

an pobal éirithe

No 2

(The Risen People)



Stalker

Mental health and the Irish

Interview with Gerry Adams (part 2)

Editorial

Much has been written of late about the recent decisions regarding the Stalker investigation and the appeal of the Birmingham Six. Many of those sympathetic to Stalker or the Birmingham Six have been expressing surprise at the decisions and at the crassness, arrogance and insensitivity behind them.

The Irish community in Britain was not surprised by either of these decisions. We expected no better. There has been no indication that the British Government is any more prepared to deal fairly with Irish people now than it ever has been.

A rational decision on either of these issues would have pointed to the oppressive nature of Britain's policy regarding the six counties and the Irish in Britain. The British Government is no more prepared to allow the truth to out now than it has ever been.

The Irish community already knew that. We did not have to wait for the decisions to be announced to have our hopes dashed. We never hoped that the British Government would willingly and freely give us a fair deal. It seems that Britain will only give us justice when no other option remains open.

We have not yet made it too difficult for them to take any other option. We have not put enough pressure on the Government to force them to concede us justice. We have not made the cost of treating the Irish with contempt too high in terms of international opinion and the opinion of ordinary decent British people.

The Irish community was not surprised but we are outraged at having our legitimate concerns cast aside as if they were of no account. This anger is seething beneath the surface at the moment in sullen cynicism at the prospect of ever achieving justice. It needs to be fanned into positive activity—particularly on behalf of the Birmingham Six. Supportive activities such as letter-writing, pickets, marches, trade union motions, delegations, etc, need to be redoubled and people who have never taken part in such activities need to be drawn in.

The British Government will never freely choose to give our people justice and equality. We have to ensure that they have no choice. It will be the Irish community who free the Birmingham Six.

Equal Opportunities Policy

The editorial committee respects and upholds the rights of all people and will especially promote the rights of all Irish people including heterosexual women and men, lesbians and gay men, travellers and settled dwellers regardless of class, religion, race, colour, ethnic group, nationality, citizenship, place of birth, age and disability.

Any article which contravenes this policy will be rejected.

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Diarmuid Breatnach, Kevin Campbell, Virginia Moyles, Peter Murray, Pat Reynolds, Del Thorogood, Caitlin Wright.

The editorial committee reserves the right to edit journalistic articles and to refuse to print articles.



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Bloody Sunday Commemoration March

On Saturday 30th January 1988 thousands of Irish people and supporters of the struggle for self-determination for the people of Ireland took to the streets of Islington to demonstrate in memory of the fourteen unarmed civilians shot dead by British soldiers in Derry sixteen years before and in support of the demand for the withdrawal of British troops from the north of Ireland. Their numbers inevitably swelled by the sense of outrage amongst the Irish community in Britain at the week's decisions regarding the Stalker investigation and the appeal of the Birmingham Six, they filled the Holloway Road with a blaze of colourful banners and the rousing notes of the music of resistance.

Led by a number of those who were to speak at the rally, the march included three flute bands who created the atmosphere of excitement, defiance and a sense of history characteristic of Irish marches.

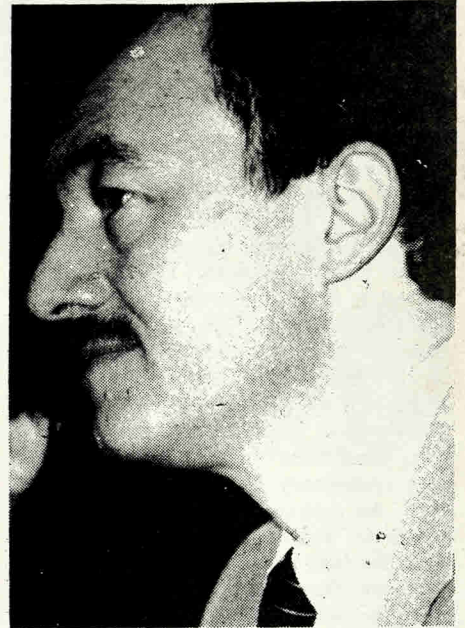
The march progressed peacefully until it met a group of National Front members outside Islington Town Hall where the rally was to take place. At that point the police tried to push the march onto the pavement, a few people were arrested and Haringey IBRG's banner was broken by the police. Marchers refused to respond to this provocation.

Apart from this, the march was very successful. Unfortunately, it was not possible

to fit anything like the numbers of people on the march into the town hall so a relay system was set up to transmit the speeches to those left outside.

The marchers were welcomed to Islington by Jeremy Corbyn, local MP. The rally was addressed first by Ken Livingstone who gave a stirring speech in which he repeated his accusation made during the preceding week that the Attorney General was an accomplice to murder. Billy Etherington of the NUM spoke of the connections between the struggle of the miners and that of Irish people in Britain and Ireland. Patricia Hegarty of the Irish Union of Students was followed by Emma Groves whose story of how she was blinded by a plastic bullet had many people close to tears. Eileen Kelly, whose daughter Carol Ann was killed at the age of twelve by another plastic bullet, had a similarly moving tale to tell. Mitchell McLaughlin, Sinn Féin councillor in Derry talked of current events in his home city. Diane Abbott, MP for Hackney North, talked of the importance of solidarity between the Black and Irish struggles for justice. Unmesh Desai of Anti-Fascist Action, gave a similar message of support. Louis Alvarez of Heri Batusuna spoke of the struggle of the Basques for self-determination and the similarities to the Irish struggle.

The march was organised by the Commit-



Ken Livingstone

tee for British Withdrawal which comprises members of the Troops Out Movement, the Labour Committee for Ireland and the IBRG.

Virginia Moyles, Hackney IBRG

Campaign against Strip Searching

A very successful conference on strip searching, organised by the London Strategic Policy Unit in the months before its execution, was held on 5th December 1987 at Lambeth Town Hall. A range of speakers from different backgrounds described their personal experiences of being strip searched and a series of workshops enabled all those attending to contribute to the discussion on possible ways of achieving abolition of this humiliating practice.

Towards the end of the conference, participants agreed the following resolution:

"This conference calls for an immediate end to strip searching. There can be no security value in strip searching whatever, whether it is one or one hundred. Strip searching is used to degrade and humiliate. It is a technique of repression used systematically against Irish republican women and it

is now being used increasingly against Black and Asian women, Black youth, political activists, lesbians and gay men, and against people in prisons and at customs, in police custody at military establishments and even in the streets.

Strip searching must be ended as a matter of urgency."

A follow up meeting was held on 14th February 1988 at Hackney Town Hall to set up a broad campaign against strip searching. It was attended by over fifty people, many from groups already campaigning against strip searching along with many other interested individuals. The new campaign, the 'United Campaign against Strip Searches' has a delegate structure which draws on the wide range of groups present at the meeting.

There was discussion on trade union liaison, developing resources for the

campaign, links between different groups of people affected by the campaign (eg Irish republican women, the Black community, prisoners, people strip searched at customs and immigration points) and the progress of legal challenges to strip searching.

The meeting also agreed unanimously to send a message of support to the picket against strip searches to be held at Durham Prison on March 13th.

Nominations were taken for the steering committee which met for the first time in Birmingham on Sunday 28th February to work out a structure and further details of a campaign.

If you'd like more information, contact Sheila Spurway, Association of London Authorities, 36 Old Queen Street, London SW1 or telephone her on 01-222 7799.

Virginia Moyles

Searching for the young Irish rebels

Bernadette Hyland describes her experience as a young, second generation Irishwoman growing up in Britain.

Why is it that some young people born in Manchester, Liverpool, London, etc., of Irish parents consider themselves Irish? How do they express this identity and how are they viewed by other parts of the Irish community and British society? The answers to these questions lie in the nature of the relationship between Ireland and Britain and the cause and effects of Irish immigration into Britain.

Emigration sums up the experience of many generations of Irish people. Ireland has been consistently invaded by Britain since 1169. An agricultural country, its land was seized by British absentee landlords who made the Irish mere tenants paying exorbitant rents. The Irish paid their rents in barley and grain and grew potatoes to feed themselves. The failure of the potato crop in the 1840s led to the great hunger when 1 million people starved to death and 1 million fled to Britain and America whilst shiploads of grain were exported to Britain to pay the rents. The effects of the Great Hunger were such that by the end of the century the population of Ireland had dropped from 8 million to less than 4 million.

In 1922, after many attempts at rebellion, 26 out of 32 counties were given independence albeit with a weak and dependent economy.

The 1940s and 1950s saw great numbers of Irish people coming to Britain because the British economy was expanding whilst the Irish economy remained weak and unable to sustain its population.

The Irish came to cities such as Manchester where there was a long tradition of Irish emigration. The men came to work on building sites and railways whilst the women came into the hotels and new Health Service.

The Irish brought with them their language, culture and traditions. It was not uncommon in the 1950s in Manchester to hear Irishmen conversing in their own language in pubs and on building sites. Parish centres and, later, Irish centres provided a focus for the community giving them a place to meet after Mass and provided a venue for dances and socials. In many parishes in Manchester such as St. Brendan's and the Holy Name Irish people provided the backbone of the church-going community. In these communities they married and had children and, for many of them, Britain became their home.

Second generation

The experience of children born of Irish parents is very different. Lacking Irish

accents, they are often viewed as British and for many it is the norm to accept this definition. British society is riddled with anti-Irish racism. Being Irish is equated with being stupid or violent. There are few, if any, positive images of being Irish although there is a wealth of talent spread throughout Irish literature, politics and music. Successful writers such as Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw are 'adopted' as part of 'English' literature. It is only recently through overtly Irish groups such as U2, The Pogues and Moving Hearts that some positive images have emerged.

This is an indication of the fact that recently more second generation Irish people are asserting their Irish identity.



Bernadette Hyland, Manchester IBRG.

My family are probably typical of many Irish people who came to Britain in the 1940s. They brought with them and maintained a value and respect for their history and traditions. My parents recognised that British schools would teach history from a colonial point of view with Ireland being viewed as a 'problem'. I was therefore taught my Irish history by my parents before I went to school and given a positive image of Ireland as a sovereign state with its own language, politics and culture. This inspired me so that when I was nine years old I did my geography project on Ireland and for my CSE history I studied the Irish Famine of 1845 which was directly responsible for my presence in Manchester. This reflects the tradition of Irish families of passing on history orally and that history being seen as a valued part of our heritage.

Growing up in Britain in the 1970s as a teenager, I saw the history of Ireland both past and present shown nightly on our television with the growing civil rights movement in the north of Ireland. The introduction of the repressive Prevention of Terrorism Act in 1974 effectively muzzled the Irish community and also led to a wave of anti-Irish hysteria in the country.

The hunger strikes of 1981 had a major effect on the Irish community in Britain the majority of whom were outraged by the intransigent position adopted by the British Government.

The following years saw a resurgence in people's interest in the position of the Irish in Britain. Research showed the discrimination facing Irish born people and their children in this society ranging from Irish 'jokes' to low pay, bad housing, poor self-image and the repressive treatment of Irish people in the law as highlighted by the Birmingham Six and Guildford Four cases.

The older Irish born had remained in and around the Irish centres which, to an extent, had the effect of controlling any political activity. Younger second generation Irish people are not dependent on the Irish building employers for jobs, nor do they feel themselves to be in a subservient position to the British community. Many Irish people growing up here do not need to negotiate their position with the British community but have a familiarity with and an understanding of the British system which can only come from being born here.

For many people like myself who have come up through the 11 plus system to a university education and a professional job, it is important to assert my Irish identity alongside that of being a socialist-feminist. The emergence of organisations such as the Irish in Britain Representation Group gives me the opportunity to participate equally in organisations which confront the injustices of life for Irish people whether women or men, first, second or third generation, traditional music or Pogues fans living in Britain or Ireland.

The IBRG does not go 'cap in hand' in the way older Irish organisations were forced to do but instead proudly asserts its right to preserve our Irish culture, heritage and traditions.

Contact: Manchester IBRG, c/o Grassroots Books, 1-Newton Street, Manchester.

The new Housing Bill and the Irish community

Laura Sullivan explains the Bill's likely impact.

The new housing bill will have a particularly devastating effect on all those who get a raw deal generally and for whom decent housing would be the first step to improving other aspects of their lives. People who will be badly affected are, of course, the Irish community, the Black community, other ethnic minority groups, women, elderly people and the unemployed.

As research has shown that the Irish community has low levels of home ownership and high levels of overcrowding in run-down property lacking basic amenities and that the majority of the Irish born living in London are predominantly over the age of 45 (22% over pensionable age), our people are particularly likely to be adversely affected by this legislation. Add to this the influx of young Irish immigrants—an estimated 40,000 in 1987—facing steep rents in London, moving from one bed and breakfast lodging to another because of the Housing Benefit laws and finding it harder and harder to get into short life accommodation and we have a bleak impression of our community's housing problems. With this impression, I shall turn to the effects of the new bill.

Council Housing

Rents will go up. It will be illegal for Councils to subsidise rents from the rates. Council rents will be expected to cover the costs of repairs and improvements. The new 'economic rent' will be 50%-100% more than it is now.

Choosing your landlord Council tenants will have the chance to opt out of Council housing. A 'friendly' private landlord will write to you, possibly with enticements of low rents and better repairs and, if you agree, he or she will buy your tenancy at a low cost as the Borough Valuer will have to give a negative valuation in the landlord's favour. So landlords can be generous at first. Although you will have an 'assured tenancy' the new rules say:

- there will be no limit on the rent charged
- the tenant will lose succession rights
- There will be wide grounds on which the landlord can evict (if you were ever in arrears with your rent you may be vulnerable).

Furthermore, although the landlord will have to get consent from the government to sell housing which he or she has bought the government have said that they will issue as many general consents as possible.

Tenants' right to a say in who owns their homes is determined by voting. However, the

voting system is loaded in favour of the landlord and *not* voting will be counted as a vote for a change of ownership. You will vote in response to a landlord's letter asking if you want a new landlord. It might be that you go away for a long holiday and find that ownership of your home has changed hands while you were away.

The Private Sector

Under the new system new tenancies will be 'assured' or 'short hold'. With a short hold tenancy there will be no security. With an assured tenancy there is supposedly some security but there will be 16 grounds on which the landlord can repossess eg 'persistent delay in paying the rent'. If you have housing benefit problems you could be evicted. The law on legal eviction and harassment is to be strengthened but with so much on the landlord's side, will they need to actually 'harass' any longer? A fair rent will be a rent which is comparable to others in the area.

It will be harder for newly arrived immigrants to establish themselves. It will be harder for people struggling to make a living and for families and single parents on low incomes. Many Irish people live in substandard accommodation already; with less security, their situation isn't likely to improve.

Homeless families

With the implementation of the new bill, most of the existing municipal housing stock will be removed from the ownership of local authorities, whose main function will then be to offer advice and assistance. With little housing and less money at the disposal of local authorities, it is inevitable that ethnic minority groups will suffer. Irish families come to Britain because there is no work in Ireland. Use of the 'local connection' provision of the Homeless Persons Act, which requires a family or residential connection with the area covered by the local authority, may be used more and more to deny housing to people who have not lived in the area for a substantial period of time. People who have been forced to emigrate to Britain may be effectively deported by being offered the choice between a travel warrant and sleeping on the streets.

Certain areas will be designated housing action trusts. Dwellings in these areas will become the property of a quango. They will be improved and sold to private landlords with tenants being offered the chance to buy

their property. Councils in these areas will have no housing to offer people who are vulnerable according to the Homeless Persons Act.

Already a recent report by the Association of Local Authorities (ALA) has shown that Irish families stay in local authority bed and breakfast accommodation longer than others. Where housing is sought from other bodies, equality for ethnic minority people may not be a consideration at all.

Irish women

Access to housing will be dependent on income and it will be harder for Irish women to find decent housing as women are often on low incomes. The security and standard of property will not improve for older women living in overcrowded conditions without adequate facilities.

Women who are in violent relationships may find it harder to leave as access to housing becomes more limited. Indeed, any temporary accommodation being offered may have its own insecurity and risks which may force the woman to return to a violent man, especially if she has children.

Bed and breakfast accommodation will increase for single parents. It is often associated with poor mental and physical health. It especially puts a strain on ethnic minority women as it makes it harder to build up social networks and establish yourself in the community or to maintain networks which you had before.

Conclusion

I have painted a grim picture of the new housing bill. I haven't included every aspect of it—this is only a guideline to the way it will work. Parts of it may be amended before it is passed. The general aim—to deregulate housing to make more private sector housing available—will not change.

A campaign concerning the bill must be mounted to inform tenants of their rights. A central theme for the Irish in Britain must concern our right to be here and our right to resources. Housing is an essential right and the deprivation of this right is illustrated only too well in the use by Camden and other local authorities of the 'local connection' provision of the Homeless Persons Act. Ireland is the only overseas country for whose citizens full use of this provision is made. As Irish people, we must campaign for full ethnic minority status and the rights that this entails. We cannot accept anything less.

Focus on the north

Hearts and Minds

Last November Manchester IBRG held a very successful conference entitled "Hearts and Minds – The Irish in Britain Today". Bernadette Hyland reports on the day's discussions.

The Irish have been coming to the North West for many hundreds, if not thousands, of years. They are the largest non-British group in the North West. The post-war period saw the last great wave of Irish emigration as a failing Irish economy coincided with a boom in Britain.

The Manchester branch of the Irish in Britain Representation Group is representative of the Irish community in this area encompassing Irish born and those of Irish descent, women and men, young and not so young. Members come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Our branch has worked on a variety of issues including anti-Irish racism, education, welfare and social events.

The aim of our "Hearts and Minds" conference was to raise the profile of the Irish community in this area and to highlight their experiences and differing needs. As a branch, we felt that it was important to emphasise certain themes crucial to the lives of our community, ie the role of Irish women, emigration, education, welfare and culture.

The conference took place at Manchester Town Hall on 14th November 1987. It was formally opened by the Chair of Manchester City Council, Eileen Kelly, who outlined the views of the Council and drew parallels between them and the aims of the IBRG.

Desmond Greaves, the eminent historian, gave one of the major speeches on "Emigration—The Historical Experience", illuminating the role that emigration has played in the lives of the Irish. This theme came up constantly during the day in the seminars.

Opening the afternoon session, Gearóid MacGearailt, Ard Cathaoirleach of IBRG, expanded on the theme of the Irish in Britain in the 1980's and the growth of the IBRG. He reflected on the changes that had occurred in the Irish community and the role that the IBRG had played in encouraging the community to assert itself.

The role that Irish women have played in the past and continue to play in the community is often neglected. As a branch we felt it was important to highlight their experiences. We therefore ensured that 50% of the speakers were women, publicised the conference to Irish women's groups and provided a free creche which was used by 25 children.

Mary Lennon, author of a book on Irish women in Britain, looked at the pattern of Irish women's emigration to Britain, giving little known information such as the fact that more women than men have emigrated from Ireland.

Moy McCrory continued on this theme, using her book of short stories *The Water's Edge* to comment on the experience of growing up in an Irish working class background in Liverpool. She looked at the effects of class and the British education system on second generation young Irish people.

In the seminar on "Irish Dimensions in British Education" Mary Hickman underlined the importance of having Irish Studies on the curriculum of all British schools and colleges. The themes of education, identity and anti-Irish racism came up again and again throughout the day. Mícheál Ó Ríabhaigh looked at the history of one of the oldest Irish communities in Britain, Liverpool, and the reasons why its thriving nationalist community has continued to be oppressed and the obstacles it has faced in challenging this.

Pat Reynolds took up the theme of identity and anti-Irish racism. He traced the roots of this racism back through the history of Britain and Ireland and in this colonial relationship found the basis of present day anti-Irish racism. Pat saw education as the crucial area that could give Irish people a pride in their history and culture.

The importance of education and culture were key tenets in the formation of the Manchester theatre group, Frontline Culture and Education. They emphasise the importance of people tracing their own history and using the medium of drama to educate communities about past and present struggles and to stress the common links between communities such as the Black and the Irish.

The growth of groups such as the Irish in Manchester History Group is an important step in rediscovering the history of the Irish in this area. Steven Fielding looked at the involvement of Irish people in politics in Manchester between 1890 and 1914 and prompted a discussion on the Irish people, now forgotten, who have played an important part in this area's history and traditions.

Looking at the history of the Irish involves

consideration of their position in British society and the acceptable and unacceptable facets of that life. Máire O'Shea, a founder member of the Irish Mental Health Forum, looked at the effects on the Irish of coming to Britain and, in particular, the effects of anti-Irish racism on the mental health of our community. Once again the issues of identity and low self-image were discussed in what is an area of growing interest within the community.

Liam Clarke, in his seminar on "The needs of the Irish Elderly", commented on the fact that, although the Irish are Britain's largest ethnic minority group, there is little research into the needs of our elderly people. He looked at some of the issues for the elderly, the people who care for them and the responses needed in terms of social work policy.

The particular needs of Travellers in Britain were discussed by Sister Anna of the Catholic Travelling Mission. The Travellers, a group of Irish people with their own traditions and history have particular problems because of society's reactions to their lifestyle. Unaccepted by the British community, they are not seen by settled Irish people as part of their community, either. The racism and persecution suffered by many travellers in this area made it important that we were able to bring together in this seminar many people who work with Travellers.

The conference was a great success with over 140 delegates and with many important conversations going on in the seminars—and outside in the corridors over cigarettes and tea! It gave the Irish from all over the North West an opportunity to meet and discuss the issues important to us as Irish people.

We are grateful to the many councillors, MPs, MEPs, Councils and individuals who gave us money and grants to enable us to stage the conference. We are also indebted to the speakers who gave us their time and shared their thoughts and to the many women and men who took part so enthusiastically in all the discussions.

Manchester IBRG can be contacted by writing c/o Grass Roots Books, 1 Newton Street, Manchester, M1.

- of England!

The Irish in north east Lancashire

Micheál Ó Cnaímhsí shares the history of his community

Although it's dispersed, the Irish community in Lancashire is currently experiencing a great revival of activity. There have been large numbers of Irish people in the north east Lancashire area since the Great Hunger and towns such as Blackburn, Burnley, and Accrington had their own Irish areas.

Michael Davitt, leader of the Land League, was reared in Haslingden (a small town in the Rossendale Valley) from the age of five years when his family was evicted from their home in Straide, Co. Mayo. After losing an arm in a cotton mill in Rawtenstall, he soon became involved in the Fenian movement and was later to spend many years in Dartmoor prison. A local historian, John Dunleavy, has done a great deal of research on Michael Davitt and the local Irish community during those times.

The last great influx of Irish people into this area of Lancashire was during the late 1950's. Because of the industrial decline which north east Lancashire has experienced, very few people from the 26 counties arrive in Lancashire these days. A number of people from the 6 counties who had friends or relations in this area did arrive in the 1970's.

The areas where the Irish communities tended to live have largely disappeared through redevelopment and today it's even difficult to find a pub where Irish people congregate. The first generation are mainly elderly people and, because of the attitudes of schools etc, many of their children don't see themselves as Irish.

There are no Irish community centres to serve the social, cultural and welfare needs of the Irish people in this area and, down the years, local authorities have ignored our community and its needs.

However, some Irish people have always believed that self-help is the only way forward and despite great difficulties have established thriving Irish organisations in this area.

Two branches of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann were established in the early seventies. One is in the Preston area and the other, the Michael Davitt branch serves the Accrington, Burnley and Rossendale Valley areas. Besides presenting regular sessions of Irish traditional music and song, the branches also organise beginners' music classes to pass Irish music on to second and third generation Irish people.

The Blackburn school of Irish dancing celebrated its 25th anniversary a couple of years ago and has taught hundreds of young people down the years.

All this work has been carried on by dedicated individuals who have invested their time, money and effort to ensure that a sense of Irishness continues to exist in this area.

The North East Lancashire branch of the IBRG was established in March 1984 by a number of people who were waiting for an organisation which would seriously tackle the problems facing our people in Britain and would not shy away from difficult issues.

We decided that our meetings would be open to anyone who was interested in our work. The structure of meetings was designed to encourage people to raise issues which they felt were important. Many of our members had never attended regular meetings of any sort before joining IBRG and, at first, were shy of taking part in debates etc. Even after four years it's still difficult to persuade many of our members to represent IBRG on bodies such as community relations councils etc.

Because of a lack of resources of any kind it took our branch a long time to start to function effectively but all the time we felt that, by meeting every fortnight, we were fulfilling an important need in helping our people to regain their confidence in their Irishness—which, at that time, was under attack from all sides. Irish 'jokes' on television and anti-Irish racism in the press were at their peak and pride in being Irish was at a low ebb.

We were (and still are) portrayed by some people as being 'political'—whatever that means. These are usually the people who are Irish on March 17th. If only they bothered to attend our meetings they would find that most of our time is taken up with arranging cultural events and projects.

But we have never shied away from trying to inform the wider community of the effects of the PTA on our people or the wrongful imprisonment of the Birmingham Six and the Guildford Four or the fact that it's only when Britain finally withdraws from our country that there will be peace and justice in Ireland and the Irish community in Britain will achieve its full potential.

The past year has been our most successful yet. In March 1987 our branch published a report entitled *The Irish in Lancashire* which sought to inform local authorities of the needs and aspirations of our people. We received some very good press coverage but we still have a long way to go in persuading borough councils and education departments to take the needs of the Irish community seriously.

We have also published a book of *Irish Folk Songs* which has proved very popular and we printed our own Christmas cards in Irish which were sold throughout Britain.

The branch has organised some very successful socials during the past year, including a free night for pensioners which attracted nearly three hundred people. Recently a similar number of people attended

a concert with the Sean Brady Band.

Since September the branch has presented a fortnightly session of Irish folk and traditional music in Blackburn Trades Club. The very fine accordion player, Liam Webster, is our resident musician and he is joined by a host of friends including the famous bodhrán maker and player, Dick Lett.

These sessions have quickly become established as being the place to be for great music and song and musicians travel from all over the North West to be with us. Everyone is encouraged to contribute with a song, poem or whatever.

New members are always welcome and anyone wishing to know more about the work of North East Lancs IBRG should write to: An Rúnaí, North East Lancs IBRG, c/o the Trades Club, St Peters Street, Blackburn, Lancs.

Conference on "The Irish and the British Labour Movement" Saturday 26th March 1988

The North West Labour History Group are holding an important one-day conference on Saturday 26th March entitled "The Irish and the British Labour Movement". The conference will be held in Salford at the recently opened Working Class Movement Library which is situated in the Crescent.

There will be three speakers:

Desmond Greaves on "Fifty years of the Connolly Association"

Steven Fielding on "Irish Catholics in Manchester 1890-1939"

Geoff Bell on "The Labour Party and the Irish Question 1916-1987"

The Working Class Movement Library is a unique collection of over 20,000 books, pamphlets, newspapers and banners and much else on the history of the labour movement. It was personally collected by Ruth and Edmund Frow over a period of thirty years. Salford City Council has recently assumed responsibility for the Library and rehoused it in a much larger building where it is open to the public for study and research.

The Library has a good collection of books on Irish history inherited from the late T.A. Jackson, author of *Ireland Her Own* and some of these will be on display on the day of the conference. Full details are again obtainable from **Michael Herbert**, 218 Maine Road, Moss Side, Manchester M14 7WQ or phone on 061-226 9900 (evenings) or 061-832 7692 (day).

Stalker and the search for the truth

by Diarmuid Breatnach

The 'Stalker Affair' is but one incident in what has become known in recent years as the "Shoot to Kill" policy of the RUC. The more one looks into the background of the cases which led to Stalker's investigation, the more one sees that the whole thing has been badly mis-named.

I would hazard a guess that to the majority of the uninformed those words would conjure up images of the RUC shooting to kill (*instead of to injure*) those members of the IRA and INLA they may come across.

However, what is at issue here is the growing concern that there is a practice of executing unarmed people who are suspected by the forces of occupation of being IRA or INLA members or supporters.

"Well, what do you expect?" a person may ask. "It's a war isn't it? Don't the IRA do the same?" Certainly it is a war, but the British government refuse to recognise it as such. They persist in the "hypocrisy", as Stalker called it, of maintaining that it is a policing operation. Indeed, it's not so long ago that ten young men died on hunger strike in order to make the very point that this is a war and that they were prisoners of that war. Clearly the British government do not want to concede that point.

But even in war, is it justified to shoot prisoners? Is it right that soldiers or police be allowed to decide—often without a scrap of evidence—that someone is a state enemy and, on that suspicion, shoot their prisoner?

Before Stalker's investigation was initiated, an independent commission of enquiry was set up by lawyers in the United States at the request of families and community leaders in the six counties. The panel consisted of six highly qualified lawyers from Ireland, Britain, the USA and Europe.

Between July 1981 and February 1984 (the year of the panel's enquiry) at least 20 unarmed people were shot dead by British security forces on duty in the north of Ireland. Altogether, from 1969 until 1984 there had been over 150 such "deaths in disputed circumstances". Only 14 prosecutions of members of the Crown forces had been initiated for murder and related offences; of those, only one had been found guilty of manslaughter and none of murder.

Case histories

Some of the cases which the panel investigated are particularly sickening:

● **Armagh City, July 1983** "We were told by Mrs Anne McGerrigan that just after midnight she and a group of friends were sitting on a low wall near her house. A UDR foot patrol came along . . . and required everyone to give their names and addresses. She and the others regarded this as harassment and she gave a false name while another woman refused to give any name.

"At this point the husbands of two of the women . . . arrived and their wives moved to go off with them. Then one soldier pushed

Bernadette Gartland with the side of his rifle against her chest . . . her husband then told the soldier to leave her alone . . . her husband and the soldier then pushed each other back and forward in a short scuffle.

" . . . a large number of soldiers then appeared . . . Mrs Gartland heard one of the soldiers say "If any one of you bastards moves, we'll shoot" and between six and ten UDR members pointed their rifles straight at the group.

"Both women reported hearing the safety catches clicking off and, suddenly, one shot. Mrs McGerrigan was holding (Martin) Malone's arm at the time and he had not stepped forward or said anything. He just fell back, dying instantly."

One of the group ran to get a doctor but was stopped. On explaining his mission, he was struck in the mouth with a rifle-butt. No police officer arrived to investigate until five or six hours later. In March 1984, the Director of Public Prosecutions finally decided to bring charges against David Baird of the UDR. He was released into military custody and, in December 1984, cleared of both murder and manslaughter and is back serving with the regiment.

● **County Armagh, June 1976** While driving his brother's car at night, Liam Prince was shot dead by soldiers of the Third Parachute Regiment near the border in South Armagh. He had applied to join the RUC in which his father and brother were already serving. He was unarmed.

Subsequently, Third Para soldiers raided his family's home where their initially hostile behaviour changed when they realised that they were dealing with RUC members. However, they lied about Liam and told the family that he was safe. It was only when they went to the RUC station in Newry that the family found out that he was dead.

The army claimed that Prince was shot in crossfire between soldiers and the IRA but local people have told the family that there was no "crossfire" and no IRA activity in the area at the time. The army also suggested that Prince had failed to stop at a road-block but the car had stopped normally and there was no evidence of a skid. The driver's window was wound down as though he had stopped to produce his licence at a vehicle checkpoint.

The Coroner's Court recorded an open verdict (more about that below). However, the DPP decided not to prosecute and the case is regarded as closed.

● **Armagh City, December 1982** Séamus Grew was driving Roddy Carroll up a hill leading to the latter's home. A neighbour waved to him and then saw another car coming fast in behind Séamus' car and then it seemed that they had pulled in front and stopped him.

Such is the regularity of such harassment that he said to himself "They've stopped Séamie" and went to walk on when he heard a

burst of shooting followed by a pause and another, shorter, burst. In addition, there were police on foot in the fields and on both sides of the road and another car blocking entrance to or exit from the estate.

Police Constable John Robinson had got out of his vehicle and fired his gun into the passenger side of Grew's car, killing Carroll. He had then gone to the driver's side, reloaded, taken Grew out and shot him a few times in the back of the head. Both Grew and Carroll were unarmed.

The Coroner for Armagh, Gerard Curran, objected in open court on 3rd September, 1983 that he had been supplied with "not a single statement or document" by the DPP and that this contravened "the principles of natural and constitutional justice".

Shortly afterwards, Robinson was put on trial and it emerged that he was part of an undercover RUC Special Branch team known as E4A. Justice McDermott acquitted him and praised him for his sharp shooting.

In 1984 there had still been no inquest and Gerard Curran had resigned his post due to "grave irregularities" in the RUC files on the killings of Grew and Carroll. The following week his substitute, James Rogers, stated that he also would be unable to preside over those inquests due to "professional commitments".

● **West Belfast, October 1971** Maura Meehan and Dorothy McGuire were travelling in a car through West Belfast, sounding the horn to warn of the presence of British troops in the area. Both were shot dead by the British army. Neither was armed.

There were no prosecutions but, after 12 years, Mrs Meehan's widower received a settlement of his claim against the British army. The amount received was £1,200.

Coroner's courts

What began to emerge in the panel's investigation—aside from the murders—was a very interesting anomaly in the six counties Coroner's Courts and a chilling attitude—at the highest level of the legal machine—to the rights of civilians vis-a-vis soldiers on duty.

In 32 county Ireland in the period 1919-1922, it was not unknown for Coroner's Courts to return a verdict of "murdered by Crown forces". This cannot happen in present day Britain where "no verdict shall be framed in such a way as to appear to determine any question of:

- criminal liability on the part of a named person, or
- civil liability".

They may only determine "who the deceased was and how, when and where he (sic) came by his death". However, they may bring in a verdict of "unlawful killing" and, if the admitted killers were the police or the army, that would be tantamount to accusing them of manslaughter or murder. *But no such verdict is possible in the six counties . . .*

Prior to 1980, a six counties jury who

disbelieved the army or police version of a killing had the option of recording an "open verdict". Of those pre-1980 cases examined by the panel, two inquest juries chose that option. Most of the cases were post 1980, however, and since the changes made that year¹ Coroner's Courts in the six counties can now only list their findings, giving no indication at all as to whether they view the killing as being legal or not. In March 1983, in a letter to Lord Hylton, the Lord Chancellor said "a 'killing unlawfully' finding would, I believe, be a potent source of difficulty in Northern Ireland and I consider that it would be a retrograde step to turn Coroner's Courts into trials going beyond the finding of facts to the attribution of blame."

According to the panel it is clear that both the six counties Court of Appeal and the House of Lords itself has refused to make any statement of what rights to life a civilian may have when confronted by a soldier in the six counties. From Lord Diplock's summing up in the case of Private Jones (who had killed McElhone, a young farmer, unarmed and not connected with any paramilitary organisation or activity), the conclusion is inescapably that a soldier or police officer need only tell a Diplock Court judge that he honestly and reasonably believed his victim to be a member of a paramilitary organisation and the judge will be bound to accept that explanation. The reasonableness of the suspicion does not need to be tested, no immediate criminal activity need be feared and the soldier or police officer need be in no danger—and yet a killing of an unarmed person is "legal" and "justified".

Stalker's investigation

The panel finished its investigation at about the time that Stalker began his. He was asked to investigate only the killings of civilians by the RUC—notably the E4A unit.

If these killings (totalling six, including those of Grew and Carroll) had been investigated by a member of the RUC there was no chance that a verdict favourable to the RUC would have been accepted by the majority of the people in Ireland (and many elsewhere). It was therefore decided to bring over an officer from a police force in Britain. It's widely speculated that Stalker—as an ambitious young officer—was thought likely to give the required verdict and thus guarantee his rapid promotion. But something went wrong and Stalker began to ask the right questions.

Much of what Stalker says he found has been discussed elsewhere already. Suffice it to say that he had recommended the charging of 12 RUC officers up to the rank of Superintendent. At the time when he was taken off the case he was intending to go back to the six counties and interview officers above that rank—some of them under caution—right up to the head of the RUC, Sir John Hermon himself. Depending on Hermon's answers to a couple of questions, Stalker said on the Gay Byrne Show, he would then have decided whether to caution him before continuing the questioning.

Sampson, who took over the enquiry and was also involved in dealing with Stalker on the now discredited accusations made against him, also recommended that 12 RUC officers be charged. It is rumoured, too, that he questioned Hermon and other senior officers under caution.

No RUC officers were charged as a result of the investigation and the Attorney General declined to explain that decision or, indeed to publish the results of the investigation on the grounds that it would be against the "national interest". Of course, many ordinary British people will fail to appreciate that their "national interests" are being protected here and could be forgiven for concluding that the "national interest" at stake is that of the ruling class.

Stalker was eventually reinstated and exonerated of unprofessional misconduct. Not long after that, however, he resigned and is now busily promoting his book on the whole affair. The book does not seem to contain any further information of great importance for us, although it has interesting aspects such as the occasion when Hermon showed Stalker a sketch of the latter's family tree which revealed Stalker's terrible secret—his mother had been a catholic!

What has emerged from the six counties over the years is a pattern of the shooting of unarmed civilians (often after a series of threats by crown forces) who are then often denied access to doctor or priest or obstructed on their way to hospital (even in an ambulance) and whose homes are often raided by the same unit which carried out the shooting and who then mislead the relatives. The killers are rarely charged, if they are they are acquitted, the inquests are delayed for many months and, as a rule, the killers are not required to attend in person.

What is shown by the murders, the lack of prosecutions, Stalker's investigation—followed by his framing and suspension, full reinstatement and subsequent resignation—Sampson's investigation and the Attorney General's decision is much, much more than the RUC murders of six people and a closing of ranks between the British police, the Attorney General and the RUC. Rather, these events seem to show a state fighting a dirty war to which it is not prepared to admit, with a policy of unofficially murdering—through army, UDR and RUC—those it suspects of being its opponents. It also shows a damage-limitation strategy which attempts to confine popular awareness of such activities to the six counties. But that strategy is crumbling and the true face of British imperialism is beginning to be seen for what it always was.

**Fig.1 Deaths caused by security forces
1 July 1969-10 August 1983**

Year	Civilian deaths caused by security forces	Total deaths caused by security forces	Civilian deaths caused by security forces as a percentage of all deaths caused by security forces
1969	9	9	100.0%
1970	5	5	100.0%
1971	33	41	80.5%
1972	39	76	51.3%
1973	15	32	46.9%
1974	7	17	41.2%
1975	3	7	42.9%
1976	9	16	56.3%
1977	3	9	33.3%
1978	4	10	40.0%
1979	0	1	0.0%
1980	6	9	66.7%
1981	12	18	66.7%
1982	5	11	45.5%
1983	4	6	66.7%
Totals	154	267	57.7%

Fig.2 Deaths by all forces 1969-November 1983

Killing Agent	No of civilian deaths total death	Total no of deaths	Civilian deaths as % of total deaths	Total deaths by this agency as % of total deaths in six counties
All pro-Crown forces	716	887	80.7%	37.8%
Security forces	155	269	57.6%	11.4%
(British Army)	(129)	(222)	(58.1%)	(9.4%)
(Ulster Defence Reg)	(4)	(5)	(80.0%)	(0.2%)
(RUC & Reserve)	(22)	(42)	(52.4%)	(1.8%)
Unionist Paramilitary	561	618	90.8%	26.4%
Nationalist Paramilitary	484	1303	37.2%	57.7%

1. Coroner's Rules (England and Wales) 1953, Rule 33; as replaced by Coroner's (Amendment) Rules 1977.

These tables are based on figures supplied by the Irish Information Partnership, an independent research group based in London.

NB The Irish Information Partnership's classification of "civilian" is those "without manifest connection with paramilitaries, security forces, police or prison services."

Interview with Gerry Adams, MP

Part two: the struggle in the north of Ireland

In May 1987 Virginia Moyles asked Gerry Adams for his views on a number of questions. In our last (and first!) issue we gave part one of that interview. Here is the second and concluding part.

V: Given that the struggle's been going on for eighteen years, let's say, and you've been involved in it for much of that time, what hopeful things do you see having happened over that time? What gives you satisfaction about the things that you've achieved?

G: The thing that always nullifies, perhaps, any satisfaction is the whole struggle being waged at such a high cost, not just in terms of the lives that are being lost and I'm not just talking about republicans, I'm talking about everyone who's been killed in this situation, but also in terms of the break up of families, the grind that people have had to endure for such a long time.

But, having said that and bearing in mind the high cost, there was a situation here where twenty years ago people were totally and absolutely apathetic. In some parts of West Belfast you could have been in Liverpool—in fact there may have been actually more awareness of Irishness in parts of Liverpool or even maybe in Cricklewood or parts like that.

All of that has changed. Why it happened is the result of people having been oppressed for so long, having been deserted in this partitionist state. The educational process in the schools subdued a sense of Irishness, a sense of national consciousness. Now people, regardless of their partisan attitudes to politics or to the IRA or to whatever, are acutely aware, especially at working class level, of their Irishness. Practically, the gaelicisation of street names here is one expression of that, that next week we have Seachtain na Gaeilge we have a Gaelic week, an Irish week culminating in the presentation of prizes because West Belfast won major prizes in a national competition for areas which have done most on the question of the Irish language.

The fact that the British government, despite having tried every single thing possible from just straight terrorism through to more refined coercion through to imprisonment in all its various guises (whether it's internment or Diplock courts) through intimidation and also attempts at buying people off, have not been able to kill the struggle, have not been able to have their way and now, eighteen or nineteen years on, the struggle is as strong as it has been at any point—and many would say that it is even stronger than it was at some points—during that period.

Without sounding patronising, I do get succour. I was saying earlier on about the whole process of feeding in ideas and spread-

ing the seeds and so on and every so often the most unlikely person will make an act of resistance. A woman in a headscarf going to bingo or going to chapel or going home or going to the shops will intervene on her own against a platoon of heavily armed British soldiers who are harassing some young person. All of a sudden you see this situation developing and some wee woman is standing there telling them to take themselves off and leave the young lad alone.

The British soldiers might as well be spacemen. They walk up and down this road and don't talk to anyone because no-one will talk to them. The only way they can get people to talk to them is when they point a gun at them and the conversation, when it isn't abusive, is limited to giving your name and address, many times in Irish. They may as well be on the moon as being in a totally alien environment.

Those signs would be a source of, on the one hand, satisfaction and, on the other hand, hope because, with that type of unshakeable resolve from ordinary people who don't come out with revolutionary jargon or big rhetorical statements or anything else but are just sound, it shows that the British can't win and that this demand for national self determination is going to win through here.

It's only a matter of timing—I think that the right to national self determination is going to be won. It'll be done much quicker if people can mobilise and, wherever they live whether it's in Ireland or whether it's in Britain or wherever it happens to be, if they can bring the issue to a wider and wider public, then the agony here will be shortened. It's going to happen in the end, it's not a question of 'how can we bring about national self determination?' but 'how can we bring about national self determination in the shortest possible time?' and how we do that is simply by mobilising as we discussed earlier on and not in an overly ambitious way.

Other wee things that give temporary satisfaction are, for instance, when I was over in London last month and, on a week's notice, there was a very, very large meeting organised by the north London Irish. That gave me a lot of satisfaction to see so many people. There were over a thousand people at the meeting with minimal advertisements and very little advance publicity. It gave me a lot of satisfaction that there was that type of potential support there, that people were prepared to come along and listen to what was going on.

I could go on and on about wee things and big things but I think that the most telling thing is the most unlikely person making a small act of resistance. An act of resistance can be as small as a woman refusing to open her handbag but it takes courage to do that when there's a heavily armed man. If you were walking home tomorrow night in England and a heavily armed man confronted you and told you to open your handbag you mightn't feel too confident . . . but no, some poor woman says 'No, I'm not going to open my bag'. All these wee things show that they just can't win. The British government certainly can't win.

Loughgall was a terrible blow for the people of the nationalist community but yet the parents of the lads who were killed and, in one case, the wife of Paddy Kelly, were absolutely fantastic and myself and Martin McGuinness and Danny Morrison spent four or five days in Tyrone and we got inspiration from the families. We're supposed to be the hard men but we, in small country farms and bungalows and so on, we were actually getting succour from people who knew what had happened, who knew their sons and were prepared to stand by their sons. All the people who turned out at the funerals and did numerous small and big things to try and make sure that the lads were buried with dignity against the background of the RUC behaving the way the RUC behave at republican funerals would be a matter of some satisfaction.

The British are so stupid as to think that whatever short term gains are made over the IRA locally it's going to be at the cost of actually mobilising, a terrible cost for the lads who were killed but the fact that the British can be so stupid as to think it's going to have any real effect is ridiculous, that Tom King or Scott or Thatcher can take any satisfaction in the long term out of it is crazy.

V: What is it about this phase of the struggle that has kept it going for so much longer than it ever has before?

G: I don't know—it's impossible to say. The people now aren't any stancher than the people who went on before. Maybe it's because it has gone on so long before, you know, because there have been sporadic phases of struggle over the last fifty years, sixty years, longer, and because partition has gone on for so long and people have probably just steeled themselves and decided that they weren't willing to give up. I don't think

anybody sitting back in '69 would have perceived themselves still struggling in 1987. I certainly wouldn't have, although I thought it was going to be a long struggle—it's a living struggle, it's a struggle which is popularly based—despite the British propaganda, it is popularly based—and which has a momentum and a creativity of its own and it's made up of so many different people who all in their own wee way keep it going—you know, it isn't down to a hard line leadership—it's just the whole thrust of the situation.

Also the reason why it's been going on so long, the real reason, I suppose, is because of British stupidity. The British have it within their power at any time to end the struggle. While they dabble about trying to rearrange things, trying to put a military and political fence up, they're actually perpetuating the struggle. The role of the SDLP in the length of the struggle is an important factor because they have always been prepared to accept far less than they should do as Irish people and that has always encouraged the British to hang in and keep hanging in on the basis that if they can just isolate the republicans then the SDLP will settle for some cobbled together arrangement and British interests will be shored up for another period.

I think republicans have collectively—in the very widest sense of the meaning of collectively—decided that they are not going to accept anything less than Irish independence and it's been that sort of righteous stubbornness which has made all British and SDLP and Dublin establishment approaches to isolating republicans ineffective.

The training process has skipped a number of generation gaps. One of the lads who was killed at Loughgall was only born when the civil rights struggle started. It's a terrible indictment of the whole system but it has skipped that generation gap. It is a stubbornness on my part, if you like, that I could leave the struggle tomorrow when I've reached the point where I just can't give it any more and I would make no apologies for that—as long as one does one's best it doesn't matter what the thrust.

Then there is the economic logic of independence. People here are not going to get jobs under the present set-up—it has to be changed. People here aren't going to get civil rights under the present set-up—it has to be changed. People here aren't going to have cultural rights—it has to be changed. People here aren't going to have peace—it has to be changed. And all the irreversible thrust of all that logic can't be subverted by military coercion on the part of the British government.

So it's very hard to articulate and make parallels with other people but I would presume that it's a mixture of all of those logics which leaves people with no other choice but to struggle because what else can they do? I mean, what else can someone who wants to bring about Irish freedom do but try and bring it about? And when we are in a military situation as we are under the occupation then you arrive at the conclusion that you're involved in a struggle for independence. You either do that. . . or you don't and the demands of the situation, I think, bring out the very best in an awful lot of our

people and they're in a situation where they're prepared to make the sacrifices that they're making on a daily basis.

V: Do you think it's the military presence over the last 18 years that has made the struggle so much more immediate that people have had almost no choice?

G: Well there are a lot of wee factors involved, you know, like the benefits of better education, communication, all of that. I suppose that in the late 1960s they went out to get very, very basic and reasonable civil rights. But not only were they refused those but they were trampled into the ground. And the young people at that time with the benefit of better education, who didn't feel in any way inferior, just said that they weren't going to take it.

And we moved from the struggle for civil rights into national rights and then we moved into internment and, as each phase seems to go through, it has an effect—I mean, there will be people who will join the republican struggle because of what happened at Loughgall. There were people who joined the republican struggle because of what happened on the hunger strike. People who joined the republican struggle because of what happened on Bloody Sunday, because of what happened in the pogroms here in Belfast.

Maybe, initially it's a patriotic or an emotional response, a reaction to what's happened but very quickly it becomes a politicised—and in some cases, with younger people who have lived through the hunger strike, a highly

politicised—contribution. The calibre of the political savvy of young people joining the struggle now is a hundred times better than it was 18 or 19 years ago because they've had the benefit of just living through these years—it's what I was saying earlier on about the national consciousness and so on—it's just much greater.

I used to give a wee example of when we used to refer to the British Queen as the Queen. I hear young people of seven, eight, nine, talking about her as the British Queen. This may be just a very, very small example—it doesn't mean anything in real terms—it's just a very, very small example of a different perception of kids who have only known this period of struggle. I mean, we didn't see the British Queen as having anything to do with us, but they not only don't see her as having anything to do with them, but they also very clearly put her into the category of, not 'the Queen', but 'the British Queen'.

It's only a small example but it's the type of thing that at its very lowest level and at its very highest level shows that kids that have been through the hunger strike are much, much more conscious, more politicised and just don't see any reason why men with funny accents and guns should have the right to stop them walking down their streets, outside their own doors, going to their own pubs and discos and community centres. So perhaps the military thing has prolonged it—unless you put the other factors of the SDLP etcetera into the picture as well!



Sean-Chairde in Lambeth

Mary and Michael are both members of the IBRG Seanchairde which meets at Manor Hall, Streatham each Thursday. Mary, from Wicklow, is 80 years of age and has been living in England since 1939. She has five children one of whom lives in Dublin while the rest are over here. Michael, who is 60 years of age, comes from Dublin and has lived in England since 1941. He is single and has no children. Lambeth IBRG asked them about their experiences of living in this country.

Q: Why did you come to England?

Mary: "Oh, for the excitement . . ."

Michael: "Because there was nothing in Ireland. It was during the war and people out of work were joining the army."

Q: Didn't you think of joining the army?

Michael: "What army would I join—the Salvation Army? No, I had a job waiting for me in Birmingham as a painter. There was plenty of work then."

Mary: "I got a job as an attendant in a ladies toilet and after that I did all sorts of jobs—in a laundrette, as a cook and then I fostered children."

Q: When you first came to England how long did you intend to stay?

Mary: "Oh, I wanted to go home the next day. I thought I'd never get back again to lovely Dublin."

Michael: "When I came, I came forever. I wanted to get away from the environment I grew up in. I had no family life in Dublin."

Mary: "I made several attempts to go back but there were always things stopping me, lack of money, family ties. Once I did go back and I lived in a mobile home on a permanent site. I had the place lovely. Some people had been there for sixteen years. But in the end I had to sell it for the money. Lots of people around me were leaving to move into flats. I didn't really want a flat—I felt freer where I was. When I did move into the flat I got ill and had to come back to England."

Q: Where do you live now?

Mary: "I live in a ground floor Council flat on my own. It's too far away from the bus stops and the shops and the church."

Q: Do you vote in this country?

Mary: "Yes, I vote Labour, of course, because they're more for the working people. I'm not quite so sure now though—they're not the Labour they used to be."

Michael: "I vote Labour, too. I can't vote Conservative, Mother of Jesus. I've always voted Labour whether that's good or bad."

Q: Do you receive a state pension?

Both: "Yes".

Mary: "Yes, I manage OK. I get 25p a week extra now I'm 80. Don't you think that's an insult?"

Q: Do you have a home help or meals on wheels or anything like that?

Michael: "I've got a great home help—I couldn't do without her."

Mary: "I've got a home help. I don't have meals on wheels. I'd rather boil an egg for myself but if it got to the stage where I couldn't do that . . ."

Q: Do you attend a day centre or drop-in centre?

Both: "Only this one."

Q: Do you think it's a good idea to have a drop-in centre for Irish people in your area?

Michael: "Yes, that way you can meet your own people."

Mary: "It's nice to meet other Irish people. We can see the funny side of life. The English are more sober-faced. You feel you're nearer home then, too."

Q: Do you speak Irish at all?

Michael: "Well yes, the basic things. I learnt it at school but I rebelled against it. But I would like to learn it now."

Mary: "A teacher taught us Irish when it was forbidden to teach it. I think it's a good thing to learn our own language. We spoke more in our day than children now—at home we always said things like 'pass the butter' in Irish. Yes, I like the Irish language."

Q: Do you know any other Irish people in your area?

Mary: "There's my friend Mrs Moran. I know her through the church. It's mostly through the church—they have Irish evenings there sometimes."

Michael: "Oh, hundreds. I meet them in the pub."

Q: When did you last visit Ireland?

Mary: "I went last September with my daughter. I have a son still in Dublin. He works on a community radio station."

Michael: "I went two years ago. I went with a football team to Kildare and Dublin. It was great."

Q: Would you like to go back to Ireland to live?

Mary: "I'd be going back tomorrow if I could. I think everyone wants to go back. I know people saving up."

Michael: "No, not to live. I'm happy where I am. But I'm still 100% Irish. You can't take that away."

Q: When people tell anti-Irish jokes does it bother you at all?

Michael: "I just turn round then and make them look stupid."

Mary: "I was in a shop once and they had a poster on the wall which was supposed to be a letter from a stupid Irish mother. No woman is that ignorant. It's just making little of them. The man in the shop wouldn't like jokes made about his mother."

Q: Do you think the catholic church has done a lot for the Irish in Britain?

Mary: "I go to church whenever I can get there but I think they could do more for us. I don't think the church is interested in poor people."

Q: Do you think the children of Irish people who have settled here should consider themselves to be Irish or British?

Mary: "My sister had seven daughters and they're as Irish as the day they left. They're proud to be Irish. My children don't bother much—it's a bit disappointing. My daughter married an Englishman. He's a nice fellow but he doesn't really understand us. He thinks we're a bit mad. The English don't really love their country, you see."

Lewisham Branch

Every Friday evening members of Lewisham IBRG meet informally in "The Crown", New Cross Road, SE14 for a traditional Irish folk music session with a number of musicians and singers. The sessions start at about 9.00pm and everyone is welcome to join in.

Branch meetings are on the first Wednesday of the month but these are open only to branch members. The pensioners' group meets every second Friday. The branch magazine, *Nua Ghael* comes out about once a quarter.

Lewisham IBRG along with the Irish in Greenwich Project and the Albany Centre, Deptford, are arranging a packed schedule for St Patrick's Day at the Albany. During the day there will be exhibitions of Irish dancing, stalls, a bar and a 25s card drive. In the evening "Morning Dew" and "The Collaborators" will be playing and comedian Eoin O'Neill will be compering (tickets £3.50 or £2.50 unwaged).

Some IBRG members are also involved in

the "Irish Aspects" and Irish language courses at Goldsmiths College which take place 7.00-9.00pm on Mondays and 6.00-9.30pm on Thursdays respectively.

Lewisham IBRG have lots of other plans and projects in hand and new members are very welcome. Contact: Diarmuid Breatnach, c/o St Andrew's Centre, Brockley Road/Wickham Road, SE4.

Politics and Culture

Diarmuid Breatnach explores the links between the two.

"We're a cultural organisation, not a political one", representatives of organisations are sometimes heard to say. In one sense they may be correct but in another they are talking nonsense.

The word 'politics' (from the point of view of those not in power) encompasses the theory and action of putting pressure on—or replacing—those who rule in society, whether they do so as elected representatives or not. Obviously, the decisions of rulers to a greater or lesser degree affect most, if not all, aspects of our lives. An organisation which specialises in affecting political change would therefore be considered a "political organisation".

One definition of culture is "the sum total of beliefs, values, attitudes, customs, religion(s) and artistic expression of a society or part of society". One would expect that politics would have quite an influence on people's beliefs and attitudes since it would be in the interests of the rulers to ensure the predominance of attitudes which favoured themselves. The same would also be true of the values and customs which would give rise to those attitudes or arise out of them; even one's religious views might be affected. All this could be done through the use of education, mass media and even the pulpit.

Another way of thinking of culture is as encompassing the song, music, dance, poetry and other artistic expression of a society (or part of it). Song and poetry both use words, the words express thought and it might be reasonable to expect that those thoughts would be influenced by the dominant thoughts of a given society. It could be argued that this would extend also to music dance, painting and sculpture.

Irish artistic expression gives us even clearer indications of the truth of the above. If Irish people get together and sing freely for a while, it will not be long before an overtly political song is heard referring to some incident in the 800-year struggle against foreign domination or giving an overview of that whole history. Even emigration songs—apart from recording an aspect of the Irish experience which is due to economic and political circumstances—often make reference in passing to the anti-colonial and land struggles. The same will be found to be true of poetry and many Irish music and dance pieces have overt political/historical titles, as in, for example, *The Rights of Man*, *Sliabh na mBan* ("the women's mountain", referring to the aftermath of a battle when only the women remain on the mountain searching among the dead for their loved ones), *Ionnsaigh na h-Innse* ("Siege of Ennis") and *Fallaí Luimnigh* ("The Walls of Limerick").

The attitudes of our colonisers also bears out the above thesis. For one example, they were so concerned at its undermining effect on the Normans in Ireland that they actually passed laws forbidding them to speak Irish, play Irish games or marry Irish people (Statutes of Kilkenny, 14th century)—

unsuccessfully, as it turned out. Later, when the invaders had become English, rather than Norman, they ensured that all legal transactions in Ireland were done other than through the medium of Irish and, during the Penal Law days, forbade the education of Irish children in any sense at all. Later still, they aimed at an education which would ensure that Irish children thought of themselves as some kind of West Britons. As one of the English readers in use in Irish schools of the time had it: "I thank the Lord who made me a happy English child".

If Irish people were being attacked lastly and most devastatingly through culture, nationalist and revolutionary socialist forces also used culture as the beginning of a fight-back. Pearse, Lady Gregory, Constance Markievicz, Yeats and Connolly all played a part in this, along with others. The GAA was a hotbed of nationalists and, apart from focussing on Gaelic sports, provided a good cover for organising and recruiting those who would later exchange the hurley stick for the rifle. The Gaelic League played a similar role and Pearse was later to voice the opinion that, once the League was established, a rising became inevitable.

Some time after the Easter rising, in the twenty six counties, De Valera's Government postured as being very interested in preserving and extending the national culture. Gaelic sports did reasonably well and the Irish language was ostensibly promoted—it was a compulsory subject in schools and if one did one's exams in other subjects in Irish one gained an extra 10% of the total marks achieved. However, in the Gaeltacht areas schooling conditions remained extremely primitive and the Government's economic policies (as with those of all other Governments since) fuelled emigration and these Irish-speaking areas contributed more than their share to the flood. Irish language and music declined seriously.

In 1966 the State celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising of 1916 and, in supreme irony, songs of resistance to imperialism or colonialism were banned from the national radio and television network (songs of class resistance had hardly ever been allowed).

Irish (and other) folk songs—including 'rebel' songs—were enjoying a new popularity at that time and that trend continued to grow. The rise of the Irish civil rights struggle at the end of the sixties gave the songs something of an added push and, once the struggle for independence came once more to the fore, old resistance songs were becoming more popular and new ones were being written all the time. At least two such new songs which were banned from the state network outsold all others for a period, one of those being the well-known *Men behind the Wire*.

A survey in the mid-seventies found that traditional Irish music was the most popular

type of music among Irish youth and Gaelic games were, by then, attracting huge crowds even from among city-dwellers. By the eighties, the language was once more on the increase, significantly now among the working class people of Derry, Belfast and Dublin. Significantly also, in many cases republicans were involved in organising cultural festivals, running classes for beginners in Irish and agitating for cultural provision by the authorities of both the twenty six and the six counties.

In the six counties, a GAA pitch has been commandeered by the Army for military use. People have been arrested for replying in Irish to questions by RUC or British army personnel. Prisoners convicted as a result of their republican beliefs or activities are not allowed to wear the Fáiinne (a ring signifying that its wearer is an Irish speaker) or to have their visitors speak to them in Irish.

When people say "We're not political", are they really saying "We're afraid to admit to our political ideas" or "We don't want to upset the status quo"? Unless they're extremely naive, it would seem so. In the sense in which this article discusses the issues, one cannot separate culture from politics and the only questions which remain to be answered are: *which* politics will be served by our culture and which politics are appropriate to militate towards the preservation and development of our national culture?

Advertisement

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Available through Lewisham IBRG c/o St. Andrew's Centre, Brockley Road/Wickham Road, London SE4.

Mental Health and the Irish Community

In this article which will be serialised over three issues, Dr. Máire O'Shea gives a detailed analysis of the reasons for the poor mental health of the Irish community.

The publication of figures showing that the Irish in Britain had the highest rate of admission to mental hospitals of all the ethnic minority groups in Britain and two and a half times the British rate shocked the Irish community. A suicide rate among the Irish only lower than among Poles and Germans who include a high proportion of Jewish victims of the holocaust had to be seen as reflecting utter desperation in a group for whom suicide is a mortal sin and precludes Christian burial.

The reaction to these proofs of a high level of distress was delayed due to fear of racist overtones. The first response came from the GLC and the IBRG and then from a group of Irish professionals concerned about the lack of sensitivity to Irish needs in the statutory services. Following a public meeting in 1985 the Brent Irish Mental Health Group was set up with a consumer input to highlight the special problems faced by Irish people.

A report on the mental health of the Irish in the area found that the most vulnerable groups were single men and married women. A high rate of homelessness and poor housing conditions, unemployment, low pay and poor working conditions, cultural problems and racism were contributory factors. The group has held regular monthly meetings and has published a booklet containing interviews with Irish users of the psychiatric services. It has completed a bibliography of the very little research available. One of the members is undertaking a research project on attempted suicides among young Irish people, funded by the health authority. One local social services office has begun to monitor their Irish clientele.

In January 1987 Camden IBRG, supported by a committee on which all the interested Irish groups were represented, organised a national conference on the mental health of the Irish to explore with members of the Irish community the reasons for the appallingly high rate of mental health admissions, to draw the attention of the statutory services to the special problems of the Irish and to attract funding for pilot projects.

In addition to contributions from speakers involved with particular vulnerable groups, two eminent British academics were invited to speak. It was hoped that their prestige would attract media interest and that one of them, Dr Roland Littlewood, Senior Lecturer in Psychiatry and Anthropology at the Middlesex Hospital, author of several books on the mental health of ethnic minorities and leading member of the Transcultural Psychiatry Society, could be stimulated by discussions at the conference to research the problems of the Irish and to canvass the Transcultural Psychiatry Society to recognise the special problems of the Irish.

The Transcultural Psychiatry Society was

founded in the seventies by a group of psychiatrists in an upsurge of interest in the special problems of Asians and Afro-Caribbeans and the cultural barriers depriving them of appropriate treatment by the statutory services. Already in the sixties, studies had been published describing alleged psychotic states in Afro-Caribbeans characterised by excitement or stupor, bizarre paranoid or religious delusions and rapid recovery. The Transcultural Psychiatry Society was instrumental in setting up the Transcultural Psychiatry Unit with research funding in Bradford to be a model for the promotion of awareness in the statutory services of the cultural dimension in the psychological problems of ethnic minorities. In recent years it has attracted black community workers and social workers and has focussed on the psychological effects of racism and the promotion of race awareness among professionals. Its silence on the subject of the mental health of the Irish, the largest ethnic minority in Britain, has been deafening.

Roland Littlewood highlighted the problem that the Irish are not sufficiently 'exotic' and that Irish patients are dismissed by researchers as boring old alcoholics and schizophrenics. However, it has recently been recognised that when Afro-Caribbeans display attitudes or behaviour or express beliefs which seem bizarre to British psychiatrists they are often misdiagnosed as schizophrenic. In my experience this also applies to the Irish. The attitude of psychiatric professionals to Irish patients is typified by a question once put to me, "Is he mad or is he just Irish?"

The mad Irish stereotype is only one of the racist stereotypes absorbed during 800 years of British colonial rule in Ireland. Having been conditioned to believe that Britain has had no white colonies and that the Irish are an inferior, wayward, quaint variety of British, possessing excessively long memories and given to fighting among themselves, some of whom harbour quirky nationalist ideas, British professionals are blind to Irish culture differences. Some 'Black' professionals see racism as deriving from skin colour, not colonialism. They place the Irish in the category of dominant whites and also deny our cultural difference and the existence of anti-Irish racism.

Irish psychiatrists, products of a neo-colonialist education system which marginalises the Irish cultural identity and plays down the colonial experience and trained to make diagnoses acceptable to the Royal College of Psychiatrists, adhere to the medical model followed by the British psychiatric establishment which sees psychological problems as symptoms of diseases for which they expect an organic basis to be established one day. It

suits their class interests to obscure the effects of colonisation by studying neurological syndromes and by explaining the allegedly high rate of schizophrenia by invoking the theory of selective emigration which is said to leave those with inferior genes at home.

The other academic, Dr Cochrane, Senior Lecturer in Psychology at Birmingham University and the only researcher to have carried out a survey of admission rates to all psychiatric hospitals in England broken down according to ethnic origin and the discoverer of the extraordinarily high rate of mental hospital admissions among the Irish was invited to present his findings and conclusions in order to stimulate discussion of the reasons for the high Irish rate and the cultural dimension to the psychological problems underlying mental illness which had not been touched on in any of the few studies which included the Irish.

Cochrane found, in a survey carried out in 1977 quoted in his book *The Social Creation of Mental Illness* that of all ethnic groups only those born in the Republic of Ireland and to a much lesser extent Afro-Caribbeans had a higher rate than the British. In a later survey those born in the north of Ireland had the highest rate at 1242. Those born in the Republic of Ireland came next at 1120 followed by Poland, Scotland and the West Indies at 704, 695 and 539 respectively. Asians had a lower rate than the English. High rates among the Irish are accounted for by high rates of alcoholism and schizophrenia but the rate for schizophrenic admissions is higher among Afro-Caribbeans.

He is surprised that the Irish whom he sees as having fewer transitions to make on arrival in Britain are more vulnerable than the Asians who have many transitions to make. Leaving out of the count the security which Asians must gain from an intact ethnic identity retained by distinctive costumes and customs and language and from integrated communities which are set up in the ghettos he postulates as explanations for the high Irish admission rate four options being:

- a greater propensity for hospitalization as a response to mental illness
- genetics he dismisses for lack of evidence
- an inherent vulnerability to mental illness in the Irish culture
- the destruction of Irish society and personality by colonialism.

His hypothesis is a variation of the theory of selective emigration. He views Irish emigration as a dual phenomenon with the high rate of mental illness accounted for by a significant minority on the margins of the community who have emigrated to escape from personal problems centring around alcohol but in fact bring the problems with

them. He attributes the drinking problems to late marriage and sexual taboos in rural Ireland, the lack of emotional closeness between male members of the family extending to neighbours and workmates which is only reduced under the influence of alcohol and the peculiarly intense but ambivalent relationship with a dominant mother.

The results of his community survey of only 200 Irish households in Britain, the members of which showed fewer symptoms of psychological distress than a comparable English group or a comparable group still living in Ireland have suggested to him that the majority of the Irish community having emigrated to escape from sexual restrictions and landlessness is well-motivated, ambitious and stable and adjusts rapidly to British society. The findings of his community survey conflict with the results of a community survey carried out in Camberwell by Anthony Clare (unpublished thesis) who found excessively high rates of depression and anxiety symptoms if not of schizophrenia.

Cochrane's view of the majority of the Irish community as successful and well integrated into the host society conflicts with the figures relating to two London boroughs in which the Irish have the highest rates of unemployment, low wages, homelessness, substandard accommodation. The Irish also have the lowest rate of home ownership, possibly partly because they still cherish the dream of going home. In questioning the validity of hospital admission rates as an index of rates of mental illness in a community he leaves out of consideration the important factors contributing to admission: the policies of admitting agencies, including racism and failure of the client to seek help at an early stage due to distrust of alien professionals.

Finding that there is an equally high rate of mental hospital admissions among those born in Ireland and resident in Britain and the Irish in Ireland, Cochrane concludes that the Irish in Britain have no psychological problems arising from their immigrant status meriting special attention from the psychiatric services.

I hope to show that the unique psychological problems of the Irish in Ireland arise basically from their 800 years of colonial experience, that they carry the internalised experience with them when they emigrate, that in addition to the trauma of emigration per se, a fate borne stoically by Irish families since the 1840s, they are then faced with the unique pressures arising from being Irish and living in the territory of the colonial power still occupying part of their country and for the past 19 years waging a colonial war against their people in the occupied six counties. The experience can best be described as living in the belly of the beast.

Cochrane fails to offer a context in which the psychological problems of the Irish in Britain could be understood because he leaves out of account the crucial dimension of the historical processes experienced by the Irish people which have given rise to the unique stresses involved in being Irish in Britain and have shaped their responses and ways of coping. The Irish share the experience of colonisation by Britain with the other large ethnic minorities, the Afro-Caribbeans and the Asians, along with the pressure to emigrate due to colonial exploitation. They also share the experience of recruitment as cheap labour by the colonial power but colonisation left the fabric of society on the Indian sub-continent intact and retention of the native languages preserved the continuity of the native culture. Caribbeans share with the Irish identity conflicts, in their case due to total loss of their African roots as a result of slavery.

Irish emigrants are unique in having the longest experience of colonisation and enforced emigration. Being the only white colony they are cut off from the support of the other colonial minorities the majority of whom see racism as arising from skin colour, obscuring the need of the colonial power to disseminate negative racial stereotypes to justify colonisation. Since the Norman invasion in the twelfth century, approved by a British pope, Ireland has been subjected to intense economic exploitation and, since the Elizabethan period, has been reduced to subsistence economy geared to supplying food to Britain. Up until this the English had succeeded in establishing hegemony only over an area surrounding Dublin and the Norman invaders had been largely assimilated into Irish society.

The Elizabethan era saw an intensification of military repression together with plantation of the most fertile land by the colonial armies and intensive efforts to replace the ancient Gaelic culture with alien value systems. Together with the introduction of the Reformation the seventeenth century saw the plantation of Ulster with thousands of Scottish Presbyterians, the ancestors of present day unionists and, under Cromwell, the first attempt at genocide by massacre of the entire populations of towns. The Irish were driven to the mountainous areas of the western sea-board from west Cork to Donegal.

The defeated Irish educated elite had fled to the continent of Europe and the few who remained joined the Anglo-Irish protestant ascendancy. The land of Ireland outside of east Ulster was vested in English landlords, many of whom lived in England, letting plots of a few acres to Irish farmers at impossibly high rents and the farmers were evicted when they were unable to pay the rents. A system of primo-geniture was introduced which later

forced the landless younger members of families to emigrate. Penal laws in operation during the entire eighteenth century made it a criminal offence for the Irish to own property. The only education available was in illegal hedge schools. Very few succeeded in obtaining higher education in the Irish ecclesiastical colleges in Paris or Rome.

Catholics (for 'catholics' read 'Irish') could not enter professions or hold even a minor clerical position and had no vote. Parliament in Dublin which was ended by the Act of Union in 1800 was a colonial Parliament composed entirely of the Anglo-Irish, some of whom were beginning to demand catholic emancipation. Under the penal laws catholic religious observances were illegal and priests were persecuted. They were sheltered by the people who, in turn, having no future to look forward to were comforted by promises of happiness in the hereafter.

The priests took the place of the departed leaders and laid the foundations of the power of the church in Ireland. In 1829 catholic emancipation was granted and the British government subsidised the establishment of the catholic ecclesiastical college at Maynooth which was influenced by puritanical French Jesuits who trained Irish priests to enforce sexual taboos. Succeeding generations saw the local priest hunting courting couples armed with a blackthorn stick, the suppression of house dances and 'patterns' (open air dancing) and the segregation of the sexes in church halls, restricting social life to exclusively male drinking in pubs.

The catholic hierarchy, now the client of the colonial power, worked to reconcile the people to being happy British subjects and helped to destroy the Irish language which would have preserved the continuity of Irish identity and culture. In the 1840s the national schools (primary) were set up with religious managers in which children were beaten for speaking their native language and religious services were conducted in English.

The 1840s saw the second incidence of genocide, this time by famine deliberately brought about by the imperial government by forcing the export of corn when the potatoes were attacked by blight. This led to the first wave of mass emigration to America in coffin ships and to a lesser extent to Britain, then in the process of industrial revolution. Succeeding waves of emigration have siphoned off the most deprived elements in Ireland who, if they had stayed, could have fought for the development of Irish resources to provide employment and services for all of the people.

Dr. Máire O'Shea

To be continued in the next issue.



Irish women

One of the things that seemed really important to me when we were setting up *An Pobal Éirithe* and sorting out the form it should take and the things that it should include was that women should always have a high profile. Apart from getting articles by more women writers this also means having more articles about women.

So I decided that I'd try and write an article about women for each issue. For this issue I thought I'd write an article about the Price sisters. More and more women are being written about now but republican women still seem to get very little visibility even when they've been as 'notorious' as Dolours and Marian Price once were.

So I started doing some research—or, at least, I tried to start. First of all I combed my own fairly good collection of books on Irish history. Nothing. Plenty on the men—nothing on the women. Friends searched their bookshelves and came up with the same result. Bookshops specialising in books from and about Ireland yielded nothing. Going through the index of Tim Pat Coogan's new book *Disillusioned Decades*, I was delighted to find an entry reading 'Price sisters'. Turning excitedly to page 219, I read with disgust the meagre reference "Outside he (Gerry Adams) was met by one of the Price sisters and taken to a house in Andersonstown"! No disrespect indeed to Gerry Adams but it was a bit disheartening to realise that the only bit of information that I could find about the sisters is where one of them—unnamed—is assisting a man!

Finally, a friend uncovered the book *Irish*

Voices from English Jails and lent it to me. The book quotes from letters written by Dolours and Marian Price while they were on hungerstrike in Brixton jail. The letters give a moving and enraging account of the force feeding which they endured for 166 days, their concern for their family and each other and their amazing resilience and strength. The book gives no information on the acts for which they were imprisoned, their trial or their sentences. More importantly, it gives no explanation of the factors which made two ordinary young (Marian celebrates her twentieth birthday in one of the letters) women resist all the conditioning to which women are subjected, turn their backs on all the things on which women of that age are expected to spend their time and money and take up arms against the occupiers of their country.

It cannot be easy for young men to risk their safety, their families, their peace of mind and, ultimately, their lives in such a struggle—and men are socialised, at least sub-consciously, to expect to have to fight. How much more difficult then must it be for women who not only have to take all the same risks but have also to swim against the tide of traditional female conditioning?

The supporting role played by women in the history of the republican movement is becoming better known. But the direct involvement of women in military action is also an important aspect of the history of Irish women. Yet, apart from the romantic legends surrounding Constance Markievicz, such women are virtually unknown. The

republican roll of honour, listing all *Laochra na Poblachta* ('Soldiers of the Republic') who have died since 1969, includes the names of eleven women. How many people could name one of them? How many songs have been written about them? (The only song that springs to my mind is 'Set them free'—the one that first gave me the idea of writing about the Price sisters. And, stirring though that song is, it ends with the line "Irishmen will set them free"!)

Amongst the hundreds of men, indeed, the women are still sufficiently scarce, I should have thought, to warrant additional attention for that very scarcity value. Apparently not. Is it possible, perhaps, that the Irish community doesn't like to be reminded of its women doing such unfeminine things as fighting for the freedom of their people? Is the traditional image of the Irishwoman (which isn't so different from that of women of any other nation) still so strong?

Perhaps I'm wrong. Perhaps I'm looking in the wrong books, the wrong bookshops, talking to the wrong friends. Somehow I don't think so. Perhaps I'm going to have to find the time to research thousands of copies of newspaper archives. But I'd love to be overwhelmed by better-informed readers inundating me with the information I've missed!

Seriously, the recording of the activities of Irish women is an important part of the history of our people. If people do have information about the part played by women in the war in the six counties, or can tell me where I can find it, I'd really appreciate it.

Virginia Moyles

Seisear Birmingham agus an Bhreatain

I nDIAIDH na n-imeachtaí udaí mí Eanáir—Stalker agus an Chonstáblacht, Seisear Birmingham agus eile—chuala mé go leor leor daoine ag cur in iúl don timpeallacht go raibh íonadh orthu. Nach raibh Amnesty Idirnáisiúnta lonnaithe go príomhá i Londain? Nach raibh an Bhreatain ina ball de na Náisiúin Aontaithe? Nach raibh clú agus cáil ar fud an domhain ar 'British justice'?

Daoine iad sin, is dóigh liom, a bhí aineo-lach go maith, mar tharla a leithéidí arís agus arís agus arís eile fós i stair Shasana agus i stair na hÉireann. Is dual don, stát Breatanach a bheith chomh cothrom agus chomhdona lena chuid namhaidí go léir, bíodh siad sa mbaile nó lasmuigh den Pháil. Níor ghá dul níos faide siar ná stailc na mianadóirí, b'fhéidir, le sin a thuiscint. Ach níor mhiste eolas éigin a fháil faoi stair na 'Levellers' agus faoinar tharla i Monmouthshire tar éis an éirí amach, faoin mBreitheamh Jeffares (agus ní áirím an marú agus eile i ndiaigh cath Chúil Odain!).

Sealgair agus gabha focal mise agus le fada an lá. Scaití agus mé ar thóir fhocail tagaim ar eolas bunaidh éigin, solas a lasann

an stair dom agus a chuidíonn liom an rud dorcha udaí a thuiscint nib fhéarr.

An lá faoi dheireadh, agus mé ag iarraidh teacht ar mhíniú iarmhíre i bhfocal a cheapas a bheith ina fhriotal Ind-Eorpach, thángas ar fhiricí a shoilsiú na himeachtaí a luaigh mé cheana, sa chaoi gur féidir leis an amadán féin iad a thuiscint (más maith leis; ach tá go leor ann atá eaglach i gcónaí roimh an fhírinne).

Leabhar a scríobh Bruce Lincoln, an Meiriceánach, faoin gcéad táin bhó (*Priests, Warriors and the First Cattle Raid*) a mhíniú cúrsaí dom. An miotas a bhaineann leis an táin úd a ba chúis lem chuardach agus Táin Bó Cuailgne chun tosaigh im aigne.

In aicmí a bhí an dream Ind-Eorpach roinnte go daingean ón gcéad lá, nuair a d'ionsaigh siad Eoraip. Trí aicmí a bhí i gceist: Rí agus sagairt; trodairí (*equites*, mar a bhí sé ag César); agus an choismhuintir.

On tús, bhí sé de nós ag na sluaite Ind-Eorpacha seo ionsaí fióchmhar a dhéanamh ar an bpobal bunaidh agus a gcuid eallach a ghoíid uatha. Dualgas a bhí sa ngadaíocht mar bhí miotas ag na hInd-Eorpaigh gur leo na ba

dó dhúchas; gur orthu a bhronn Dia iad; agus trí ghadáíocht a fuair an dream réamh-Ind-Eorpach (na *dásat*) na heallaigh sin.

Taobh thiar den impiúilachas, trí ghné amháin nó eile, atá an dá rud sin: an miotas, a thugann leithscéal morálta don impiúilach cogadh a chur ar an dream atá lag; agus an aicmeachas, choinníonn smacht ar a phobal féin, agus a mhúnláíonn an pobal gafa, tar éis don impiúilachas iad a chur faoi chois. Is dual do gach coilín-teacht a bheith ina scathán, go pointe áirithe, den Ghadaí Mór, go háirithe trí aicmeachas.

Uaireanta, léann muid tuairimí náisiúntóirí Éireannacha faoin seansaol in Éirinn roimh theacht na Normannach agus a bhí gan locht, dar leo siúd sa chrannóg. Ach ní fíor dóibh.

Tá sé soiléir go maith don té a bhfuil eolas aige ar litríocht na Gaeilge gur cultúr fíor Ind-Eorpach a bhíodh in Éirinn roimh theacht na Normannach. Cruthaíonn *Pairlimint Clainne Thomáis* gur lean na smaointí aicmeacha de bheith beo fós in aigne na nGael chomh deireannach sin leis an 17ú gcéad i stair na tíre.

Deasún Breatnach

The Case for Video

By any standards there is a conspiracy of silence surrounding the Irish in Britain. Academically, we are hardly deemed worthy of study beyond the obligatory mention in footnotes on migratory patterns in the eighteenth century. Jackson's outdated history has long been out of print. Our access to the media, beyond our own commercial papers, is heavily curtailed. We are occasionally reported on, analysed and commented on; we are denied the right to comment ourselves.

Since the introduction of the Prevention of Terrorism Act the letters pages of the 'quality papers' have been closed to anything that deviates from the prevalent view of how we should be. That the PTA itself is hardly an issue is witnessed by the fact that it came to the notice of *The Guardian's* Hugo Young only recently and then only because of the plight of a fellow journalist. What of the thousands who have suffered under its provisions since its introduction?

On television we fare little better. In the sixties the BBC saw fit to ban Phillip Donnellan's documentary *The Irishman* which, if shown, could have provided the basis for much future development. Briefly, Channel Four held out some hope of change. However, since the Irish Video Project's contribution in the early days they, too, have failed to deliver. Terry Wogan or Frank Delaney are hardly typical of the Irish in Britain. Where is the Irish *Ebony*? The Irish *Bandung*?

This 'conspiracy of silence' promotes the view that, Britain, somehow a great amorphous society, easily absorbed the Irish without conflict. Success, large or limited, is almost inevitably born out of compromise—often through denial. Survival has meant constant struggle. Those of us who sleep rough or lie ill in British hospitals did not come here to do so. A great many of them

came to work in the fifties and sixties or even earlier. The nature of their current lifestyle has often been created in the migratory roadgangs who built the motorways, power-stations and, indeed, the towns of this country. That must be recognised as must the fact that our vaunted alcohol problem owes a great deal to bad housing. When you work by day and sleep four to a room at night a pub can often seem the only place of companionship. Yet there is no recognition of the roots of these problems much less of those who suffer from them.

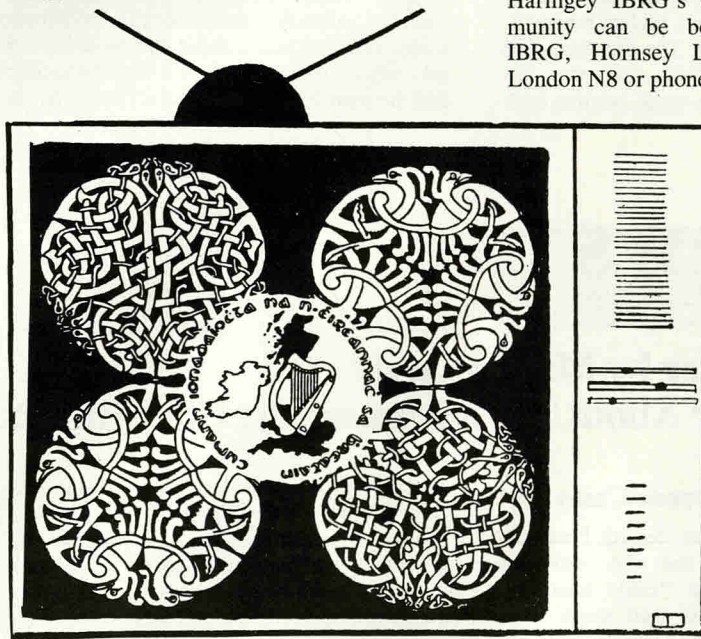
The people we interviewed in our video refused to be written into history's margins in this fashion. They want their struggle to be recognised. Some, like Kath Gillespie, were in the process of handing on their parents' struggle to their children. Their tales were

often harrowing, always illuminating. They demand to be told and retold.

We may never know how our Gaelic speaking ancestors who came to this country with no knowledge of English were treated. What we must do is preserve what we have before it slips away from us completely. Video and the new technology can be as much our weapons as anybody's in this fight to preserve our history because the nurses who trudged the hospital wards of this country and the men who bent their backs on its roads were making history as surely as any politician—their own personal history and the history of Britain and Ireland.

**Janice McKnight,
Haringey IBRG Video Project.**

Haringey IBRG's video on the Irish community can be borrowed from Haringey IBRG, Hornsey Library, Haringey Park, London N8 or phone 01-348 3354



Education – a way forward

IBRG's concern about the failure of the education system to meet the needs of the Irish community led to the establishment of the conference which now takes place annually at Soar Valley. As with all such ventures, we wish the Soar Valley conference every success in those areas which will lead to the advancement of all Irish people.

However, the task of dealing with the entrenched anti-Irish imperialism of much of British first and second level state education remains and we must address ourselves to that struggle. We need to reach children before they go into secondary and tertiary education as, by this time, they will already have been given much distorted information which may well prejudice their views of themselves and others. This is a fight which is likely to be much harder to win than that of introducing Irish studies at third level.

So what should be our way forward? Not, I believe, treading only the path of the confer-

ence pattern of platform guest speakers and large audiences, no matter how photogenic such conferences may be.

Conferences are useful in as far as they spread accurate information and encourage debate. Indeed, IBRG is holding a conference on community aspects of education on 23rd April 1988. However, it is important to remember that education is not the prerogative of professionals and we need to find practical ways of ensuring that the educational needs of the Irish community are met. What is taught is the business of us all. How it may most effectively be taught is the task of the professionals. In IBRG we are bringing together the professional educator and the amateur (in the original and best sense of that word) to produce teaching packs, for use in schools.

To this end it is proposed that branches be asked, having attended the conference, to discuss the necessary elements of a satis-

factory curriculum for the teaching of primary school pupils to overcome the damage currently done to the self image of Irish children and the misinformation and lack of information on Ireland given to all children in British schools.

The recommendations of branches will be collated into a list of topics to be included in the course along with suggested sources.

Representatives from branches will then meet to undertake the task of producing the first draft of a teaching pack. IBRG is well blessed with professional teachers and graphic and layout artists and their advice and help will be essential. This draft will then be polished to the point where it is ready for publication and will be put to An Árd Choiste for acceptance. Having accepted it, An Árd Choiste will then undertake the task of finding means of production and distribution.

Caitlín Wright, Bolton IBRG

The Irish in Manchester History Group

The Irish in Manchester History Group was formed in 1986. The purpose of the Group is to bring together all those with an interest in the history of Irish people in Manchester. The contribution of Irish people in Manchester and Lancashire generally has been profound. It can be found in the political and religious spheres, in music, welfare, county organisations, in drama and literature and in the trade union movement. Yet, much research remains to be done. No systematic attempt has been made to compile a permanent record of the Irish in Manchester.

The broad objectives of the group on its inception were, therefore, the creation of an archive of original historical material, the promotion and encouragement of research and the holding of regular meetings and talks. The work of the Group has so far, however, concentrated on research. The emphasis has been mainly on the 1840s and this has produced considerable material on the Irish

influence in municipal affairs through such men as Daniel McCabe and Daniel Boyle. Material has also been discovered on the Stockport riots of 1851 and in time it is hoped to consider the impact of the immigration of the inter-war and post-war years.

The Group hope that, with the growth of research, it can institute its other objectives of talks and meetings more regularly. Those involved in the research have been heartened by interest shown in a seriously neglected area. Obviously the potential is great and the Group would welcome further members in order that it can extend its activities directly to the Irish community via talks and appeals for photographs, newspapers, letters, manuscripts, music and sports programmes, society minutes, membership cards plus direct reminiscences about the building site, the office, the hospital, the accommodation and the manifold problems of acclimatisation.

Membership is open to all and the Group operates in a spirit of friendly teamwork which also permits members to pursue their particular interests as a contribution to the work of the Group as a whole. In due course they hope that the publication of some of their research will stimulate further interest in this important area. As time passes the difficulties in obtaining first hand accounts obviously increases. They would clearly welcome all support in the recording of these memories.

The Group have been fortunate in their first year in receiving some local authority assistance in their research. This cannot be taken for granted in the future. For this reason, the more help they can enlist, the more likely is the prospect of the work continuing. If you can help in any way you can contact the Group through **Michael Herbert**, 218 Maine Road, Moss Side, Manchester M14 7WQ.

Reviews

Over the Water by Maude Casey

Did You Hear About The Irishman? by Christine Reid

Over the Water by Maude Casey

Most of those who were reared here but whose parents are Irish and who made the yearly pilgrimage on the "cattle boat" to Ireland each summer will find much with which to identify in Maude Casey's *Over the Water*.

This is her first book. She herself was born and reared in Britain of Irish parents and it's a fair assumption that the book is at least somewhat autobiographical. The book is the story of a teenage Irish girl going to school in Britain and of her relations with her schoolmates and her family. Self-respect and shame, pride and embarrassment fight each other in a war across the girl's mind.

The book is also the story of a holiday in Ireland and how the girl relates to her grandparents, cousins, uncles and aunts as well as to the farm animals, the cycles of nature and farmwork and how, in the course of it all, her family relationships undergo profound changes.

This work will, I suspect, become something of a social document in a genre where there is, alas, too little competition. But there is much more to the book than that—Maude Casey's wonderful eye for detail combines with a lyrical beauty in description and does not clash with down-to-earth accounts of an uncle "shaking shit from his boot", a horse defecating and other animals pissing. Nature is here in all its delicacy and dirt.

People and not stereotypes populate Casey's book and both women and men are shown in their strengths and weaknesses, ugliness and beauty. Nor does Casey shirk politics as, for example, in her description of emigrants cursing the forces that shape their fate or the grandmother's account of a Black-and-Tan raid on the farm.

For me the book was something of an emotional experience and yet I'm glad I read it. It is said that very rarely can a writer produce more than one outstanding piece of work; it will be interesting to see if Maude Casey can, in years to come, match the quality of what she has done here.

Over the Water, Maude Casey, Livewire 1987, £2.95.

Did You Hear About The Irishman?

Christine Reid's play *Did You Hear About The Irishman?* was recently part-read and part-acted at the City and Tower Hamlets Teachers' Centre, during a cultural programme to launch "A month of Irish History and Culture" at the same venue.

Set in the six counties, the play centres on two families who have members incarcerated in the 'Kesh' ('Maze'), one being loyalist and the other being nationalist. The families are, however, related and one of the sons of the nationalist family is going out with a young protestant woman, the niece of a well-known unionist politician.

The play is quite well crafted and has some funny lines in places but, although "the common enemy" is mentioned once and a British army raid is recounted on another occasion, the main emphasis all the time is on the notion believed by most British people, that 'the Irish are fighting amongst themselves over religion and the poor soldiers are there to keep the two sides apart'.

Another aspect of dubious value was the device of having an actor playing the role of a northern British comedian who kept bombarding the audience with anti-Irish 'humour'. It is very difficult to handle such devices properly without having the reverse effect to that intended and Ms Reid might have been well advised to employ a direct antagonist to the comedian rather than rely on the body of the play to do so with its aforementioned serious weaknesses.

After the play Ms Reid invited questions and comments and I and others made observations about the distortion of the situation in the six counties. Reactions from the playwright and the cast varied from suggesting that I wanted to run the protestants out of 'Ulster' to dishonest assertions that the play was "above politics" (while at the same time claiming that it would enhance the knowledge of British members of the audience on events in Ireland!).

Did You Hear About The Irishman? by Christine Reid.

D. Breatnach

Holiday brochure

issued by Sellafield's Tourist Board

(The Irish Government have recently protested to Britain about the dangers of Sellafield and the proposed new developments at Trawsfynydd. A case may be taken to the European Parliament.)

When planning your holiday
—an escape to bliss—
There's a place you just can't
afford to miss
It's more fantastic than any fable,
You really must go if you're able.

On the pavement in Malaga, eggs can be
fried—
but not at night say those who've tried;
But by night or day it's our proud boast:
our beach will cook your Sunday roast.

Midnight bathing? The cold's no trouble
(though the sands have a tendency to bubble);
And if you're impressed by the Northern
Lights,
just watch this beach glow at nights!

At Windscale or Sellafield
—what's in a name?—
Names can change,
but radiation's the same.
Sun makes the beaches glow so bright—
but not as much as they glow by night!

You can stay indoors if you like
—no need to swim, bathe or hike—
You'll get a tan to show friends and kin,
even all over—outside and in!
Windscale Rock stick is good to eat
and better souvenir you'll never meet;
Take some home and in twilight's gloom
just watch it light up your whole room!
Indeed we use it here at nights—
it saves so much on our street lights;
It's cheaper than electricity, gas or coal
(though it's been known to melt lamp-poles).

If you're hungry you can make a halt
(bring your vinegar, chips and salt),
Cast your line and wait at the ready,
you'll soon catch your fish—fried already!
But watch out for seagulls; they leave your
bait,
instead they come to steal lead weights.
They fight over each one with such a racket—
each bird wants its very own lead jacket!

File 1985.

Obituary

Bolton branch mourns the death of one of its much valued members of the Irish community in Bolton, Mrs Margaret Spencer, a descendent of Warren Point, Co. Down.

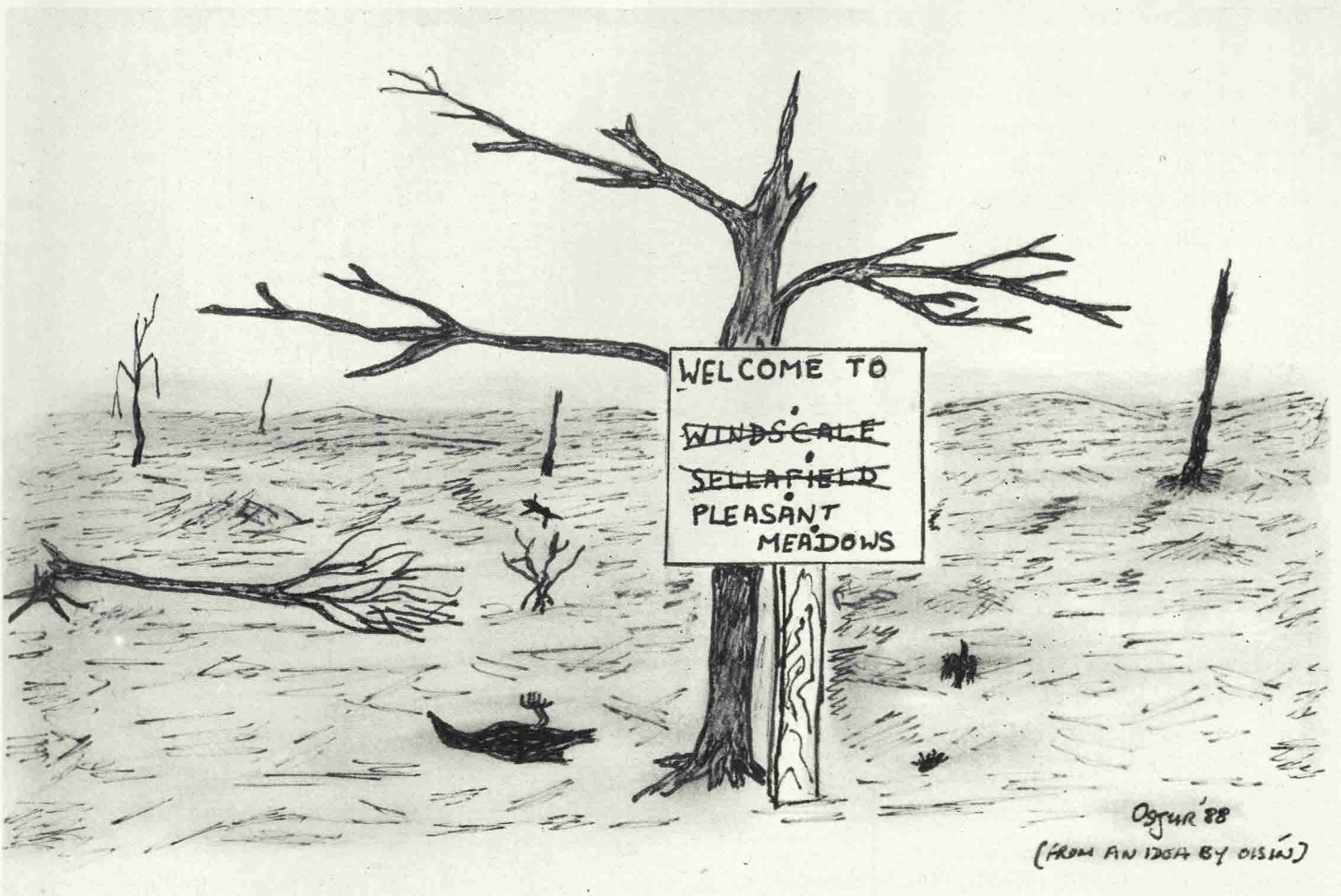
Her family had over a hundred years of connection with Bolton and, in the early days of the Labour movement, they ran the Irish Labour Club in town.

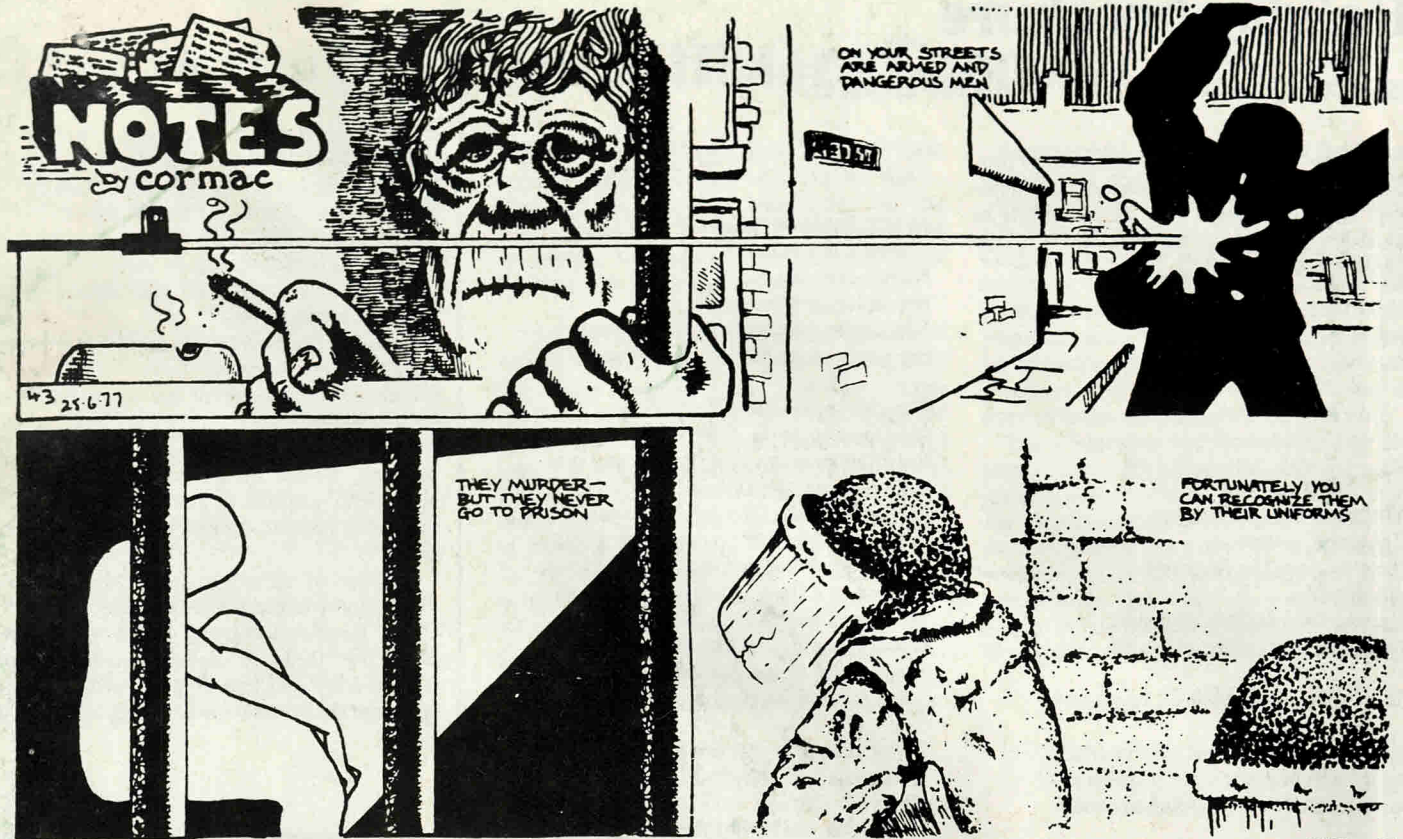
After a relatively short illness, Mrs Spencer passed away, taking with her a wealth of knowledge of the history of the Irish in Bolton.

She was the much loved mother of Noel Spencer, Rúnaí of Bolton IBRG, who is himself an inspiration and first-class organiser in the Labour stronghold of Bolton South East.

A lover of all things Irish, Mrs Spencer died at home in great care and comfort.

Our deepest sympathy to all the family from the Irish in Britain Representation Group. May she rest in peace with God as she lived in peace with her many friends on earth.





Join us!

Join IBRG and/or subscribe to An Pobal Éirithe

IBRG has branches throughout London and in Birmingham, Bolton, Bristol, Brighton, Coventry, Leeds, Manchester, North East Lancs. If you would like to join (or start!) a branch please fill in the form below and return to An Pobal Éirithe, 52 Victoria Park Road, London E9 7NB.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION: FEE £2.00 (£1.00 unwaged)

I would like to join IBRG.

NAME:

ADDRESS:

If you would like to subscribe to An Pobal Éirithe please fill in the form below and return it to the above address:

SUBSCRIPTION APPLICATION: Individuals £2.00 Organisations £10.00

Plus postage £1.30

I would like to subscribe to An Pobal Éirithe.

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Please make cheques payable to **An Pobal Éirithe**