British consider a solution that does not leave their bigoted allies in place – the ‘democratic’ justification for the occupation of Ireland.

The new element in the current situation is the rabid and open determination of Dublin government to placate the Paisleyites and force a stability to partition, no matter how sectarian or unjust. Mary McAleese, the Irish president, met UDA ‘brigadier’ Jackie McDonald just before the uprising and just after he had helped launch the sectarian ‘Love Ulster’ campaign. Apparently the pair are friends, with the President’s husband a golfing partner. Even more explicit was the position of Irish Justice Minister Michael McDowell. Famous for never missing a chance to condemn republican violence, his reaction to loyalist violence was quite different. True republicanism, he proclaimed, meant conceding to the Orange brethren.

The period following republican surrender will see a bizarre struggle between Imperialism, Irish capitalism and the Provos on the one hand and Paisley on the other. The alliance will attempt to force Paisley to become prime minister. Paisley will force forward an uprising to prevent this as long as the price is Catholics in government.

The weapons of the British will be threats to revert to direct rule indefinitely, to abolish the RIR, the Protestant militia inside the British army that replaced the UDR, to impose swinging water charges, to make further concessions to the Provos, such as the return of ‘on the runs’ who were not included in the agreement to release prisoners and to bring the Provos into police boards and include them on the edges of the state forces. Little of this will affect the DUP. They prefer direct rule, where they can influence the British in endless quangos and boards. The British are already climbing down on the RIR promise. Local politicians would find it useful to have water charges imposed rather than have their supporters see them impose the charge themselves. They will reckon that it is as easy to oppose concessions to the Provos from outside as it is from inside.

The British will be fairly confident of their ability to contain the ‘Love Ulster’ demonstration. They will be somewhat more concerned that sectarian attacks can end Catholic complacency about a new settlement in the North, but will calculate that their penetration of the loyalists and the massive hand-outs of grants will contain the paramilitaries.

Their greatest concern will be unionist withdrawals from police boards, and the fact that these withdrawals were announced by the North and West Belfast parades commission – a body that includes the loyalist paramilitaries. From their point of view the state needs unionist support to survive. It is much more important that unionists be involved in the police boards than that Provos are.

The conflict will end in stalemate. The history of the process so far suggest that the British will try to resolve it by making further concessions to unionism. At that point the Provos will cease being hero’s – the sultans of surrender – and again find themselves leaned on to nudge the settlement further to the right.

The decay of unionism will continue, but the outcome is not necessarily their fall. It will become more and more obvious that it is London and their servants in Dublin that are holding up the corpse. It is only when Irish workers recognise that reality and engage in a battle against their own leaders that the defeat of loyalism and sectarianism will be a realistic option.

Policing Britain

By Siobhan Ni Dhuibhir

Gerry Adams must have listened very carefully to Sir Ian Blair's speech the other night as the issue of policing is one that is currently weighing heavily on his mind. Ian Blair, Head of the Metropolitan Police and therefore, the most senior police officer in the UK made an impassioned plea for people to tell him what kind of police service they want. Now, I know we are all supposed to be grateful for the opportunity and to applaud the openness of the police to actually ask us citizens what we think of the police but I find the whole exercise sickening and scary.

At the moment, the chattering classes, Governments and most commentators are constantly bemoaning the loss of authority in our society and wondering what it is we are supposed to exchange the Churches, Trade Unions and Family ties for. We are all lost according to them in a morass of selfishness, anti-social behaviour, hopelessness and lack of belief in ourselves and others. Well, no bloody wonder when even the Police are asking for our help and support to decide what it is exactly that they are there for. How pathetic is that! Surely, the police are there to uphold the law and even though I disagree with many of the laws they are supposedly upholding, that is their job and what I expect them to do. I am not a supporter of any police force because I see them as the armed arm of the state but I accept that until the revolution they are a fact of life and you expect them to be against you and just get on with it.

Nowadays though, the police are just as much victims of the prevailing climate of fear and victimhood as everyone else. They shoot an innocent man dead and they are the ones who are weeping and feeling sorry for themselves – not because they have done wrong but because no one understands how hard it is for them to do their job. The criticism of the shooting has in the main focused on why the police need to have a shoot to kill policy in the UK to fight terrorism rather than on whether the police should ever have a shoot to kill policy at all.

The fact that all of the draconian and often illegal methods used by the Police and Army in Ireland and the UK throughout the past thirty years did not bring the war to an end and were often counter productive is forgotten. The Police will always want more and more powers and laws to support their view of the world but isn't that why we have democratic accountability and separation of the legal system from the police?

Unfortunately, it is not the demand of the Police for even more draconian measures to keep us safe from an unknown terrorist threat that is the most dangerous thing about the current situation within Policing. In fact, that is par for the course and civil libertarians, the legal profession and a lot of ordinary citizens recognise these calls by the Police for more and more power as typical and are quick to speak out against the most obviously anti democratic measures. The police and courts have never had a problem holding people on remand for long periods with very little evidence which is never challenged by Labour or any other backbenchers whereas actually putting this into the law was a step too far.

The more insidious role of the Police today though is much more dangerous and goes virtually unchallenged by everyone. Sir Ian Blair told us that the Met deploys officers every day in London tasked specifically to prevent truancy and graffiti. Well, I'm sorry but I don't need the police to be following young people around and harassing them but I am untypical. The police are being asked to police more and more of our private lives and to uphold laws that are intruding further into the private sphere so that it is no wonder they act confused. The Police are involved in domestic violence, child protection, binge drinking campaigns, obesity campaigns, anti-smoking and anti-bullying campaigns, victim awareness raising, internet monitoring, and the list goes on.

The Labour Government has more than any previous blurred the boundaries between the private and the public sphere and the Police are part of this ongoing morass. They are used now more than ever before to monitor and police what we are up to at home, at work and at play. The criminal and civil law has also expanded to include many private issues as offences or almost offences as in the use of anti-social behaviour orders. Everyday we are told that it is our behaviour that leads to the difficulties faced by society today and that only more policing by the Police, social workers, community workers, religious workers, youth workers and ourselves will improve the society we live in. The fear and victim mentality

encouraged by the Government means that the Police have more and more roles to play in monitoring and changing our behaviour and therefore, it is a shock both to them and us when they actually have to get on with some real policing like stopping suicide bombers, rioting and actual crimes.

Gerry Adams and Gerry Kelly of course have no difficulty with the new role of the police as moral guardians interfering more and more into our private lives as their brand of politics agrees strongly with this approach. Indeed, they have co-operated with the police and the Government on the victimhood and fear agenda for years as it suits them well. So, while they go on moaning about collusion, devolved powers and 50:50 policing they are all the time supporting and colluding with the new moral role of the Police and the State.

The interference of the Police and the State into our private lives is what needs to be challenged and we cannot expect any current political party to do so. Question everything and don't be taken in by Sinn Fein's or the Police's moans about not being understood – we understand the anti-human agenda they are pursuing only too well. It is policing but not democratic or accountable!

George Galloway in Belfast

Patricia Campbell reports

George Galloway former labour MP from the British based Respect Party addressed a packed audience at Queens University Belfast as part of his speaking tour across Ireland and as part of the University's Festival. He made an eloquent speech, which was laced with humour and satire. This was followed by a lively question and answer session.

In his address, he reminded the audience about the Irish Government's position on neutrality, emphasising that 10 000 US soldiers pass through Shannon Airport everyday on their way to wage war on Iraq. That is not neutrality he said. He spoke about how the Iraq war did not just start in 2003 when the 'coalition of killing' invaded Iraq. It started long before that with economic sanctions imposed on the people of Iraq.

Children died before they were old enough to even know they were Iraqi – economic sanctions that caused the slow quiet death of Iraqi children and nobody was listening. Then a pack of lies were invented to invade and wage war on Iraq. He talked about the hundreds of US soldiers who were being killed not to mention losing limbs and being mutilated, young men who were sent there to kill and be killed on the premise that Iraqis would welcome them with flowers.

In relation to the Taliban and Osama bin Laden he explained how the US and Britain created them. They tell us you can't negotiate with Bin Laden, they should know they know him better than we do. He spoke movingly about those who were on the hijacked planes that crashed into the Twin Towers in New York. What must it have been like to be in that situation, knowing they were flying to their death. Some of them, he said, had mobile phones and were able to leave messages for their loved ones on answering machines. He made the point that the poor people of Afghanistan and Iraq don't have mobile phones or answering machines and their loss from the bombs coming from the sky, is no less horrific or painful.

The MP spoke about Saudi Arabia, a country known for its human rights abuses It has no courts, no freedom or liberty of any kind, beheadings are screened live on TV on a weekly basis and guess who was over there to sell them arms he asked; none other than a one time leading member of the communist party, Dr John Reid, former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and now Foreign Affairs Minister. Was he there to promote human rights or the rights of people Galloway asked? No he was not he was there to sell them £40 billion worth of weaponry to suppress the Saudi people and crush their liberty, freedom and democracy" He made the point that Britain and the US are in the habit of propping up corrupt leaders at the expense of human rights.

Remember when Israel invaded Lebanon in 1983. Who was in charge and who opened the floodgates to let the Israelis in to massacre and cut the bellies and throats of every man woman and child in sight? It was General Ariel Sharon himself, he said. Israel has no greater friend than this Prime Minister, Tony Blair. Don't forget that the British security services are currently training Lybian Colonel Gaddafi's forces. He reminded the audience that every bullet in the back of an Iraqi or Palestinian child, is paid for by you, the taxpayer.

Referring to his own party, The Respect Party, he made the point that they represented the people who New Labour had betrayed. He spoke about how Tony Blair boasts about having the 'finest armed forces in the world' but he can not boast about having the finest hospitals or the finest public services or the finest schools. When asked from the floor "would Government policy on Iraq be any different under Gordon Brown"? Galloway replied "Twiddle Dee and Twiddle Dumb" He believes Brown would not have the spine to challenge Blair for the leadership of the party. Brown talks 'left' and acts 'right.' Britain is the only country in the entire world to privatise air traffic control. No body else in the whole has done that except new Labour under Brown. He reminded the audience about the firemen strike, men who plunge into burning buildings to save lives were asking for £8.50 per hour and Brown called them "wreckers". Brown insisted that they would destroy the economy and at the same time he signed a blank cheque for war.

He was congratulated from the floor on his performance at the American Senate and asked did he believe they would pursue him again. To rapturous applause, He replied, " Of Course they will be back but I'm ready for them. I have been up close and personal to some of the most horrible and dangerous people, none more dangerous than Tony Blair and his cohorts". He made it clear he is not afraid of them, at least not afraid enough to be silenced.

Hunger Strike

By Margaret McKearney

Much is written and rightly so about the hunger strikes in Long Kesh in 1980 and again in 1981. However, less is known about the events leading up to the strikes and the torture and suffering endured by both the prisoners and their loved ones in the four and a half years that preceded them. On March 1976 when the British Government withdrew political status (which had been won in 1972) from Republican prisoners, they were attempting to envelop the war with a cloak of criminality. This was fiercely resisted by all republicans inside and outside of the prisons. While the men and women prisoners embarked on their struggle inside the gates, a simultaneous struggle was started outside by the republican movement, but in particular by the prisoner's relatives who formed a Relatives Action Committee (RAC).

The cause in the beginning was not always popular and the awful reality of just what the protest would entail did not sink in until Kieran Nugent stripped naked wrapped himself in a blanket and refused to wear prison uniform. As 1976 drew to a close, when Belfast women shivered in the bitter frosts, wrapped in blankets attempting to highlight the conditions in which their Blanket Men lived even their own national voice appeared to ignore them. It took until 1978 before An Phoblacht ran a substantial article on the plight of the prisoners. In the meantime, relatives of the men and women carried on tirelessly across the length and breadth of the thirty-two counties in an effort to raise contentiousness about the titanic struggle taking place between a British Government and the republican prisoners.

However, 1978 saw a turning point for the prisoners, their protest started to draw international support. In March of that year over 300 people, many wearing only blankets, marched on London's Fleet Street in memory of the second anniversary of the withdrawal of political status. Support was coming from other quarters and outspoken priests Fathers Denis Faul and Raymond Murray issued a pamphlet on the state of the northern prisons.

In Dublin onlookers at the annual St. Patrick's Day parade were forced to confront the issue when H-block activists turned a previously nondescript float into a H-block cell complete with prisoners wrapped in blankets. However conditions deteriorated inside of the prison and the men were forced to embark on what came to be known as the dirty protest, wherein the prisoners refused to slop out. This was not ploy but a calculated response to the severe and savage beatings administered to them by the prison warders when they left their cell to empty their slop buckets.

However, by summer of 1978, such was the level of support for the prisoners that 20,000 people marched from Coalisland to Dungannon to demonstrate their anger at the treatment of the prisoners. The march captured much media attention with the abiding image of mothers, wives, daughters wrapped in blankets. By the autumn of that year the level of protest was both national and international and indeed by November the Soviet Weekly World Affairs carried footage and a report of three women wrapped in their now familiar blankets. As the level of protest spread so did the media coverage, none more so than the republican newspaper.

In January of 1979 An Phoblacht had merged with Republican News to become the voice of republican Ireland. Immediately focus shifted and the paper now carried the Marcella column which carried both the news and views of the prisoners in the H-blocks. Often the column reproduced the literary writing of the men and frequently praised the efforts of the Relatives Action Committee. Such was the increased level of coverage for the prisoners that one disgruntled Dublin reader contacted the news paper to complain about the level of reporting.

As the year passed more and more organisations and individuals threw their weight behind the campaign. The president of the GAA issued a statement and trade unionists were also coming on board. That year an important development took place as the first prisoner was released. Not only was he able to give first hand accounts of the conditions in the prison he also gave heart to the beleaguered RAC that there was some light at the end of the tunnel. Against this heightened awareness of what the British Government was inflicting on the prisoners the IRA stepped up their campaign. August and September 1979 witnessed the IRA actions at Narrowwater and on Lord Mountbatten. Such was the interest in these two attacks that the Relatives Action Committee took the step of placing a one page advert in the Republican News to remind people that au contraire the war was not over, we still had prisoners and moreover they still needed our help.

As the year ended it was becoming increasingly clear that a national committee needed to be established and that this committee needed to represent the widest possible cross section of society, Sinn Fein simply could not do it alone. Therefore representatives of Sinn Fein, IRSP, Irish Civil Rights Action League, TUC against repression, Conradh na Gaeilge, Women Against Imperialism, the Socialist Workers Group, the Socialist Labour Party, the Irish Workers Group and members of the Peace People and other individuals set up a northern based committee. On December 16 an equally diverse committee was established in Dublin with an t-Athair Piaris Ó Duill in the chair.

As a new year and a new decade opened, the situation in the H-blocks was now firmly on the public and political agenda. For some months Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich intervened on their behalf. Earlier he had famously described the blocks as worse than 'sewers of Calcutta' however he was snubbed and humiliated by the British Tories. The prisoners knew that this was a make or break year and as news filtered into the prison in the autumn of 1980 that the British were not prepared to compromise they agreed that the only available weapon left was the ancient Indo-European method of fasting in front of the person/people who had wronged you in an attempt to shame them. The date was set and on Monday 27 October 1980 seven men began to their protest.

The Hunger Strike begins

The Hunger Strike was the best of times and the worst of times. We on the outside were saddened that we had failed the men and women we had at times moved mountains for. Nothing was too much or too little if it galvanised some one or some organisation into action. We pleaded and begged, we humbled ourselves speaking to the type of person that we would not ordinarily consider honourable. Anything was preferable to letting prisoners languish in that hell hole that was known as Cellular Maze, but finally the day came the men, to be followed by the women, would embark on a hunger strike.

We reported into the National H-Block Committee looking to see what we could do. We need not have worried, they had a list for us. Again we were sent around the country, this time to encourage the local committees to greater efforts. The first twenty-five days or so were quiet, news coming from the prisons was slow but we managed to get some word every day. It did not matter that it was second hand. As the strike got into its third and fourth week media and public interest started to heighten and as it did our jobs got busier.

I remember being asked to canvas the building sites of Dublin in an attempt to get the construction workers to march in support of the Hunger Strikers. It was felt that as a "wee girl" I would at least get an audience. I spoke to many construction workers, I remember speaking to the Beaumont Hospital site workers and indeed to the Wood Quay workers and these honourable men agreed to add their voices in support of the men. However on the day in question it was decided that a "wee girl" was not suitable to lead grown men down O'Connell Street so another relative, male of course, was seconded for the job. I did not care, all that mattered was that several hundred construction workers disrupted Dublin one afternoon and highlighted the cause of the lads.

Towards the end of November it was decided to hold a forty-eight hour hunger strike outside the Dáil, the fast would then end in a rally. About twenty of us arrived at midday Thursday, promptly set up lean-to shelters, festooned the railings with our banners and periodically disrupted traffic by blocking the street. Twenty five years later I wonder how we were let away with it. Many people spent a period of time in our tents and I will never forget the haunting voice of Bernadette Mc Aliskey singing as Gailge. On the Saturday morning a great buzz went up. Nora Connolly O'Brien had arrived and as I sat looking at her in total awe, I cracked up when I saw her touch my then middle aged mother's arm and say 'Its up to you young girls now to carry on the fight', twenty-five years on I wouldn't mind being called a young girl.

However, memory and time heals and we master the art of blocking out the more unpleasant aspects of the past. Sudden death has touched me, and at least there is something clinical, abrupt and final about it, the days of the hunger strike was like a death every day, every day you woke up wondered if this was going to be the day, I would not wish it on anybody. I remember the day I heard that my brother had been brought down from the Crumlin Road where he was on remand; I cried with self pity and hated myself afterwards.

As the days crept onwards and reached the fiftieth, hope went out the window and I started to think about the end. All I hoped was that it would not hurt them, too much. Then one night after coming in from a street picket, blue with cold, the news came through that it was over, the British had done a deal, part brokered by the IRA's Officer Commanding in the H-Blocks, Bobby Sands. In reality, the story was only beginning.

A society that failed to protect its children

Civilisation will not attain to its perfection until the last stone from the last church falls on the last priest...Émile Zola

By Anthony McIntyre

A global phenomenon, they are read about everyday and everywhere. Like the fictional world from the Charlton Heston movie, Omega Man, our planet seems to be in the grip of a human pestilence; on this occasion far removed from the comfort of the cinema, by a plague of priests chanting 'boys, boys.' The prevalence of clerical abuse is such that it is tempting to visualise a plethora of paedophile orchards where priests are hanging from every tree – not by the neck, regrettably.

Despite living in the era of the enlightenment, where superstition ought to have been replaced by reason, human society remains scourged by priestcraft and those who practice it. We are the citizens of a world in which the dementia of religion knows no boundaries, impervious to both time and location. Immunisation from its effects has proven successful only in a minority of cases. Like a social syphilis intent on destroying the societal intellect, it exploits primordial fears and furtively creeps inside the citadel of reason where, absurdly, it occupies a privileged position and expects, even demands, that the sacred, in the form of canon law, trump the secular and allow it to become the judge in its own cause - in stark violation of the long established Madisonian principle of judicial detachment. And for too long the secular connived in its own usurpation.

In the North we continue to elect religious maniacs rather than ban them. Just days ago, to the eternal disgrace of the electorate, Maurice Mills, an elected councillor from the DUP (where else?) and throwback to mediaeval times, regaled television viewers with his cruel and bizarre take on the Asian tsunami and the more recent Hurricane Katrina. Yes, it was all the work of big Yahweh; in the first instance taking out his displeasure on residents and holidaymakers alike because some pretender to big Yahweh's throne going under the name Allah was spreading Islam. The introduction of compulsory identity cards should help take care of that impostor for Maurice. The second strike, Katrina the Holy Hurricane, was launched from Heaven and using the latest Lazarus tornado guidance system was propelled earthwards to smite the sinners of 'Gay Orleans.' The spreading of tsunamis would seem a worse crime in most people's eyes than the spreading of Islam, but not in Maurice's. Then again, God works in mysterious ways and only picks special fools to interpret strange events. Who are we to reason why? Maybe next time, if big Yahweh is as just as he is mysterious, Ferns may find itself hit by a meteorite - and hopefully not when the diocesan men of cloth are touring orphanages in Thailand.

People who subscribe to various forms of this bunkum have nevertheless benefited from it to the point that they have for long being easily able to pass themselves off as leading moral guardians in supposedly secular societies, where the executive, legislature and judiciary behaved like the three wise monkeys, neither seeing, hearing nor speaking of the enormous phallic moral guardian that stalked our children.

The priest class with its knowledge of Latin, must have thought it had hit the jackpot and won a boys bonanza, when few stopped to ask the all important question 'quis custodiet custodiet?' Like the frightened worshippers of some Aztec God, Ireland licentiously offered its children to the most lecherous of men. Can the country really claim to need the Ferns Report to serve as a wake up call? For long, many of its citizens seemed prepared to die peacefully in bed rather than get up and confront what was going on their midst.

For all its undoubted ability to magnetise the media, Judge Frank Murphy's 271-page report is hardly any more shocking than what has passed before. Learning that priests are abusing children is as commonplace as being told there is a violent conflict in the Middle East. It has figured in our daily reading activity for so long, it is now hard to recall a time when newspapers did not feature stories about priests abusing children.

If an Irish Times headline that 'More details emerge of sexual abuse cases involving priests' is supposed to shock us, the paper's management may hope shock stories and sales are not correlated. Irish society and its children will be fortunate if the Ferns Report does not become the gatherer of the dust it helped raise, once matters settle down. Time alone will tell

if the point has been reached for what one columnist described as 'a landmark in the history of the Catholic Church in Ireland.'

While cardinals may have been forced to resign in places as far apart as Austria and America, it remains true that clerics are responsible for only a minority of crimes visited on abuse victims – according to the Ferns Report, a lowly 3.2 % of the whole. And even here it is not exclusive to the Catholic Church. The comedian George Carlin is reported to have quipped that Protestant preachers wrote an impressive new book, called, *Ministers Do More Than Lay People*. Norman Ruddock has pointed to the existence of the phenomenon within Protestant clerical circles, while Tariq Ali showed that mullahs too liked their boys. However, few of the secular perpetrators have been afforded the protection of an institution as powerful as the Church of Rome. That shield in itself became a weapon of coercion and intimidation that dissuaded people from coming forward with their concerns. As Martin Mansergh observed 'the whistleblower, as always everywhere, was the one to be punished.'

The Ferns Report tackled the role of the Vatican directly and expressed concern 'that the church authorities either in this country or in Rome did not properly alert their priests to the danger of child sexual abuse at a time when they did or should have known of this danger which had been clearly identified by church authorities elsewhere.' According to Colm O'Gorman of the One in Four group the Vatican operated an international policy that bound anyone with knowledge of clerical sexual abuse to absolute secrecy. The penalty for breaking Vatican omerta was excommunication.

To help combat this, the report recommended a new criminal offence targeting those who recklessly endanger children. Unfortunately, it is unlikely that the Vatican shall extradite any of its key figures to Ireland to stand trial. It is even more unlikely that the Dublin Government will request the Vatican to do so. Where has the voice of Pope Ratzinger been in all this? It has bellowed loudly throughout the world - but only to fuel the persecution of gay people.

Society cannot afford to wait until the Vatican decides that the genuine sanctity of children is more precious than the pious cant of the institution. Those within the church who abused or covered for abuse it at whatever level, should be relentlessly pursued today, hauled from their palaces and banged up until they cease to pose a threat. A society that fails to protect its own children must bear a large measure of culpability for the abuse those children endure.

The Case for Fintan Lane

By Gerry Corbett

I.W.U. Regional Secretary Connacht

The level to which the National media have reacted to the case of Fintan Lane has been astonishing, with the question of should prisoners be paid for work done while serving their sentence being the main source of the public debate.

However when one stands back from the media frenzy and quietly looks at the actual case a number very interesting points come to the fore, for example prisoners in Ireland are all-ready being paid when they decide to take up an offer of work from the prison authorities, furthermore they are made aware they will receive a remuneration for the work they carry out. They are not obliged to work and can decide to do absolutely nothing while serving their time if they so wish. Now we are all aware that the reason people are sent to prison is that they have been judged to break the law.

This is where the case becomes very interesting The law of the land clearly states that as and from the 1st of May 2005 the National Minimum Wage to be paid to every experienced adult worker should be €7.65 per hour. Fintan Lane had all-ready vast experience in Kitchen work he had as a student done numerous summers working in the states doing this type of work he is also an adult. There are exclusions to the act namely close relatives and apprentices, however prisoners are not excluded from the act. So we now discover a situation where it appears that while in prison for breaking the law the people who are incarcerating you are also breaking the law by not paying the National Minimum Wage. Not the best form of rehabilitation I think one would agree.

More interestingly the defence put forward by the state in this case was that a contract of employment was not in place. Yet when one looks at the criteria laid down for a contract of employment to be in place under the Payment of Wages Act 1991, Mr. Lane qualifies on all points.

A contract is defined whereby an individual agrees with another person to do or perform personally any work or service (whether or not the third person is a party to the contract) whose status by virtue of the contract is not that of a client or customer of any profession or business undertaking carried on by the individual, and the person who is liable to pay the wages of the individual in respect of the work or service shall be deemed for the purposes of this act to be his employer, whether the contract is express or implied and if express, whether it is oral or in writing. It also states employer, in relation to an employee, means the person with whom the employee has entered into or for whom the employee works under. Wages under the act means any sums payable to the employee by the employer in connection with his employment.

Therefore in Mr. Lanes case it appeared to the Independent Workers Union that a verbal contract had been entered into by Mr. Lane and Limerick Prison, there was an offer and acceptance of work and remuneration for the work was agreed moreover quite clearly under Irish Labour Law Mr. Lane should have been paid the National Minimum Wage for the work he performed. In conclusion we look forward to processing this case to its finality and would be quietly confident of achieving victory on behalf of our member's rights.

Prisoner's rights should include labour rights

By Fintan Lane

Between November 2003 and January 2004, I spent 45 days in prison as a result of my refusal to pay a fine for my involvement in a mass trespass against the facilitation of the US war machine at Shannon airport. Following my release, my trade union – the Independent Workers' Union – sent a bill to Limerick Prison insisting on the payment of back-wages amounting to €1,978.58. The bill, based on the minimum wage, took into account that I worked as a dishwasher from 9am to 4pm each day, making a total of 49 hours a week, for which I received a voucher worth €2.54 each week. We deducted the vouchers from the overall figure.

Cheeky? Outrageous? Or about time? I've experienced all three reactions since we entered the claim, which, of course, is about the principle not the money. Not surprisingly, many people take a hostile view and feel little sympathy for prisoners. And why should they? Our prisons contain many criminals guilty of the most heinous of offences. They also, of course, contain many people imprisoned for minor offences or who have ended up there as a result of complex familial or socio-economic circumstances. It is no coincidence that the vast majority of prisoners come from what we euphemistically describe as 'less-well-off' backgrounds.

Prisoners 'rights' are commonly disregarded because of a long-standing dehumanisation of those incarcerated; the hang 'em and flog 'em brigade, for instance, are forever telling us that prisons are five-star hotels where prisoners live it up at the taxpayers expense. Such nonsense facilitates the withholding of normal civil and labour rights from prisoners, including the fundamental right to receive a fair day's wage for a fair day's work. Nonetheless, I would argue that there are at least three strong reasons why working prisoners should be properly paid.

First, nobody is sentenced to hard labour in this country anymore. Convicted and remand prisoners lose their liberty, which is no small thing, but we no longer expect them to break stones. Indeed, only a small minority of trusted prisoners actually work within Irish prisons. However, these individuals do work that otherwise would have to be contracted out. They work in the kitchens, laundries and in other vital roles, doing jobs that prison officers or outside workers would normally perform.

There is a basic trade union principle involved here – every worker is entitled to a proper rate of pay, whether that person is a journalist with the Irish Times, an immigrant periwinkle picker or a full-time employee in one of our prisons. A worker is a worker. Slave-labour should not be acceptable in this country under any guise.

Secondly, there is a real danger that this cheap prison labour could be deployed to make profits for the private sector. Indeed, since this issue was first raised, Brid Smith, a former bin-charges prisoner in Dublin, has revealed that women prisoners in Mountjoy were stitching shoes for a private company – Dubarry's – two years ago for derisory wages. Likewise, P.J. McEvoy (a former general secretary of the Prison Officers' Association) announced on RTE that he knows of several private companies, including Mercedes Benz, that are using prison labour.

Is this the sort of society we want? Prisoners operate call-centres, make paper cups for McDonalds and build roads on chain gangs in the United States. All unpaid and for private sector profit. In this country, there are already people – and not just in the PDs – advocating the full or semi-privatisation of our penal institutions. Where would that leave prison labour? It doesn't bear thinking about. Prison officers will resist such a development, but they must have our active support when they do so.

Thirdly, how does the blatant exploitation of a prisoner's labour help in his or her 'rehabilitation'? Plainly, it doesn't. We hear platitudes from many commentators

about the need for 'rehabilitation', but in practice little is done. It is clear that we need to radically overhaul our legal and penal systems. This will require new thinking, including the consideration of ideas that at first sight seem outlandish. Stripping prisoners of basic labour rights is not helpful – prison shouldn't be about increasing the alienation of those incarcerated. Moreover, a prisoner who has been paid a decent day's wage for a decent day's work is much more likely to see paid employment as an attractive option after his release than a prisoner who has experienced work as exploitation.

Ultimately, this is about taking labour rights seriously. We either oppose the exploitation of labour or we don't. I believe we must.

Guantanamo Bay & George Bush's USA

By Rosemary Campbell

I do not plan to stop until I either die or we are respected. People will definitely die. Bobby Sands petitioned the British government to stop illegitimate internment of Irish men without trial. He had the courage of his convictions and he starved himself to death Nobody should believe for one moment that my brothers here have any less courage.

The words of Binyam Mohammed, a former London schoolboy who is currently on hunger strike in the infamous Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp.

His understanding of why Bobby Sands went on hunger strike may not be entirely accurate but he can identify with the Irish hunger strikers in that he understands they too were the victims of a brutal British regime similar to the regime he now finds himself.

The former London schoolboy is one of hundreds who were abducted from their homelands by the US military and flown across the world to be caged like animals. The US describes them as "enemy combatants" yet they have been detained indefinitely without charge, trial or legal rights. The shocking images at the beginning of the 21st Century from Guantanamo Bay with hooded men, on their knees, clad in orange boiler suits, hands bind behind their backs was the face of the new millennium and US injustice. The United States opened the Prison camp in January 2002. Reports of beatings torture and humiliation emerged soon after. Some of the accounts made sickening reading.

Three years later hundreds of inmates in the US prison camp have embarked on a hunger strike against on going abuse and their continued detention with out trial. The New York Times reported that Senior Military officials at Quantanamo have been unable to end the hunger strike and are worried about their ability to control the situation. British human rights lawyer, Stafford Smith who represents 40 detainees at Guantanamo Bay, eight of whom are British residents recently told the Guardian newspaper that the American military were trying to play down a political scandal if a prisoner were to die. This is the second hunger strike since June 2005. The first ended on 28th July after the authorities promised to bring the prison into compliance with the Geneva Conventions. Representatives of the prisoners insist Donald Rumsfeld had approved this and the agreement was not honoured. A second hunger strike re-commenced on 11th August

Meanwhile four of the hunger strikers are to be tried by special war crimes tribunals known as commissions made up of military officers. These will be the first such US trials since World War 2. Human rights activists and military defence lawyers have condemned these commission rules. They insist evidence is obtained through torture and hearsay, which favours prosecutors and does not allow for judicial review.

Recent reports highlight that a number of the prisoners are in the camp's hospital, held in handcuffs and leg restraints and being restrained to have feeding tubes inserted to be forced fed, an extremely painful procedure which raises many ethical questions. A group of medics, 'Physicians for Human Rights' fault the practice of force-feeding. They note that international codes of medical ethics forbid doctors from force feeding hunger strikers. They insist Doctors must respect the autonomy of people who choose to refuse food or fluids and understand the consequences. However a Military Pentagon spokesperson made the point "the Department of Defence policy is to preserve the life of detainees".

The type of life being preserved is being well documented. One of the force-fed prisoners, Fawzi al odah is quoted as saying "we have no faith in the courts and

this is the only thing we can do. If I die it will be better than this hell". Human rights lawyer, Tom Wilner representing Odah and a number of other prisoners reported that he could hardly sit up while being interviewed by the military. He also reported that his client had bruises on his body from an alleged incident and the prisoner had told him that during a previous interrogation, he had been chained down and forced to urinate on himself. These men have been stripped of their dignity and denied basic human rights their captors have attempted to dehumanise them. They have been forced into subjugation.

The US and its allies stand accused of breaching international law in relation to prisoners they brand as enemy combatants or 'Al-Qaida suspects' Secret trials and the detention of prisoners without legal rights is wide spread. New legislation and blatant racist policies make for a new draconian era. A Canadian based detention centre, the Toronto West Detention Centre, dubbed Canada's Guantanamo Bay houses an Egyptian refugee, Mohammed Mahjoub, who is currently on hunger strike. He has been imprisoned for five years without charge or trial and he is one of five men being held in Canada as 'suspected terrorists' under federal security certificate. Such certificates can only be employed against immigrants and refugees but not against Canadian citizens.

As the world stays silent and awaits imminent deaths - today these people are in Guantanamo – tomorrow it could be any one.

Winter Days in France

By Liam O'Ruairc

After almost twenty nights of rioting all over France and thousands of burnt cars, the numbers of incidents now seems to be decreasing, but the country is not going back to the way it was before. The revolt sparked on 27 October after the death of two youths chased by the police generated one of the most serious crises to be faced by the French state in decades. The government re-introduce a 1955 law that had not been used since the Algerian war allowing local authorities to declare a state of emergency and impose curfews banning any presence on the streets after certain hours.

The revolt by people whom France's Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy referred to not as human beings but as "racaille" (rabble and scum) has created an intolerable challenge to the state. Mr Sarkozy promised that he would take a Karcher, a high-pressure water hose most used to wash dog excrement off streets, to "clean out" the housing estates home to much of the immigrant population and the most disadvantaged sections of the working class.

By imposing repressive measures and collective punishments on entire housing estates, the government is making clear that its target is not simply the rioting youth, but a wide section of the population. This has brought significant sections of the people on the side of the rioting youth, even if many oppose the burning of cars and destruction of property. Some critics are saying that the youth are going "too far", but how far is "too far" when the Interior Minister threatens to "clean out" a whole section of the population?

For Ignacio Ramonet, editor of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, the revolt was an example of "jacquerie urbaine" ("urban whiteboyism" or "urban defenderism" to put it in Irish terms). Spontaneous uprisings are as old as class societies, from Watt Tyler's peasants revolt in the 13th century through to the Los Angeles riots of 1992.

The state has been trying to blame the revolt on everything from polygamy to islamists, but in reality no one is behind it. No one initiated the revolt, and there is no one to call it off. That such a purely spontaneous revolt could last for over two weeks and spread all over the country is remarkable. It shows that many refuse to accept the state's authority.

The French government is in crisis as the situation has gotten out of the Interior Minister's control. Far from being able to impose the state's rule through repressive measures, the events have shown the limits of state authority and of the power of the streets. Not only has the state been unable to stop the disturbances (as rioters told *The Observer*, if incidents are on the decrease it is because they could not find more cars to burn), but its actions have only thrown oil on the fire as they intensified and spread all over the country.

Some left commentators have criticised the fact that the rioting youths were 'apolitical', expressed chauvinist attitudes etc. If the youths lack a high level of political consciousness and a clear understanding of the nature of their enemy, they are far from 'apolitical' to reject their social exclusion. Refusing resignation and to keep their heads down is a beginning, a starting point. The revolt along with the victory of "no" vote on the European constitution means that the year 2005 in France is likely to be remembered as a year where people fought back neoliberalism.

The youth from the housing estates have put themselves at the centre of events, and forced everyone else to define themselves in relation to them. Amongst the forces that are working for social change, there are two basic positions. One criticises the revolt for being counter-productive, a symptom of social problems. The

other welcomes it as a classical revolt of oppressed people against the state, similar to the 1992 Los Angeles riots.

Those two positions are opposed to one another. One is seeing the revolt as a problem, the other as a solution. One is based on a struggle against the state, the other on elections and 'alternative' policies (i.e. 'acceptable' repression etc). The choice is now between transforming a revolt against state authority into protests against specific governmental policies and into electoralist dead-ends, or maintaining and extending the spirit of revolt.

A course we are no longer following

By Pauline Hadaway

Reflecting on changes in the social condition of post War Britain, Nye Bevan, former Labour Health Minister and architect of the National Health Service, warned against the kind of lazy thinking, which interprets political reality using the 'blunted tools' of exhausted categories and dogma:

"Words persist when the reality which lay behind them has changed....so ideas degenerate into a kind of folk lore which we pass to each other, fondly imagining we are still talking of the reality around us.....As we fumble with our out-worn categories our political vitality is sucked away and we stumble from one situation to another, without chart, without compass and with the wheel lashed to a course we are no longer following."

Bevan was addressing the political elites of his day, but fifty years on, as western political leaders seem increasingly to be losing the plot, trying to make sense of a world, which seems to lurch from one crisis to another, his words are taking on a new resonance. They say a week is a long time in politics, but the first fortnight in November seemed more like a lifetime. The month kicked off with riots in France spreading from the northern Paris suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois into other areas of the Seine-Saint-Denis region and beyond. For some on the Left the riots, containing echoes of 1968, held out the promise of a new wave of class struggle, a view which appeared to hold some purchase when French President Jacques Chirac declared a state of emergency on 8th November, reviving curfew laws dating from the Algerian war of Independence. The following day, just as the violence appeared to be abating, Interior Minister Sarkozy threatened to reignite the crisis by announcing his decision to deport any 'non-citizen' convicted of riot, even if they were legally resident in France. Prime Minister, Dominique de Villepin, although weighing in behind Sarkozy's hard line law and order stance, simultaneously announced a package of aid measures for France's most deprived areas, while Chirac offered to meet with representatives of disaffected minorities to talk things over. Possibly inspired by graffiti demanding 'Liberty, Equality, Respect!' or more probably with one eye on the presidency, Sarkozy promptly challenged Chirac's commitment to the republican ideal of universal citizenship, asserting that some form of affirmative action was essential to overcome the problems of the country's ethnic minorities.

Meanwhile across the Channel, as a majority of MPs voted for an extension of summary detention from 14 to 28 days, the British state finally abolished its formal commitment to the principle of Habeas Corpus, the centuries old right of every citizen not to be imprisoned without criminal charge or trial. A few days later, Britain announced its intention to lead a NATO force to reoccupy southern Afghanistan, while the United Nations was once again denied access to Guantanamo Bay, amidst further reports of routine torture of 'disappeared' prisoners by the US & UK backed regime in Iraq. That same morning, as the British Parliament settled back to the serious business of discussing binge drinking and banning chips from school dinners, Ian Blair, Chief Constable of the Metropolitan Police, appealed for greater public consultation around policing approaches in the wake of the July 7 bombings. Of course what the impeccably 'pc' police chief actually means is, let's do a bit of PR so the public buy into policies like shoot to kill, summary detention and the suspension of due process. Whatever next? Focus groups around the pros and cons of torture?

As events crowd in, attempts at political response or analysis seem only to add to the general sense of confusion. In the face of rioting by marginalised x groups of young people, the French authorities simultaneously mouthed platitudes about inclusion, called a state of emergency and offered to ditch the Constitution.

Here in Britain, in the wrangle over 90 or 28 days, political commentators characterised Tony Blair's opponents as rebellious defenders of freedom, overlooking the fact that very few had actually mounted any principled defence of civil liberty, falling back instead on the argument that locking people up for long periods was probably ineffective and anyway might act as a recruiting sergeant for terrorism.

The idea of liberty as something intrinsically valuable and therefore worth defending on its own terms is disappearing from the radar of public and political consciousness, submerged beneath a tidal wave of cynical, conservative and authoritarian thinking. In the face of political uncertainty the fall back position of the right will always be defensive and controlling, but elements of the left appear more and more to be singing off the same reactionary hymn sheet. Increasingly identified as greedy, irresponsible and irrational, human beings now stand accused of endangering the planet through over consumption as well as undermining the security and well being of society, through anti social behaviour, defined as just about everything from throwing up in the street or vandalising the local community centre to committing acts of terrorism.

To make sense and regain control of a world that seems to be spinning out of control, we need to remake a progressive and future orientated political project, which believes in human potential, supports liberty and human ambition and places the interests of humanity at the centre of its mission. For those of us who represent the remnants of the once progressive Left, the starting point is not a retreat to the past but a re-examination of contemporary political and social movements against the humanist, secular and progressive principles that animated past political struggles. Where contemporary movements fail to measure up they must be challenged, for in the words of Bevan, political movements are what they do, not necessarily what they say they do. It is the verb that matters, not the noun.

US Seeks Extradition of Veteran Republican Socialist

By John Nixon

Almost fifty years after he led the raid on Brookeborough barracks in which Fergal O Hanlon and Sean Sabhat were killed, lifelong socialist republican and former IRA activist Sean Garland finds himself on the run and facing extradition to the six counties from where he then faces certain extradition to the United States or worse, to that slither of coast in Cuba known as Guantanamo Bay.

Garland joined the IRA in 1954 and was instructed by his GHQ to infiltrate the British army at Gough Barracks in Armagh where he helped to organise the capture of hundreds of weapons in what was the most successful operation of the IRA's fifties border campaign 'Operation Harvest'. This successful operation laid to another carbon copy arms raid at Lisanelly Barracks in Omagh. Throughout his life Garland has spent time in prisons both north and south and has remained true to his republican socialist principles. He is now in his seventies and in failing health. The U.S. authorities want to question him about counterfeit American 100 dollar bills, 'Superdollars' which they claim he and the Official IRA were involved in purchasing and distributing.

The president of the Workers' Party was arrested by the PSNI accompanied by US Secret Service spooks in Belfast hours before he was to address his party's conference. He found himself back in a northern prison but was soon released on bail. Due to his failing health he was allowed to travel across the border to continue medical treatment. Much publicity surrounds the case in which it is claimed that Garland travelled to Russia and other countries over many years to purchase US 100 dollar bills which the US Secret Service maintains were printed in North Korea. Millions of counterfeit 100 dollar bills have seeped into Global economies.

The whole case reads like an international financial espionage thriller. The case is officially referred to as 'The United States of America V Sean Garland, aka 'The Man with The Hat'. A warrant was issued by the US authorities last May for Garland's extradition but was not acted upon by the authorities. His arrest in Belfast on October 7th sparked a furious re-action from his party who are currently waging a high profile campaign in the north to highlight what they see as an 'act of vicious political intimidation'.

Garland strenuously denies any involvement. No criminal charges had been preferred. His arrest in Belfast is seen as another British/Blair sop to the Americans. Whatever issues lie at the heart of the matter whether political or legal or otherwise, the reality is that veteran socialist Sean Garland is a man in failing health and moving on in years. There is a strong humanitarian dimension to the whole matter as well as political. Garland has now issued a statement via his website (www.seangarland.com) stating he has no chance of a fair trial and has therefore decided that he will not return to the north. He remains defiant and protests his innocence.

"Despite some misgivings about my health I am ready to face any fair proceedings but I am not willing to face what is in effect a court which has its hands tied by an act which is primarily dictated by the political agenda of the US. Because of the grossly unjust nature of this Extradition Treaty I have decided therefore not to return to British jurisdiction. I will place myself under the protection of my own government and my country's constitution which guarantee me basic human rights and freedoms. I thank all those people in The Dail and Seanad, The House of Commons, the many hundreds of international supporters, parties and individuals, and the many thousands in Ireland who have played a part in this fight."

The Workers' Party have vowed to continue to fight his extradition. Anti extradition committees have been established throughout the north and thousands of leaflets and posters have been distributed and erected.

'We shall continue to fight this extradition demand of the US and we look forward to the continued support of all our friends and supporters in this new phase of the campaign.

The fact that Sean Garland is not charged with any offence, and that neither the Police Service of Northern Ireland nor the Gardai in the Republic of Ireland have shown any interest in questioning Sean Garland is a critical issue. It will give everyone, in these islands and beyond, cause to be concerned about his potential extradition to the United States. This will constitute a violation of his human rights, not least his right to a fair trial under Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights. 16. International support has already been received from Parliamentarians in Britain, Belgium, Greece, the European Parliament and Human Rights Lawyers in the United States.

If you would like to offer your support, to Stop the Extradition of Sean Garland to the USA, or receive further information, contact: John Lowry, 23 Hill St, Dublin 1. Tel: 01 - 874 0716 or e-mail: wpi@indigo.ie **Web: www.seangarland.org**

Mid Ulster Trades Council officially relaunched

Harry Hutchinson
Secretary Mid-Ulster Trades Council

The Mid Ulster Trade Union Council (MUTC), has been re-launched to include the areas of Dungannon, Cookstown and Magherafelt. This Trades Council may now, at last, get the recognition it deserves from the NIC (Northern Ireland Committee) of the Irish Congress of Trades Unions.

MUTC was first established in 1988 with six unions involved in it. It became one of the most active trades councils in Northern Ireland, particularly round the issue of sectarianism.

In 1992 the Teebane Massacre occurred, during a spate of tit-for-tat Republican and Loyalist paramilitary killings. The atrocity sent a shockwave throughout the Province. The MUTC responded by organising workers' strikes in Mid Ulster and urged the ICTU to officially back it: despite reticence from the ICTU leadership, the groundswell of rank and file support for this action forced the leadership to make it official. Thousands of workers rallied in Cookstown and Magherafelt town centres. The example shown by the MUTC led other areas to follow their example. Over 20,000 protested in Belfast, Omagh etc in what became the biggest movement against sectarianism since the 1970s.

The strike demonstrated the MUTC did not shy away from 'contentious' issues. After the anti-sectarian strikes, the MUTC urged the ICTU to seize the opportunity and go on the offensive against poverty and unemployment, the root causes of sectarianism; and also electorally challenge the sectarian political parties; however their calls were not heeded.

For the retention of acute hospital services, MUTC set up a campaign for rural hospitals. This brought together the trade union and community health campaign groups West of the Bann and in Downpatrick. The Rural Hospital Campaign eradicated division between the areas and took a united voice to the government and Northern Ireland Assembly.

Currently MUTC members are involved in the 'We Won't Pay' Water Charges campaign, and also MUTC backed an anti-water charges candidate in the May local government elections in Cookstown, to highlight the issue. Members of the Council are involved in organising both Lough Neagh fishermen and migrant workers in the area.

Despite their proud history of activity, mentioned above, the MUTC has never been recognised by the ICTU; now, for the first time, they will be part of the Northern Ireland Trades Councils, which is part of ICTU.

With the erosion of trade union membership, and a lull in union activity, there is a dire need for trades councils to vigorously take up the issues that affect working class people. Factories closing and moving to cheap-labour sweatshops in the Far East, necessitates a campaign for the public ownership of industries. The exploitation of migrant workers that affects wages and conditions of all employees, call for a campaign to increase the national minimum wage towards £8/10 per hour, as set by the European Union, along with a recruitment campaign for workers to join a trade union.

These are the issues the MUTC aim to concentrate on. The crux will be urging the trade union leadership to actively campaign for their implementation.

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