an pobal éirithe

(The Risen People)

1st issue!

Birmingham Six/Guildford Four

Interview with Gerry Adams

Anti-Irish racism analysed

The magazine of the Irish in Britain Representation Group 40p

Céad mile Fáilte

to the first issue of *An Pobal Eirithe* (the Risen People), the new magazine of the Irish in Britain Representation Group. The magazine, which will be produced, initially, at least, on a quarterly basis, is intended to reflect the pride of Irish people in Britain in their heritage, their culture and their identity. It will also, of course, cover the work of the IBRG!

This first issue seems a good opportunity to inform our readers of the magazine's editorial aims and policy.

The aim of *An Pobal Eirithe* is to promote the objectives of the Irish in Britain Representation Group as follows:

1. To communicate to Irish people in Britain

- to educate members and keep them informed
- to reach the Irish community and raise consciousness of Irish issues
- to promote Irish culture and foster a positive sense of identity
- to ensure that Irish youth has access to Irish culture

2. To promote the rights of Irish women and men in Britain, to reflect the contribution of the Irish community to British life and to demand full representation at national and local level.

- to campaign for equal rights in employment, health, housing and social services.
- to challenge anti-Irish racism and discrimination
- to campaign against the Prevention of Terrorism Act
- to campaign for Irish rights in education
- to reflect the lives of Irish women in Britain and Ireland
- to campaign for fair access to radio stations and to Channel 4 TV
- to campaign for the compilation of accurate statistics on the Irish community
- to campaign on Travellers' issues
- to campaign on behalf of Irish prisoners in Britain
- to reflect and promote Irish culture, language, literature and arts
- to campaign on issues of travel between Britain and Ireland

3. To promote the cause of self determination for Ireland and the Irish people

- to challenge British censorship and routine media distortion of Irish affairs and the conflict in Ireland
- to highlight campaigns on issues such as plastic bullets
- to highlight and comment on current affairs in the 26 counties.

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

Equal Opportunities Policy

The editorial board 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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Introduction to IBRG

For those readers who are, perhaps, unfamiliar with IBRG, it seems a good idea to tell you a bit about the organisation and its activities.

The IBRG was formed in 1981 to represent the interests of the Irish in Britain in social, cultural and political matters. Our foremost concern is the representation of the Irish community in Britain but IBRG is also concerned about events in Ireland.

IBRG works at both local branch level and at Ard Choiste (executive committee) level on a wide range of issues of interest to Irish people. Many of these issues are described in detail elsewhere in this magazine but, to give an overview of the activities of IBRG, a few are summarised here.

A very successful welfare conference was held in Brixton in July. Attended by more than 100 people, the conference explored a wide range of welfare issues including the needs of women, young offenders, the elderly and prisoners. See the article on page 9.

A very active Mental Health Forum organised by IBRG for mental health professionals and lay people interested in the subject has been meeting since the IBRG Mental Health Conference in Camden in January.

A conference on the repatriation of Irish prisoners—both political and non-political—was held recently in Haringey. It was too recent for a full report in this issue so look out for it in the next issue!

The campaign against the Prevention of Terrorism Act is another high priority for IBRG. Last February saw a lobby in the House of Commons organised by IBRG. Lobbying of MPs, councillors and TDs is a continuing activity. IBRG has recently submitted its views on the PTA both in writing and at a meeting with Viscount Colville who is reviewing the Act.

Justice for the Birmingham Six, Guildford Four, Maguire Seven and Judith Ward is an issue on which IBRG has been working for a number of years. It is a battle which is still far from won and much work still needs to be done. See page 17 for article on the Guildford Four.

IBRG also maintains a constant watch for anti-Irish racism in the media and elsewhere and has achieved a number of successes despite the defensiveness of the Press and the toothlessness of the Press Council.

IBRG is also active in the fields of education. IBRG's research into the educational needs of Irish children has enabled pressure to be put on councillors responsible for the provision of education.

Members of IBRG take part in the Troops Out Movement delegation to Belfast for the anti-internment march each August. IBRG is very concerned to spread accurate information about the war in the six counties and the oppression of nationalists there.

IBRG also considers the preservation, development and celebration of Irish culture to be of great importance. Socials, music sessions, ceilithe etc play a large part in IBRG's programme. Watch out for a major ceili in London next March!

Will justice finally be done?

The case of the Birmingham Six

Everyone who has taken the time to look with care and an open mind at the evidence is convinced that the Birmingham Six are innocent. Chris Mullin's 'story of how six innocent Irishmen were convicted of the biggest mass murder in British history' shows that they were convicted on the basis of confessions which were beaten out of them and forensic evidence which has since been discredited. It is not intended to go into the details of the case here, but rather to look at the current situation as the case goes to the Court of Appeal. (Those who do want details are referred to Chris Mullin's book, *Error of Judgment*.)

The Home Secretary, after many months of intense pressure finally agreed to refer the case to the Court of Appeal on 20th January, 1987.

The referral naturally raised the hopes of those who support the Birmingham Six but the battle for justice is far from won.

Another quote from Chris Mullin, speaking just after the Home Secretary's decision, sets the scene: 'The Court of Appeal contains some of the most closed minds in the land and the precedents are not encouraging'.

The fact that those involved in prosecuting and judging the case have since been promoted to the highest and most influential levels of the judiciary makes the prospect of justice seem even more remote. For such people to admit one such mistake would be hard enough; to open up the possibility that the much vaunted British legal system is subject to such abuse is asking a great deal. The fact that the legal system itself would be likely to come out of an honest and critical review much the stronger may hold little sway where such mighty personal reputations are at stake.

In reality, of course, a person's reputation is likely to be enhanced by an honest admission of having made a mistake. This rarely makes such an admission easier to make.

There is no guarantee that justice will be done in the Appeal Court in November. The attention of all who care about justice will be on that Court demanding that the truth be finally told, the legal system vindicated and the Birmingham Six free at last.

Virginia Moyles

We've come a long way since 1981!

Gearoid MacGearailt, Cathaoirleach of IBRG, profiled IBRG's achievements so far in his speech to the 1987 Ard Fheis

As many of you will no doubt remember, the IBRG was formed in November 1981 to represent the Irish communities in Britain in social, cultural, welfare and political matters.

It was formed at a time when British society had found it popular to adopt such terms as 'multi-racial', 'multi-ethnic' and 'multi-cultural'—when other communities were being encouraged to 'find their roots' and when we were being told to forget ours.

It was formed at a time when the Prevention of Terrorism Act had battered our community into a wary silence and when to be Irish was not a positive attribute in seeking a job or housing or a political career.

It was formed at a time when Irish politics were encroaching very emotionally into every household in Britain via the hunger strikes and when we as a community found ourselves struck dumb by leaders who would not or could not articulate our feelings of anger and frustration and sympathy.

And, of course, it was formed at a time when successive Irish governments felt able and justified in disowning those who had been forced to emigrate, to bestow upon them a second class status, to view them as social or cultural enthusiasts but never as political activists and never as Irish in the true sense of the word.

Leave Ireland and you leave behind your Irish citizenship, they told us. And forget it, if you happen to have been born here.

In many ways it is difficult, in comparing our present situation with that of 1981, to recall how we felt, how we acted and how we expressed our identity in those difficult days.

We have achieved much in a short space of time and it is hard to believe that we have only been around for a little over five years and that our organisation is still very new.

And it is important to remember that our achievements are not just measured in terms of conferences, funded projects, press releases, delegations and the like.

It is also measured in terms of our influence on British and Irish society. The fact that Irish people no longer feel intimidated by the PTA. The fact that there is a new air of confidence among our community.

If we look back on some of the more politically sensitive issues which we took on board at our birth, (the campaign for the Guildford 4, the campaign for the Birmingham 6, the campaign against the PTA, anti-racism, Equal Opportunities, grant-aid etc) we see that we often stood alone. We were subjected to intimidation by the British authorities, scepticism and suspicion by the Irish authorities and ridicule and resentment by the traditional Irish organisations.

But the ballgame is somewhat different today.

Now there are active campaigns in support of the Guildford 4 and the Birmingham 6 and those campaigns receive the support of MPs, TDs and organisations and individuals who previously would have had to be dragged screaming and kicking to a meeting around these issues.

Now it is popular to call for the repeal of the PTA.

Now Equal Opportunities and anti-racism from an Irish perspective are increasingly acceptable and careers are being made around the subjects.

And, as an organisation, it is important that we welcome this growth of popular interest in such topics. We are the leaders of our community and we are not frightened to give that lead.

And our influence is extensive and should not be under-estimated either by us or by others. We lead, others follow.

But it is important to remember that the mentality which attempted to stifle our birth and to leave our ideas and our enthusiasm still-born is very much alive today among certain sections of our community, among certain sections of British society and among certain sections of the Irish establishment.

The aims and objectives of our ballgame may well still be the same as when we were formed in 1981 but the rules of the game and the tactics have definitely changed. And it is important that WE decide those rules and tactics.

Our organisation and our structure have changed considerably since we were first formed and, because of that ability to adapt and change we should never become irrelevant or out of contact with our community.

We have recognised that the priorities of our community change rapidly and we have developed the ability to change our priorities similarly—all the time keeping our eyes firmly fixed on our long term objectives. To have Irish communities in Britain free from oppression and free from discrimination and participating as equals in a multi-cultural society.

And we have recognised that our communities no longer want to hear empty promises or hollow words—either from us or from others. They want action and we are delivering that action.

The last twelve months have seen us delivering in every aspect of our activities. We have developed the ability to be a community organisation and a pressure group at one and the same time.

In social and cultural activities our branches have been to the forefront. Throughout Britain there are language and dance classes set up by the IBRG. In Bolton and North East Lancs our communities have seen festivals prompted or organised by IBRG while in Leeds the first ever exhibition on the history of the Irish in that city was seen in the libraries. All thanks and credit to those branches.

And if I mentioned all the socials and ceilithe that have been run by branches throughout the organisation during this year I would be here until tonight. But that in no way underestimates the hard work put into organising and running those events.

In August we formulated our organisation's Education policy and Haringey IBRG published their survey into education at local schools. A survey which clearly did not receive the initial media attention it deserved.

In London we opened the debate with the ILEA and have every expectation that, before too long, Inner London schools will be meeting the needs of young Irish people in the areas set out in our policy document on education.

And in Manchester our branch challenged the local authority over their use of anti-Irish racism to educate against sexism.

In September we held our second conference to update our 'Northern Ireland' policy document. We spoke out against the strip-searching of Martina Anderson and Ella O'Dwyer in Brixton prison, held a protest picket of the prison and gave practical support to the formation of the IPA.

We were the first to condemn the Anglo-Irish accord as a worthless document intended to strengthen security co-operation between Britain and the 26 counties and, as usual, we were proved right when it failed to produce a single constructive thing.

A number of our branches participated in the very successful tour of Britain by Sinn Fein councillors and others participated in the Sheffield Bloody Sunday commemoration march which was a success in spite of the interruption of the rally by the IFM.

In May our Coventry and Birmingham branches helped form the West Midlands PTA Research and Welfare Association which has recently become a national organisation and earlier this year we organised the first of our annual lobbies against the PTA.

In January we focussed on the subject of Irish mental health when Camden volunteered to organise our very successful Mental Health Conference. It will be interesting to see what pressure our Mental Health Forum will bring to play in maintaining the impetus our conference has generated.

In February our Lewisham branch co-operated in organising and running a conference on policing the Irish community and the recommendations from that conference

should go far in encouraging local authorities to take this matter seriously.

And, of course, all the time we have been campaigning on issues as diverse as the Fair Employment Agency report into Building Society discrimination in the six counties to the high levels of nuclear discharge into the Irish Sea to demanding an Irish category in the 1991 census.

But I would be doing an injustice to summarising our activities during the year if I failed to mention our Emigration document.

For the first time ever an Irish organisation in this country not only complained to the Irish Government about the re-emergence of emigration but told them what to do about it.

In a carefully worded document we analysed the root cause of the emigration and proposed methods to alleviate the problem.

And we put that document into the hands of organisations and individuals in Ireland who would do something about it. There is little doubt that the results of the recent General Election in Ireland were dictated by the state of the Irish economy and by the high level of emigration. And there is little doubt that, with our document and our statements publicised in every provincial newspaper in Ireland, we influenced in part that result.

Never again can an Irish Government casually dismiss those who are forced to emigrate. And never again will an Irish Government casually dismiss the IBRG.

And all of the time we have been strengthening and consolidating our organisation. For the first time ever an Irish organisation in Britain with members of both genders has attempted to recognise the particular needs of Irish women and started to cater for them within that organisation—instead of forcing them to organise outside.

By setting up our Women's Sub-Committee and agreeing detailed statements of intent we have set ourselves upon an important road and we must do everything possible within the next twelve months to ensure that we deliver on those statements. Irish women must know that IBRG respects and caters for their particular needs and that Irish women will be represented at every level of the organisation.

But the time for consolidation alone has ended. Now is the time for growth and expansion as well as for consolidation.

We must find ways of supporting our organisation where we are weak, of expanding our membership in all branches and of establishing new branches in all areas of the country.

We must expand the range of our activities and ensure that the IBRG 'wind of change' blows wherever there is inequality or unfairness against our community or wherever there are opportunists exploiting our people.

We must encourage greater participation at national level of IBRG and we must ensure greater support of our sub-committees and individuals who give so much time and energy to our organisation.

And we must expand our range of contacts by finding common ground with political parties other than the Labour party—SDP, Liberal, SNP, Plaid Cymru or whatever. Our community has diverse opinions and we must reflect them.

We have achieved much in our short career but we have far more to achieve still. And I am confident that we have the talent and the ability to meet whatever challenges are ahead of us.

But, as I said earlier, our achievements are not just measured in terms of conferences, press releases and the like. IBRG is the catalyst for change in our community and that role demands a high level of commitment and responsibility from us.

It will never be enough for us to sit back and feel that we have arrived. We will never arrive for there will always be something else for us to do.

And that responsibility and that commitment must rest with each Officer of IBRG, with each branch of IBRG and with each one of you.

Because you are the Irish in Britain Representation Group.

We've always been around!

Jackie Jolley outlines the achievements of women in Irish history

Irish women have been active at all levels of Ireland's long history of anti-colonial struggle although it has only been in recent years that they have formed their own autonomous organisations. The issue of the relationship between feminist struggles and the nationalist movement still remains unsolved.

In rural areas many women became strong supporters of the Land League and in 1881 Fanny and Anna Parnell established the Central Land League of the Ladies of Ireland and when the men went to jail the women took over. Using money sent by emigrants in America they helped victims of the struggle, set up new local leaders, distributed the no-rent manifesto, built up resistance to evictions and intensified the boycott. Although the Ladies' Land League was established and initiated by radical educated women, 440 branches were quickly set up all over Ireland.

Needless to say, the hierarchy of the church frowned upon the Land League and, in particular, the Ladies' Land League. Archbishop McCabe of Dublin condemned it as "an attempt at degrading the women of Ireland" and "bringing into disrepute the modesty of their sex and the dignity of womanhood".

It was not, however, the church that brought about the downfall of the Ladies' Land League but the male leaders themselves, who dissolved it after only two years of existence because of the women's militancy.

Michael Davitt, a radical leader of the Land League, described the effects of the Ladies' Land League. "Everything in the way of defeating the ordinary law and asserting the unwritten laws of the League .... was more systematically carried out under the direction of the Ladies' executive than by its predecessor. The result was more anarchy, more illegality, more outrages, until it began to dawn on some of the official minds that imprisonment of the male leaders only rendered confusion worse for Dublin Castle and made the country infinitely more ungovernable under the sway of their women successors."

The role of women within the nationalist struggle has traditionally been viewed as a supportive one—ie supporting the men in their political and military activities —although in reality much of the 'donkey work' of organising meetings, distributing leaflets, etc was done by women.

However, in 1900 a group of women frustrated by the bar to females (operated by most nationalist groups of that time) formed Inghinidhe na hEireann, the Daughters of Erin. Although the group was relatively small and saw itself as primarily cultivating the Irish language and literature it was important in that it gave many women the experience of organising and established the first nationalist women's group in Ireland. Their first campaign was against the Boer war and the enlistment of Irishmen into the British army.

With the establishment in 1913 of the Irish Volunteers which also excluded women from membership, a sister organisation, Cumann na mBan, was set up in 1914. There was some discussion at the time about the exclusion of women not only from the Irish Volunteers but also from any decision or policy making. Francis Sheehy Skeffington, a pacifist and the editor of the suffrage paper, the *Irish Citizen*, observed: "When you have found and clearly expressed the reason why women cannot be asked to enrol in this movement, you will be close to the reactionary element in the movement itself".

Many women did not want to be excluded from the growing nationalist movement. It was felt that all women's groups should join under the same banner and in 1915 Inghinidhe na hEireann merged with Cumann na mBan. A look at some of the women who were involved in the Cumann at that time reveals some of the difficulties of women's involvement in political struggles. Most of the women were single, without the responsibility of childcare, had some independent economic status or had supportive families with a stauch republican background. It is important to remember that at this time one working woman in three was employed as a domestic servant and the long hours and heavy work left little time for meetings or political activity.

Nevertheless, Cumann na mBan played an important and active role in 1916 as despatch riders, cooks and medical attendants. The only woman to be made a staff officer was Countess Markievicz who was also a member of the Irish Citizens' Army.

After the 1916 Rising, the Cumann expanded rapidly from 100 branches in 1917 to 600 in 1918. The organisation's constitution of 1919 recognised, albeit in a romantic vision, that women had a right to equal status with men, but harkened back to the old Gaelic civilisation 'where sex was no bar to citizenship and women were free to devote to the service of their country every talent and capacity with which they were endowed, which rights were then taken from them under English rule'.

It must have been a blow when the pro-Treaty forces in the newly established Dail did not grant the vote to women under 30 and thereby did not give recognition to the loyal efforts of many young women.

The rise of the suffrage movement

This movement began in Ireland when Anna Halsam founded the Irish Suffrage Society. In its early years the movement attracted mainly professional and aristocratic women and with its single issue demand it transcended party politics. However, the political ferment of the first decade of the twentieth century and the ambivalence of many of the politicians involved in the Home Rule movement led to the formation of a more militant group, the Irish Women's Franchise League which was founded by Hannah Sheehy Skeffington—an ardent pacifist and feminist. The unity of the movement was severely questioned when Edward Carson threatened to set up a rebel unionist government if the Home Rule Bill was passed by Westminster. Many suffragettes determined to have the vote decided to campaign for it in Belfast under Carson's proposed government.

In Dublin the Irish Women's Franchise League was developing links with the labour movement under Connolly and assisted the strikers of 1913 with soup kitchens and clothes. The founding of Cumann na mBan in 1914 further deepened the split between the various suffrage groups and many women, feeling that their future lay in a Republic of Ireland, joined the nationalist movement despite their misgivings about its male orientation. Louise Gavan Duffy, a founder member of the Cumann stated "there were women on the Cumann na mBan committee who were suffragists, others of different opinions but so urgent, so important was the work of the (Irish) Volunteers, that we could not afford to divide. Everything was put aside and we were ready to do what we were told; carry messages, give first aid, make meals, in short any work....we knew there would be a rising—what time, where, how? We would know when the time was ripe and we left it to the leaders. When the time came it was, however, without my foreknowledge."

Women in the labour movement

Opportunities for women working outside the home were few. In 1841 there were over half a million textile workers. However, by 1881 this had dropped to less than 100,000 mainly because work was becoming centralised into the linen mills of Belfast where the conditions were deplorable. Although attempts had been made by women (eg Mary Galway) to unionise women in the latter part of the nineteenth century, it was not until the labour struggles of the beginning of the twentieth century that women began to take an active and independent part in the labour movement.

In 1911 Delia Larkin along with her brother Jim formed the Irish Women Workers Union which was active in both Dublin and Belfast. That same year 1,500 women laundry workers came out on strike in Belfast and won their demands.

In 1913 large numbers of women working in the textile and other industries came out on strike in protest at the lockout. After the lockout many women lost their jobs and Delia Larkin started the Women's Clothing Co-operative Society to provide jobs. James Connolly persuaded No 1 branch committee to open up a disused shop on Eden Quay beside Liberty Hall. Delia also had a formative influence on the social developments within the I.T.G.W.U.—she formed choirs, a dramatic society and helped to establish a renowned Sunday night social gathering at Liberty Hall.

As with other women active in Irish struggles, little is known or recorded about Delia's personal or political life and her departure from the I.T.G.W.U. in 1915 is shrouded in mystery.

Women in IBRG

Women's Sub-committee

In order to promote the interests of Irish women in Britain, IBRG has established a Women's Sub-committee which is open to all women members of IBRG.

Irish community organisations have not in the past addressed the specific needs and interests of women. The primary experience of women in our community has been in a supporting role and IBRG, in acknowledging this, encourages women to be involved in and active at all levels of the organisation. All political discussion and policy formulation must therefore take account of women's needs and circumstances and must incorporate a women's perspective.

IBRG recognise that it is not enough for it to say that it wants more women actively involved in the organisation without taking practical steps to enable them to do so. All major meetings are therefore provided with creches and funds are made available to pay creche workers. Every attempt is made to facilitate women's participation at every level of branch activity including babysitting/carers allowance where feasible. Where such arrangements prove impossible alternative arrangements are made to ensure the active participation of those women affected.

Due to social and economic conditions in Ireland there are more Irish women than Irish men in Britain and IBRG recognise that, while they face similar housing and employment problems, Irish women do not have access to the same social network as Irish men and there is often more pressure on them to assimilate.

IBRG supports a woman's right to choose. All branches should know about the Irish women's abortion support groups in London and Liverpool as well as the various groups in Britain and Ireland offering pre and post abortion counselling.

IBRG recognises that Travelling women face hostility from both the British and Irish communities. The IBRG will support them through the Women's sub-committee in their campaigns for proper health care and education for their children.

IBRG recognises that stripsearching is used as a form of sexual harassment against women prisoners and continues its campaign against this practice through its Women's and Prisoners' sub-committees.

IBRG recognises that Irish lesbians are a particularly disadvantaged section of the Irish community who are often forced to hide their sexual identity. Because of a lack of recognition in the wider Irish community, many have been forced to shed their Irish identity and assimilate into British society to find support in the British feminist movement. The Women's sub-committee will campaign for recognition of the existence and experience of Irish lesbians and an end to discrimination against lesbians both within the Irish community and in the wider community.

IBRG recognise that Irish women have played a prominent part in passing on culture, language and tradition to our children and the Women's Sub-committee encourages women to continue and develop this work.

The Women's Sub-committee will undertake work to re-examine the the traditional image of women throughout Irish history and to help Irish women here to discover their true historical identity. The collective impact that generations of Irish women have had in shaping our cultural identity and the sacrifices that Irish women have made to further the cause of national and social freedom over the centuries has been denied, distorted or completely ignored. IBRG wish to counter this negative and devalued image and to recount the deeds and achievements of the many ordinary women upon whose labour—both inside and outside the home—society has long depended.

IBRG recognise the special problems of second, third and fourth generation Irish women and will support them and their right to be Irish.

IBRG recognise the discrimination faced by black and other ethnic minority women and will support them in their struggle.

The Women's Sub-committee will make contact with other Irish women's organisations and other women's groups in furtherance of the above aims and of the general aims of IBRG.

IBRG Sub-committees are organised on a regional basis. The Women's Sub-committee is most active at present around the London region but it is important that women from other areas get involved. If you want to take part in the activities of the Women's Sub-committee contact your branch Runai to find out the date of the next meeting or call a meeting of IBRG women in your area. A meeting of all IBRG women in England, Scotland and Wales is being planned to follow An Ard Fheis in March 1988.

The state of Irish welfare

In July 1984 IBRG held a conference on 'an Irish dimension to British welfare'. Here **Gearoid MacGearailt** outlines the context of Irish welfare in Britain today and reports back on the conference.

Many people will be familiar with the stories of how Irish people came to this country—particularly in recent decades—and how they were faced with an almost schizophrenic approach by Britain and its people. On the one hand they were needed to undertake the rebuilding of Britain's infrastructure after the ravages of the second world war and on the other hand they were despised and ridiculed as an inferior race and, along with the other colonial peoples who were encouraged to come to Britain seeking work at that time, were afforded a second class status.

But perhaps what is missing from our history is the story of the '50s, the '60s and the '70s and any explanation of what happened to those Irish emigrants as British society apparently became more tolerant towards minority groups.

Because today, when social workers and race relations activists talk about 'ethnic minorities', many only recognise Black people in that context. When they use sections of the Race Relations Act to apparently better the lot of members of 'ethnic minorities' who are within their sphere of influence they often misrepresent that Act as though its provisions can only be used on behalf of the Black communities.

And all those Irish people who, alongside Afro-Caribbean and Asian people, faced the 'No Irish, No Blacks, No dogs' signs in the '50s appear to have been forgotten and apparently no consideration is given to the the effects that discrimination and racism must have had upon them and, as a direct result, on the Irish communities of today. We are faced with another type of schizophrenia—this time by the welfare professionals—which dictates that, while they recognise the implications and effects which such discriminatory activity must have had upon the Black communities of today, many cannot or will not take that philosophy one step further and include our people and our communities in that analysis.

And, until recent times, our communities accepted that situation and made no attempt to challenge it. Instead they attempted to cope with the problems and welfare needs which our people were displaying and it became accepted that you did not ask British institutions for help. It was either considered to be charity or else it risked ridicule or, in recent years, harassment under the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

But, of course, the problems have always been so complex and so enormous that we could never do more than support a fraction of those who needed help. Everyone else had to 'make do' as best they could.

With the formation of the IBRG in 1981 we considered this problem and accepted that, if we were to have any significant impact upon the welfare needs of our people, then we had to change that insular approach by our community, encourage people to seek assistance from statutory organisations like social services departments and, at the same time, force those statutory institutions to respond positively to approaches from our people.

The rationale behind that decision was obvious. As the largest and oldest ethnic minority group in Britain we have contributed significantly to the development of this country and its welfare state. Our people have consistently paid their taxes and their rates. In short, we are entitled to a return on our investment.

Initially our strategy was to pressurise individual councils to recognise the Irish communities in their midst and to take positive action in their support. It soon became apparent however that the numbers of such 'sympathetic' councils were likely to dramatically reduce and, simultaneously, the financial resources of those individual councils was likely to be substantially eroded. We therefore decided that we had to increase the number of people within the welfare professions who were sympathetic and responsive to Irish needs.

On July 4 of this year Lambeth IBRG organised, on behalf of the central organisation, the first of our conferences entitled 'an Irish Dimension to British Welfare'. Its purpose was to highlight specific areas of concern within our community and to gather together speakers who were expert on those areas. It was aimed primarily at the professionals in local government and related fields who provided the social services which our community so desperately needed. It was an educative conference intended to provide an alternative dimension to the concept of welfare rights and ethnic minorities.

We had a lot of difficulty in deciding which topics needed to be examined first. There are so many separate areas of concern in terms of the welfare support of our community that it would have been impossible to cover them all. In the end we decided to cover eight of them and to give participants a choice of four seminars in the morning and four in the afternoon.

The eight that we chose were a mixture of the old and the new. In the morning there was Tom Connor, a research worker at the London Strategic Policy Unit, talking about emigration to Britain and the social and material conditions of the London Irish through the years. There was the Reverend Bobby Gilmore, head of the Irish Chaplaincy in Britain, talking about Irish welfare work and the Catholic Church. There was Alison Norman, of the Centre for Policy Studies on Ageing, who discussed the problems facing elderly people in general when growing old in a second homeland. There was Mary Lennon of the Granuaile Collective, who detailed the experience of Irish women within British society and questioned whether either society did justice to the problems or achievements of Irish women.

In the afternoon there was Micheal O Riabhaigh who considered the high level of young offenders in British society and questioned whether there was an Irish dimension to social work with young offenders in British cities. There was Liam Clarke who looked in depth at the Irish experience of growing old in Britain and considered whether social services in Britain recognised the particular needs of Irish elderly. And there were Claire Keating from the Irish Prisoners Appeal and Mairin Higgins from Haringey IBRG who considered the specific needs of Irish prisoners—political and non-political.

In addition to the seminar speakers there were also three main conference speakers who concentrated on three particular areas of concern. First of all, Breifne O'Reilly, third secretary to the London Irish Embassy, addressed the topic of Irish Government welfare policy and the Irish in Britain. Then came Father Des Wilson who discussed the causes and consequences, both past and present, of emigration from Ireland. And finally John McDonnell, ex-deputy leader of the GLC, highlighted the effects of racism on the Irish who live and work in Britain.

Over 125 people attended the conference and many more placed advance orders for the conference report (which is currently being produced). They represented a wide variety of professions ranging from directors of social services to prison governors to home care organisers. And they came from all the major cities in England.

There can be little doubt that the conference was successful in achieving its aims. The topics covered were priorities in terms of the welfare of our community. The speakers were expert in their fields and delivered their speeches with authority. And the professionals came to listen. And, of course, the conference report will reinforce the success of the event.

But there were some disappointments. In typical style the professional social work magazines ignored the conference entirely or gave it minimal coverage (though they have since expressed interest in receiving a copy of the report). And only a fraction of those invited to attend actually did so.

But a start was made. And those who attended were given the word to spread out among their colleagues and friends. Our community will no longer be ignored. We will have access to the social services for which we pay our rates and taxes. And we will have an Irish dimension to British welfare.

As the Chair of the conference said in closing "See you next year!".

The Prevention of Terrorism Act 1974

and its effects on the Irish community

The Prevention of Terrorism Act was rushed through Parliament in 1974 in the midst of the wave of anti-Irish hysteria which followed the Guildford and Birmingham pub bombings. It is a piece of pre-emptive legislation unprecedented in recent British legal history in the powers which it gives to the police force and the rights which it removes from the individual.

Under the provisions of the Act a person can be arrested without evidence on the instinct of a police officer that they might be intending to commit a crime. The suspect can be held for up to seven days without being charged and without access to family, friends or legal advice. She or he can be excluded from Britain with no right of appeal to a court of law.

On an everyday basis, people are stopped and questioned at ports when travelling between Britain and Ireland. They can be arrested without warrant for extended questioning without any charge against them ever being considered.

The Act has until recent years been used almost exclusively against the Irish although it is now being used against the Libyan and Sikh communities—ie any communities whom the authorities stereotype as fostering 'terrorists'.

The establishment's justification of the Act is that these draconian and pre-emptive measures are necessary to prevent loss of life caused by activity by organisations such as the IRA. The need to prevent crimes of violence, they reason, outweighs the rights of the individual.

This argument bears little scrutiny. Under the Act, hundreds of times more innocent people are unjustly harrassed than guilty people are ever prevented from committing acts of violence. Even if the Act was preventing acts of violence, it could be strongly argued that the cost of harassment to so many innocent people was too high. The facts reveal that the PTA is not preventing acts of violence—witness the IRA activity at the Conservative party conference two years ago.

If the need to prevent acts of violence outweighed the need to safeguard the rights of innocent citizens then this concept should surely be extended. In a society in which high levels of violence are commonplace, IRA activity forms only a tiny fraction of the acts of violence which take place in Britain today. By far the greatest level of violence leading to death and injury takes place against women in their own homes. Where is the pre-emptive legislation requiring the police to arrest a man before he beats his partner?

The PTA, of course, is not designed to protect ordinary people from violence. It is designed to protect oppressive governments from the consequences of their actions, to enable them to repress any resistance to their occupation of another country.

It is used to facilitate mass surveillance of the Irish community in Britain. More than 6,000 people have been detained under the Act since it was passed and of these, less than 3% have been charged with any offence under the Act. Hundreds of thousands of people have been stopped, searched and questioned under the Act in an information gathering exercise.

The use of the PTA against the Irish community silenced us for a number of years. Afraid of receiving the treatment meted out to people such as the Birmingham Six and the Guildford Four, the Irish in Britain kept their heads down for most of the rest of the seventies. Many were afraid to go to Irish centres, Irish pubs, etc. Not until 1981 when the hungerstrike revealed the blatantly oppressive nature of the British government towards Ireland and the Irish in a fashion so dramatic that it could no longer be ignored, did the community start to fight back against this repressive legislation.

As part of IBRG's campaign for the repeal of the PTA, members of An Ard Choiste (executive committee) recently met with Viscount Colville who is currently carrying out a review of the operation of the Act. The points outlined above were put to the Viscount who acknowledged them and agreed to include them in his report but added that he did not think that the government would be persuaded to repeal the Act. The review appears to be little more than a cosmetic exercise designed to convince the rest of the world that Britain is taking care to ensure that justice is done. The Viscount was concerned that few people in the six counties other than the RUC had agreed to meet him. It would appear that they are only too aware of the superficiality of the review.

It is essential for all communities in Britain that this Act is repealed. British legislation is becoming more and more repressive in its application towards members of oppressed groups. Crowd surveillance, riot control techniques and plastic bullets are some of the other oppressive measures perfected against the Irish for use against other disadvantaged members of society such as Black and other ethnic minority groups, the miners and the strikers at Wapping.

The establishment thinks that it will silence Irish protest against the PTA by extending the operation of the Act to other communities. We object just as strongly to the possibility of other communities being equally mistreated; we demand the basic right to live in peace and freedom for all people. The PTA must be repealed.

Stripsearching must be abolished

Most women experience unease and embarrassment at undressing to be examined by a doctor whom we have visited of our own free will and who has our interests at heart.

Imagine then being forced to strip to be searched intimately by a prison warder, knowing that if you refuse or resist you will be stripped forcibly by the people who are depriving you of your freedom.

This is happening routinely to Irish women prisoners in British jails. It happens to other female and male prisoners, too, but seems to be used more frequently and more systematically against Irish republican women.

The excuse given by the prison system and the Home Office is that strip searching is necessary for security purposes, yet women will often be strip searched before and after a court visit where there is virtually no possibility of contact with the outside world and not before or after a visit by family where the possibility of passing something in or out is greater. Adequate security measures in addition to the strict security observed in all prisons can be provided by the use of electronic detecting devices such as are used at airports. The only items known to have been found on women prisoners as a result of strip searches are a bottle of perfume and a five pound note. Hardly a threat to security!

Strip searching is a gross form of sexual harassment and a number of women have said that the experience of being strip searched was like being raped. The women prisoners perceive it as a deliberate ploy to grind down their spirit of resistance. The use of strip searching by the British authorities reveals the attitude that prisoners are not entitled to human rights. This obviously permeates the treatment of prisoners throughout the whole prison system—strip searching is just the most blatantly oppressive of a whole range of dehumanising practices.

All human beings are entitled to human dignity. The loss of their freedom is a terrible ordeal for any human being to undergo. This and only this is the punishment determined by the courts and no further indignity should be inflicted on any prisoner.

Instead of accepting or ignoring the degrading treatment of women and men in British prisons, we should be insisting, in the short term, on a complete change in the prison system and the way it treats prisoners and, in the long term, on the eradication of the factors (political, economic, social and emotional) that put people in prison. Irish women will continue to go to jail as long as Britain occupies part of their country. There are many other factors which force women and men into actions which land them in prison. These things must change. In the meantime, strip searching must be abolished and women's bodies never again used as weapons against them.

Interview with Gerry Adams, MP

Part one: the relationship between the Irish in Ireland and the Irish in Britain

In May 1987 **Virginia Moyles** *asked Gerry Adams for his views on a number of questions. Here we give the first part of that interview. The next issue will include part two on the struggle in the north of Ireland*

V: How do you see the relationship between the Irish in Ireland and the Irish in Britain?

G: One of the things that I have found—and to some degree I am relying on other people's opinions and on some limited experience of my own—is that there is a new awareness among the Irish in Britain this last six or seven years. I've found on the number of trips that I've made over the last four or five years, for example the last trip, a whole awareness among people there of their culture, if you like, a coming out of the closet on Irish issues.

I found a strong affinity among many of the people that I met—an affinity between them and the prisoners' movement—in recognition of the experience, for example, of the Birmingham Six which clearly showed that perhaps any Irish person is vulnerable to British coercion.

I think as well that there is a developing situation where the Irish in Britain are starting to mobilise, perhaps slowly, perhaps it's in its early days, but starting to mobilise in their own interests in Britain. Also there is recognition that the vast majority are economic exiles. Some of these people may have gone to Britain voluntarily as people from any country go to other countries but the vast majority of Irish people in Britain were forced to go. The situation in their own country meant that they couldn't get a living and they were forced from their land, from their farms, or from their towns or cities to seek employment, to seek a quality of life which they should have been able to get in their own country.

Second generation Irish, the children of those people, while they obviously have found a niche of sorts in Britain, have a very, very, close affinity with what's happening here. The relationship, therefore, between people, not in the general sense of the Irish in Ireland but between the Irish in Ireland who are engaged in struggle and the Irish in Britain, should, I think, be a very close one —they should be able to relate to each other very easily. The other thing which is probably significant to some degree is that, in the eyes of the general British public, the sectarian divisions which happen in Ireland are blurred in England. They don't ask whether you're a catholic or a protestant; everyone's seen as Irish and, because of the racism which still exists, are in many cases treated accordingly.

If I'm correct, and I may not be, but if I'm correct in that there is a keener sense of identity, a keener sense of roots and the beginning of the development of political muscle in Britain, well, then that to a large degree, I think, could be traced back to the struggle in Ireland. The Irish earlier on were forced into a subordinate position—the middle class may have attempted to assimilate into society but working class people were treated in a racist fashion. I think that the duration of the struggle, the length of the struggle, to some degree, is responsible for what I see as the emergence of a more unashamed expression of Irishness, that we're Irish, that we live here, that we have rights and that we want those rights and that we shouldn't be pretending that we're little English men and women but we're Irish people living in Britain. So I think that the struggle here in Ireland has had a lot to do with that.

I also think that when the struggle reaches a successful conclusion here where we start to develop our economy and we start to develop our own independent strategies, this will open the way for Irish people who wish to come back to Ireland. That if they wish to come back they wouldn't necessarily be coming back to a dole queue but they could be coming back to play a part small or large in building a new freedom, in building a new society. I think that's a very important dimension. A lot of the people who emigrate, especially the recent waves of emigrants, are people with skills, are people who have been trained in the universities and other institutions and who have gone abroad because they can't get a living here. With an end to British partition in Ireland and the building of a new situation here, those people would obviously have a major role to play.

But that's fairly abstract. I think that in the immediate short term the Irish in Britain should mobilise against the PTA, should mobilise against the framing of Irish people, should mobilise behind prisoners and should mobilise on a whole range of cultural issues and social rights.

Furthermore, I think they should be mobilising in a very general sense on the question of the right of the Irish people to self determination. They don't have to be at all campaigning, even if they wanted to, in support of the IRA or Sinn Fein or the armed struggle or a socialist republic or anything else like that. Those things are, to some degree in the British context, an abstraction. The centrality of the issue at this stage in the struggle is whether or not the British parliament or government have the right to claim ownership of a part of Ireland, have the right to partition Ireland, have the right to interfere in Irish affairs.

In that context, people, Irish people especially, in Britain, working in their own communities, developing their own needs and linking them with what's happened here in Ireland and being active within their trade union movement, their political party, their women's organisation, in whatever political or social or trade union group they happen to be involved in is almost crucial, in raising the issue and in preventing the British government from keeping a paper wall around the whole situation. The British government doesn't want a debate on the issue. Grass roots opinion in Britain, if we believe opinion polls, is clearly for British withdrawal. The British government want to stifle that and Irish people can play a major role in getting the debate, the discussion started.

I think this can have a number of effects; even by virtue of becoming interested in the issue, they immediately in an intellectual way start to improve their own situation. They, as exiles do in every struggle, play a major part in building international support. The building of that support, which was described to me rather dramatically as being carried out 'in the belly of the beast', is a major role.

The work being done in the USA is, by and large, being done by Irish exiles. The work being done in Australia is, by and large, being done by Irish exiles or at least the catalysts are a group of Irish exiles. The work within the state of the colonial power should be encouraged and advanced and moved, in all the numerous small ways that it can be, around the issue of national self determination. That should be a major task for Irish people who don't owe the British government any loyalty on the question of Ireland.

Irish people in Britain may have certain responsibilities and duties they have to fulfil in Britain but, on the question of Ireland, they should be questioning parliamentary candidates as to their position on Ireland. They should be assuring themselves not just of that candidate's credentials in terms of the very necessary social and economic issues that affect working people in Britain but also saying to them 'What are you doing about the twenty year war that's going on in the north of Ireland?'

Now maybe the work that has to be done seems very mundane and very isolationist—it's a lone voice and it's writing letters to the paper or trying to get a motion passed through a branch or a constituency party but it's about all of that work coming together. It's about sowing the seeds—it doesn't just happen by a miracle because all that work, necessary mundane, boring work, has to be done and, in doing that work, not only is the struggle here being helped but also, especially if people are organising themselves (as with the IBRG or other organisations) they are also strengthening themselves. They

aren't just raising an emotional appeal, they're also saying 'We do have a wee bit of political muscle, we represent the Irish in this district and I'm not just an individual Irish person making an emotional appeal. I can deliver for you if you deliver for me.

V: What are the most effective ways you've found of reaching people?

G: Well, there aren't any short cuts. Even in the situation of Ireland today and in the north of Ireland where there is a very dramatic catalyst and so on it still comes down to hard graft. We've discovered a thousand times and reiterated a thousand times that there are no magic formulas. It took 19 years to get a commitment from the British government that Divis would be demolished. It took thousands of committee meetings and statements and pickets and so on. It was carried by one or two individuals in periods and it was carried by a minority of people in periods and at other times there were masses of people and then it dropped off. I think all struggles are like that but if you're sowing seeds all the time, even if it doesn't manifest itself in a major way, something happens and then it all comes together.

Now, for example, Loughgall happened and, lo and behold, there were thousands and thousands and thousands of people came out to express their solidarity with the IRA volunteers and with their families. Now, had they been isolated terrorists as the British would suggest you would have had a small number of extremists and their families. But you had cross-sections of the Nationalist community—old women, old men, young people, people from professional life, working farmers, a whole cross-section of people. Somewhere through the last 16 or 17 years someone's been sowing seeds. Now if you called a protest meeting tomorrow you mightn't get those people but when they needed to come out, when they needed to say to the world 'These weren't terrorists, these were people from our community and we are opposed to what happened to them', then they came out.

And similarly, in Britain, it might be very, very difficult to get projects off the ground, to get consciousness raised to the point where you have a lot of people mobilised but as the process continues and continues something will happen and you'll look round and you'll discover much, much more support than you thought. Now, if the seeding isn't done it won't happen and it can't happen without the preparatory work, without, as I've said a few times, the tedious, boring work. But if that's done, then you start to make gains.

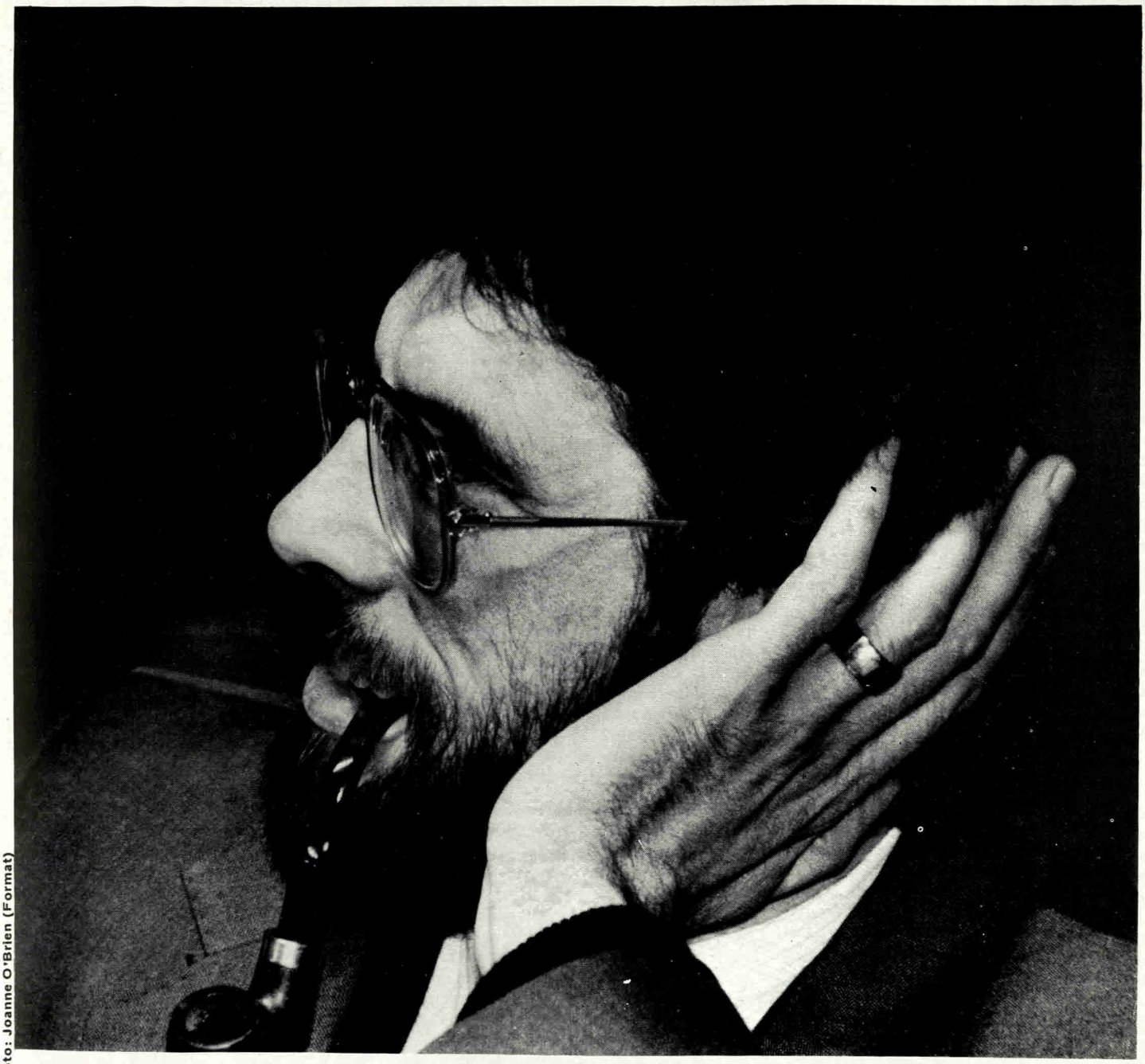


Photo: Joanne O'Brien (Format)

V: Are you including cultural activities in the seeding?
G: Oh yes. It's of absolute importance. Yes, I think the whole cultural dimension to the struggle is an integral part of the whole struggle. I think in relation to the Irish in Britain that that is obviously a very important dimension because if you don't have an awareness of your culture or your identity, well then you simply become British.

Perhaps there's nothing wrong with that if that's what you want to do but if you wish to preserve your identity and to do so on a collective basis, on a community basis, on a wider basis, then the whole consciousness raising of our traditions and of our customs and our music and dance all become very, very important and in that process of consciousness raising you can't have a fairly highly developed national consciousness on the question of Ireland without coming bang up against the question of partition. The process of doing that will create a situation where you will be open to arguments for resolving the invasion into Irish affairs of the British or you will actually become active in trying to organise opposition to British interference.

V: Are there any mistakes which you've learned to avoid and which you could warn us against?
G: Well, I think there have been mistakes and we're still making mistakes. I don't think there's any text book but I think that in the type of politics in which we're involved here we work alongside people, we work with people. We don't work for people. We may do if a person happens to be illiterate or old or infirm and, on some occasions (mostly with women where they happen to have big domestic responsibilities) we will take a greater share—but generally we have a policy of working with people, of decreasing the dependency factor, of developing the struggle, of developing people's sense of it, of helping them to create conditions where they can help themselves. I suppose the simple example is—we can't free the Irish people; only the Irish people can free the Irish people. You can't teach anyone Irish; that person has to be willing to learn Irish.

Opportunism should be avoided like the plague. You may be able to get your photograph in the paper or a statement in the paper on the basis of some short term opportunity over some issue but that's no substitute for action or hard work on the issue and bringing the issue to a conclusion. This may either be a successful conclusion in its own right or, even if the conclusion isn't successful, if, in the process of working towards it, people have moved forward and have learned from it, then progress will have been made.

I think we should avoid factionalism and, particularly in Britain, I think the Irish should avoid aligning themselves with any of the numerous micro-left parties. It isn't because they are small parties but because they take such ridiculously ultra-left positions on the question of Ireland. It's said here in fact that some of the small left parties take a more principled position on the IRA than the IRA itself does. All that should be avoided. In the context of Ireland, of the Irish war, it should be done on the basis of the right to national self-determination. People don't need to support the IRA, they don't need to support Sinn Fein, they don't need to support a Socialist Republic. If they do all those things, fair enough, but support should be won on the broadest possible basis, not on a narrow theoretically correct position.

What we in Ireland want from the people in England is for them to persuade or to pressurise their government to withdraw. People there, of course, should be involved in the mainstream as far as possible working on popular opinion and shouldn't be involved in ongoing sectarian debates about the correctness of this position as opposed to the correctness of that position. If the support can be built on the simple premise that the people in Ireland have the right to national self-determination, that the British government shouldn't be here, then that's the way it should be built.

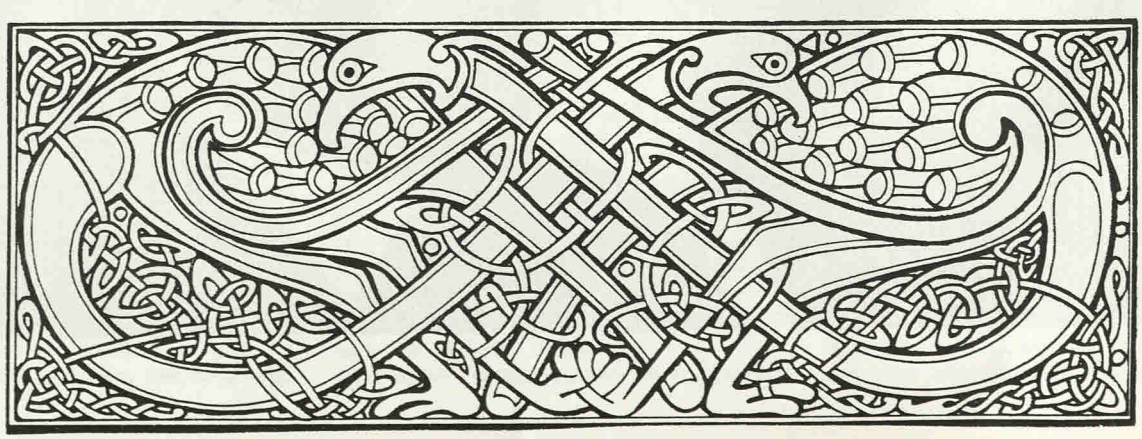
There are numerous other wee things that come into my head but the key is to be very, very sure about your objectives and to suss them all out; not to get involved in short term opportunistic type politics but to work alongside people, with people, in a principled and proper way and to avoid any sectarianism or factionalism or personality politics or any examples like this which seem to affect all human relationships, not just Irish ones.

I think the job of the Irish in Britain is to first of all try and build support within the Irish communities. I think that there are some key roles for Irish people. One is to build the defence of their own community against all that is hostile to it—and it's a matter of opinion which is the best way to proceed—but then to develop support on the whole question of Ireland.

V: Are there any particular pressure points you think we should be pushing in order to get the troops out?
G: Well, it's going to be a slow business, as I've said a few times—it isn't going to happen overnight. Obviously there's a major job to be undertaken within the broad labour movement and, regardless of what I, as an Irish republican, think about the Labour leadership, the Labour party would, I presume, be one of the parties that, hopefully, Irish people would feel some affinity with in terms of their own social status in Britain. I wouldn't be encouraging Irish people to join the Labour party in a public sense but it does appear to me to be one of the points where you can, as an ordinary member, build on support for national self determination at local constituency level. We have seen in fact that the limited amount of debate which has been aroused has in fact come from either the young people around the Labour party or from the Labour party itself.

But what other pressure points there are is a matter for people there to identify. People in Ireland can't tell people in Britain how to proceed in an ABC way. We can simply outline our objectives here in general as to the way things should proceed. Then it's up to the people there who are faced with the conditions, with your own resources, with all that's happening, to work out the best way to advance and it could be in a trades council, it could be in a cultural group, it could be in a political party, it could be in a trade union branch, it could be around the issue of plastic bullets, around the issue of discrimination in employment, around civil liberties issues, it could be around, as I've said a few times, issues which directly affect Irish people living in Britain. The choice and the decision as to which is the best is a matter for the people there.

V: Is there a danger of people spreading their energies too thinly?
G: It depends absolutely on what resources you have but I have found that a programmed approach where you actually stick with something until it comes to a conclusion is sometimes very, very effective, both in terms of learning and also of actually winning on an issue. Even if the winning doesn't mean you've won the actual issue but you've won the issue in terms of developing your ability to bring it right through to a conclusion. Again that's a matter for people there to work out—I wouldn't presume to ask anybody in London how we should organise in West Belfast. I would seek general advice from people—in fact we do seek general advice from people on a regular basis and take the advice—but detailed work's up to the people who are living there.



Do the Irish experience racism?

There are many definitions of racism and people will often argue hotly for hours over relatively pedantic forms of words which precisely reflect their particular political leanings.

However one which, I think, would find relatively wide agreement within the 'equal opportunities industry' would go something like this:-

the misuse of power along lines dictated by prejudice against a person or group on grounds of race, colour, nationality or ethnic origin which results in that person or group being deprived of their rights to education, jobs, housing, health care, a sense of pride in their identity and freedom from harassment.

Using this definition, three areas need to be considered:-

(a) whether prejudice against the Irish exists
(b) whether the Irish differ from the British in terms of the grounds on which racism takes place
(c) whether power is misused to deprive the Irish of their rights.

(a) Does prejudice against the Irish exist?

Evidence of prejudice against the Irish abounds in British society. A prime example is the anti-Irish joke so beloved by many British—and some Irish—comedians. These jokes reinforce the ancient stereotypes, first created to justify British pillage of Ireland, of Irish people as violent, drunken, untrustworthy and, perhaps most damaging of all, stupid.

It will be said that these jokes are told in friendship and affection. It can never be friendly or affectionate to put a person or a people down. Jokes such as these instill ideas which distort the judgment of those making decisions ranging from who to employ to whether to withdraw troops from the six counties. The fact that some members of oppressed groups collude with the oppression of their people has never been justification for continuing the oppression.

Another example of anti-Irish prejudice is the distortion by the media in the reporting of Irish affairs. The 26 county state is seen almost as a 'Guinness republic' with neither its economy nor its politicians being taken seriously by the British media.

In reporting events in the 6 county statelet, the media excels at one-sided presentation. British TV viewers could be forgiven for thinking that nothing but violence ever happens in the 6 counties—for they are rarely shown anything else. Only one view of the conflict is ever shown; British soldiers keeping the peace are occasionally forced to kill while criminal thugs in the IRA are murdering them left, right and centre. Almost no attempt is made to analyse the reasons for the conflict. British people are left with the image of the violent Irish being kept apart by the noble British in a situation with no possibility of a solution.

Yet another example of anti-Irish prejudice is the use of the word 'Irish' to describe someone or something as illogical or stupid. Another is the use of the word 'Paddy' to describe both an Irish person and a fit of rage. The phrase 'taking the micky' comes from the concept of a 'Mick' or Irish person as a figure of fun.

Anti-Irish prejudice is a reality for Irish people living in Britain.

(b) Do the Irish differ from the British in terms of the grounds on which racism is perpetuated?

Obviously, most Irish people do not noticeably differ from the white Anglo-Saxon British in terms of skin colour. It is important to note that, because of this, any racism experienced by Irish people will be qualitatively different to that experienced by Black people. Irish people will never be subject to verbal abuse and physical assault simply because of the way they look. Irish people's skin colour will not remind those around them of their prejudices every time they look at an Irish person although an Irish accent will often trigger great prejudice.

However, in terms of race, nationality and ethnic origin, the Irish and the British are two separate groups. Despite much intermingling, there still remain two clearly defined races —the Celtic Irish and the Anglo-Saxon British.

People born in Ireland or of Irish descent are entitled to Irish nationality—the 26 county state is a separate nation and the retention of the 6 counties by the British does not strip the people there of their Irishness.

If more evidence of the difference between the Irish and the British is needed it can be found by looking at the concept of ethnic origin.

An ethnic group is a group of people who share a common national or cultural tradition. The most cursory examination of Irish music, songs, dance, language, literature and religion show a very strong national cultural tradition very different from that of Britain. The Irish indisputably belong to a separate ethnic group.

Thus, in terms of the grounds on which racism is perpetuated, the Irish differ from the British in race, nationality and ethnic origin.

(c) Is power misused to deprive the Irish of their rights?

Ireland was Britain's first colony. Britain has been exploiting Irish people in both Ireland and England for centuries. It is from this basis that the oppression of Irish people continues.

British society has the power to grant or deny to people living within it the necessities of a decent life—such as education, jobs, housing, health care, a sense of pride in their identity and freedom from harassment. These things are basic human rights.

Education

A number of problems face Irish young people in the British education system. One is the negative portrayal of their cultural identity which alienates them and pressurises them to assimilate. Another is the communicated expectation of many teachers that, true to the stereotype, Irish children will be stupid and slow to learn. Another is the distortion of their history which they will have to reconcile with what they may already know. Yet another is the omission of any teaching of their culture such as the Irish language, Irish music, dance, literature, etc.

Children (and adults!) learn best when they are confident and relaxed and have a strong sense of self esteem. The pressures to which Irish young people are subjected by the education system can hinder their learning and lower their expectations of themselves and of society.

Jobs

The 1981 Labour Force Survey of the economic activity of residents in Greater London who were born in the 26 county Republic shows that 82% of those who were employed held manual or clerical/junior jobs.

Where effective equal opportunities monitoring is carried out by employers it has shown that the Irish fare no better than any other ethnic minority group.

The construction industry has traditionally employed large numbers of Irish people and still accounts for 23% of Irish employment. The effect of the recession on the industry has caused proportionately high job losses for the Irish community.

The London Borough of Hackney has recently set itself the target of employing 6% Irish people by December 1990 to reflect the number of Irish people living in the borough. Whether this figure underestimates the numbers of Irish people in Hackney is questionable. The Council currently employs 5% Irish people but they tend to be concentrated in manual work. Of a workforce split almost exactly 50/50 between officers and manual workers, 2.5% of all officers are Irish whilst 7.1% of all manual workers are Irish. For all other Black and ethnic minorities the figures were 31.4% of all officers and 23.5% of all manual workers.

Housing

The GLC's 1984 'Policy Report on the Irish Community' stated that two out of every seven people sleeping rough in London are Irish. Of those living in hostels in inner city areas, 23% are Irish with suburban hostels showing a higher percentage.

In England and Wales heads of households born in the Republic of Ireland are less likely to be owner occupiers than any other group except, marginally, people born in the Caribbean. Of all heads of households born in the Republic, 43.8% are owner occupiers compared with 42.9% of those born in the Caribbean and 58.1% of the total population.

In a study of the housing profile of the Irish in London, Dr. Maguire of the Irish in

Islington Project concludes that 'The Irish born live in considerably worse accommodation than the white British born'.

Health care

A cause for considerable concern in this area is the unusually high incidence of mental illness and suicide amongst Irish people in Britain. A number of possible causes have been advanced to explain this. These include:-

- the alienation of Irish people from the host community and pressure to deny their Irishness and assimilate
- the results of a study which showed that Irishmen (sic) are more isolated and likely to be single and living in lodging houses than are other foreign born migrants and are therefore more vulnerable to mental illness.

It is significant that very little work has been carried out to investigate and resolve this problem—do policy makers in the health service believe suicide and mental illness to be just two more inherent traits of the Irish?

Sense of pride in identity

It can be extremely difficult to maintain a sense of pride in being Irish in Britain. When you are met day in and day out by the message that you and your people are inherently irrational, stupid, violent, alcoholic, untrustworthy, etc, etc, it can be hard to remain convinced that all of this misinformation is completely untrue. Unless Irish people keep a clear distinction in their heads between what the stereotypes say they are like and the way they really are, it is easy to start wondering 'why would they say all this unless it is true?'

Children of Irish parents may well see Irish adults around them deliberately anglicising their accents and playing down their Irishness. They may not be taught about their heritage in their homes because their parents believe that they will get on better if they are brought up to be 'English'. They may well get the impression that at best being Irish is not worth talking about and at worst that it is something to be afraid and ashamed of.

Children whose parents do give them a sense of pride in being Irish may find their confidence dented by the image portrayed of Irish people by their peers and teachers at school. Young people will not want to identify as Irish when to be Irish is seen as being stupid and inferior to English people. Young people who do maintain their pride in the face of hostile or patronising treatment may become alienated from their peers.

Together with the other symptoms of oppression outlined above, these factors form a formidable barrier to any Irish person trying to maintain her or his pride in being Irish.

Freedom from harassment

Irish people in Britain experience many forms of harassment. With capital punishment outlawed for over twenty years, eight Irishmen were shot dead in Loughgall in Ireland by British forces in May 1987. This scant regard for justice is reflected, thankfully in a less dramatic fashion, in the treatment accorded to Irish people in Britain by the security forces. The Prevention of Terrorism Act has until recently been used almost exclusively against Irish people, although it is now beginning to be used against the Sikh community. Under this Act, people can be stopped, questioned, searched and held incommunicado for up to seven days, without being under the slightest suspicion of having committed an offence. Since the passing of the Act in 1974, over 6,150 people have been detained, of whom only 2.8% have been charged with offences under the Act. In 1985 alone, over 55,000 people were stopped, searched and questioned at ports in England and Wales. This amounts to mass surveillance of the Irish community in Britain. The Act is used to intimidate Irish people rather than prevent acts of violence—for which there was already sufficient legislation.

Irish people frequently experience anti-Irish treatment at the hands of the police including beatings accompanied by anti-Irish insults.

Amongst the worst cases of injustice experienced by Irish people in Britain are those of the Birmingham Six, Guildford Four and Maguire Seven. All of these people were convicted by British courts of involvement in making or placing bombs. On the evidence available any impartial court would have found them innocent. The convictions were based on evidence which has since been discredited and on confessions which were beaten or intimidated from the prisoners. After twelve years, the Home Secretary has finally agreed to review the case of the Birmingham Six but still refuses to reconsider the other cases.

Harassment such as this has pressurised Irish people into keeping their heads down for too long. After 1974 many Irish people were afraid to take part in legitimate social or political activity for fear of falling foul of the British establishment and its oppressive use of the legal system. Irish people do not have freedom from harassment in Britain.

In all these ways, the British establishment misuses its power to deprive Irish people of their human and civil rights.

In summary, it can be seen that, using the definition given at the beginning of this article, Irish people undoubtedly experience racism. It is not based on skin colour but on the colonial relationship between Ireland and Britain. Anti-Irish racism is qualitatively different from anti-Black racism but all forms of racism are deeply hurtful to their targets and the detrimental effect on the development and status of both the Black and the Irish communities has been very similar.

It is not difficult to understand why anti-Irish racism is so prevalent in Britain. Britain has occupied and oppressed at least part of Ireland for over eight centuries. A war is currently being waged between British forces and Irish people no longer prepared to put up with the occupation of their country and the oppression of their community. In order to justify their part in this situation, the British need to depict the Irish as being unfit to govern themselves—an image perfectly supported by the stereotypes portraying the Irish as violent, stupid, illogical and so on.

Until Britain leaves Ireland to the Irish people, anti-Irish racism will be used to try to 'justify' the unjustifiable.

Virginia Moyles

Song

(Song)

My accent is Cockney;
I was born in London town.
Only my mother was Irish;
she came from County Down.
If I grew up hating racism
against Irish, Black or Jew,
I'll tell you why and not deny
to my mother all credit's due.

I learned about our history
at my dear mother's knee;
About our culture and the struggle
of our people to be free.
She was my only teacher
and the truth I must tell:
I was a willing student
and she did teach me well.

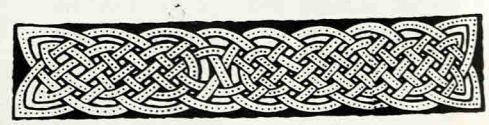
I was not taught our language
or our culture at school
And when it came to history
a load of lies was the rule.
I heard my people derided
and mocked by the 'Irish joke'
And I fought back, as a lad,
'til my heart nearly broke.

I've seen other first generation
crumble 'neath the assault,
Turn their back on their own nation
and with their own race find fault,
And mock their own people;
but for all that did defect,
I've seen others stand up proud
and fight for respect.

There's good and bad in all races
with that statement I hold;
Even among the English
if the truth would be told.
But I'll never hide my roots
nor my ancestors deny,
And I'll stay proud to be Irish
until the day that I die.

File 1986.

The writer of this song is looking for a tune and a title for it. The words can be adapted to reflect the gender and birthplace of the singer and her/his Irish parent.



Justice for the Guildford Four!

Tom Barron of Islington IBRG puts the case.

The Guildford Four, three Irishmen and one Englishwoman, have now served 13 years in prison for the Guildford and Woolwich pub bombings which took place in October and November 1974. In 1975 they received the highest sentences handed out by an English court at that time. Carole Richardson was sentenced to be detained at her majesty's pleasure. Gerry Conlon was sentenced to life imprisonment—not less than 30 years. Paddy Armstrong was also sentenced to life—not less than thirty-five years. Paul Hill was sentenced to life with the recommendation that he never be released except as an act of mercy on account of great age or infirmity. The four have consistently maintained their innocence. Any rational person looking at the evidence would undoubtedly reach the conclusion that they are innocent.

The four were convicted solely on the basis of statements that they made to the police. These statements contained over 100 inconsistencies and contradicted each other. The four testified in court that the statements were given after they had been abused, deprived of sleep and brutalised and after threats of physical injury to themselves and their families. There was no corroborating evidence, no forensic evidence and no evidence of identification; eight witnesses from the Horse and Groom pub (the scene of the Guildford bombing) failed to pick out Carole Richardson in identity parades, after which the police gave up trying to secure such evidence. There was no evidence against the defendents and all the evidence there is points to their innocence.

Both Carole Richardson and Paul Hill have alibis corroborated by other witnesses. Lisa Astin, a friend of Carole's, testified that she was with Carole during the whole of the afternoon in question. This was substantiated by Frank Johnson who met the two women and went with them to a pop concert that evening. Frank Johnson's original statement to the police made it impossible for Carole to have carried out the bombing at Guildford. In a later statement after 'questioning' by police which included being beaten and threats to his mother Frank Johnson changed his statement with regard to the time at which he met the two women. On a Yorkshire Television 'First Tuesday' documentary he said that he would have signed anything, including taking responsibility for the bombings. After his second statement, the prosecution said that Carole could have driven from Guildford to the concert in the 48 minutes which the second statement indicated as the time available—which a police car breaking all speed limits had barely managed to do.

Paul Hill has two alibis. Paul's girlfriend testified that, at the time of the Guildford bombings, he was with her in Southampton and this is confirmed by two other witnesses. At the time of the Woolwich bombings he was with his aunt and uncle, with whom he lived in London, except for a 20 minute phone call to his girlfriend in Southampton.

Balcombe Siege evidence

After the arrest of the Guildford Four the bombing campaign continued until the capture of an IRA Active Service Unit at Balcombe Street in 1975. Three of these four men stated that they had planted the Guildford and Woolwich bombs and gave details about the bombings which only the true bombers could have known and which, when checked, were found to be correct. At their trial they were not charged with the Guildford and Woolwich bombings despite forensic evidence connecting these explosions with others carried out by this Active Service Unit. In court Douglas Higgs, the Government Forensic Scientist, was asked why he omitted the Guildford and Woolwich bombings from his evidence. He replied that Commander Jim Neville, an officer of the bomb squad, had instructed him to do so. Nevill, in turn said that he was acting on the advice of the Director of Public Prosecutions!

In October 1977 a no-jury Court of Appeal refused to overturn the convictions despite the evidence of the Balcombe Street Active Service Unit. The three judges did accept that the Balcombe Street men had probably been involved—yet they have never been charged with the Guildford and Woolwich bombings. Why not? No jury deliberating on the Guildford Four has ever heard this evidence. Would they have convicted if they had?

New evidence

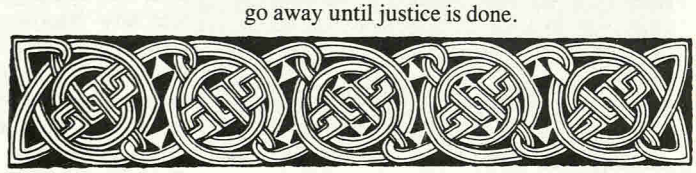
In his review of the case of the Guildford Four, announced in January 1987, the Home Secretary said that no new evidence or matters of substance had been presented so he could not refer the case to a Court of Appeal. The Criminal Appeal Act 1968 does not mention 'new evidence or matters of substance'; Section 17 says that the Home Secretary can refer a case 'if he thinks fit'. Yet Douglas Hurd doesn't think fit despite the fact that there is no evidence against the four. Despite the fact that no jury deliberating on the Guildford and Woolwich bombings has ever heard the evidence of the Balcombe Street Active Service Unit. Despite the fact that a government scientific assessment of a pub bombing in Caterham in August 1975 was that it was probably carried out by the same people who carried out the Guildford bombing. (This piece of evidence was never given to the defence at the trial and therefore has never been heard by a jury.) Despite the fact that Evonne Fox, a friend of Paul Hill's family, has stated in a further 'First Tuesday' programme that she visited Paul Hill's aunt and uncle on the night of the Woolwich bombings and that Paul Hill was in her company that night. Even by his own criteria the Home Secretary must regard this as 'new evidence or matters of substance' and refer the case to a Court of Appeal.

Following a delegation led by Cardinal Hume, Douglas Hurd has now announced a review of the case by Avon and Somerset police. It is essential that the Home Secretary ensures that this review is conducted speedily and is not used to try to discredit the new witnesses and that he refers the case to the Court of Appeal immediately.

What it means to the Irish in Britain

The Guildford Four were found guilty in a wave of anti-Irish hysteria and so were the Irish communities in Britain. The Guildford Four, Birmingham Six, Maguire Seven and Judith Ward highlight many of the issues facing Irish people in Britain today. The Guildford Four and Maguire Seven were the first people convicted under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, a piece of legislation intended to silence Irish people and prevent them from expressing their political views. The fact that these people are still in prison or (in the case of the Maguires) have served out their sentences shows how successful this tactic has proved to be. The calculated raising of anti-Irish feeling at times of high emotion allows the latent racism which is fostered and institutionalised at all levels of British society to come to the fore in all its sordid reality thus making it impossible to hold a rational debate concerning Irish issues. The treatment of the Guildford Four and Maguire Seven is no different to that which many other Irish prisoners have received and continue to receive today. The Irish communities must campaign hard to secure justice in these cases in order to prevent further injustices, to combat the deliberate misinformation and cultivated ignorance around Irish issues, to place these issues firmly on the political agenda and to show the need for them to be addressed now.

Support the campaign for the release of the Guildford Four and justice for the Maguire Seven. Lobby MPs, councillors and TDs, hold public meetings, take up the cases in your unions and political parties. Let the Home Office know that these cases will not go away until justice is done.



IBRG joins the TOM delegation to Belfast

Laura Sullivan and **Virginia Moyles** give an account of their visit.

On Friday, 7th August 1987, after an uneventful journey from London to Stranraer, we left the train to be met by port police asking us to complete PTA cards. Well, the trip wouldn't have been complete without this little ceremony, would it?

When we arrived at Larne (reinforced by a splendid breakfast on the boat!) we were held up by friendly RUC officers who gallantly waved the women members of the delegation through customs while delaying our male colleagues for questioning. Who said chivalry was dead? If, for any reason, we might want to smuggle an extra packet of cigarettes through customs we wouldn't give it to a man!

Once on the coach which was to take us to Belfast we were joined by yet another delightful member of the RUC who very kindly took great pains to tell us that if we took part in any illegal marches over the weekend we were likely to be arrested. Us? Illegal marches? Good job he told us!

We finally arrived at Conway Mill, the delegation's 'headquarters' to a bustling, friendly, exciting and expectant atmosphere and a warm welcome from Sinn Fein.

TOM had thoughtfully arranged time for Irish delegates to meet in an Irish support group which Laura led. It was good to talk with other Irish people and we had an interesting discussion on anti-Irish racism but we felt that it was not as necessary in Ireland as it would be in Britain as we were, after all, at home.

We split up then—Laura to visit Divis and Virginia to represent IBRG at a press conference. Divis was dreadful; people are living in buildings which are practically falling apart. The work of the community is very impressive, though, especially given the criminally high levels of unemployment and the heavy surveillance to which the people are subjected.

The press conference would have been laughable if it wasn't so tragic. There were about six journalists from different newspapers and a BBC TV crew. They weren't the least bit interested in why we were in Belfast—they spent the whole session trying to corner us into saying either that we condemned violence or, conversely, that we supported the IRA. The impartial British (and Irish) press at their best!

As we travelled round Belfast, every now and then we would see an armoured car containing heavily armed members of the RUC or the British army. It's amazing and rather frightening how quickly you can get used to seeing armed men on the streets—well, at least the fear subsides but you seethe with resentment every time they appear. And we were just there for the weekend—we have no way of knowing what it's like to live with the constant presence of foreign soldiers ostentatiously bearing arms. Even during this short time we were stopped at gunpoint by army and RUC on a further two occasions, asked for our names and addresses and warned repeatedly against marching on an 'illegal demonstration'. At one point we were 'shadowed' by RUC trucks following us at walking pace on our way to the republican plot in Milltown Cemetery.

The workshops organised by Sinn Fein gave us further insights into the reality of living in nationalist Belfast in 1987. Rather than go into detail about the wide range of workshops, all of which were interesting and informative, we'd just like to pick out some highlights (after all, this is supposed to be an article, not a book!). The most moving thing was hearing about people's experiences and the work which they are doing at first hand. Many of the things we heard we had read about beforehand and thought we knew something about but nothing brings the message home like, for example, hearing an ex-prisoner say "to the Home Office there are ODCs (ordinary decent criminals) and then there's this dirt (republican prisoners)". Pearse's 'The Murder Machine' took on added meaning when read and explained by a member of Sinn Fein. Workshops covered trade unions, women's issues, culture, youth and a number of other topics.

An overall impression of the Sinn Fein people whom we met was that they had a deep respect for other people and their causes. They were willing to listen, open and undefensive and ready to admit that they didn't have all the answers.

However, the delegation was not solely concerned with oppression and the occupation! Each night there was a wide range of social events from which to choose. On our first night, after being taken to our billets and introduced to our hosts, we were whisked off to a ceili where we were given a round of applause, taught various set dances and treated to the singing of several local people. Great tolerance was shown of our ignorance of the steps and everyone was really encouraging! A recently released ex-prisoner was welcomed with a standing ovation and a large bottle of spirits!

The next night we went to an open air concert on a hillside just outside Belfast. It was completely dark except for the moon and the lights around the small, temporary stage. The resistance ballads of the band were going down well enough, but things really warmed up when an army helicopter hovered overhead and switched on its searchlight, flooding the hillside with brilliant light. The crowd laughed and cheered and waved clenched fists to yells of "up the 'RA!". We thought it was really considerate of the army to come and light up the proceedings. We couldn't understand why they didn't stay!

The main highlight of the delegation came on the Sunday afternoon with the anti-internment march. As we walked along the Falls Road with the TOM delegation (with our IBRG banner, of course!), we were close to tears to find the people lining the street clapping and cheering as we passed. We had not realised how important it is to the people of the six counties that there is support from people in Britain. People showed particular interest in our banner; one young man asked us if we would give it to him! We weren't sure how impressed he was with IBRG or whether he wanted to sell it down the Falls Road—so we hung on to it! Thousands of people poured down the Falls Road on the march—the RUC obviously hadn't managed to intimidate many other people either! After the rally, to avoid possible problems indicated by running youths and muffled bangs, we were shepherded into the PD (Prisoners' Dependants) Club for tea and sandwiches until things had quietened down. On our way back to Conway Mill all our taxis were systematically stopped and the occupants asked for their names. One group was held by the RUC/army for half an hour while those of us still not yet quite used to this sort of thing tried not to panic. But nothing could repress the feeling of strength and determination engendered by the march along with the knowledge that one day justice will triumph.

That evening we were invited to the Felon's Club, to a concert by the Irish Brigade. Each evening we had been impressed by the pride with which people expressed their culture and their support for the republican movement in their social activities. This night took the biscuit! Excited after the march, hundreds of people from Belfast, the rest of Ireland, England, the USA and the land of the Basques packed themselves into this magnificent club which is richly decorated with celtic designs. Stirred by the political message of the songs of the Irish Brigade and with the inspiration of the march still fresh in everyone's minds, by the end of the evening the whole hall was singing along with the band, swaying, clapping and waving clenched fists to the music! We'd never seen anything like it! And our night had hardly begun! When we got home to our billet at about one in the morning we were joined by a number of friends of our hosts along with other members of the delegation for a party. The singing started immediately and everyone was expected to join in. Countless songs and poems later we fell into bed at almost 6.00am. We had to be up at 9.00!

We have dwelt at length on the social side of our visit because somehow it was the more unexpected aspect. The facts about the occupation you can get in Britain if you really try. The unity of the people and the solid support for Sinn Fein are things you don't see unless you go to the nationalist areas of the six counties. The strength, vitality, political awareness and warmth of the people we met, along with their obvious pride in their Irishness gave us something very important. It was particularly exciting to hear so many people speaking fluent Irish!

All of this made clearer for us the close links between cultural activities and political activities. The struggle against oppression is an empty, barren thing if you're not fighting for your identity, your heritage. Our pride in being Irish was strengthened and the need to get the troops out as soon as possible reinforced. The soldiers on the streets, the stories of people's individual lives, the work that's being done, the cultural activities all reflected the political situation and nothing could have shown more clearly how inseparably intertwined are the personal and the political. Our thanks go to Sinn Fein and the Troops Out Movement for arranging a brilliant weekend. The only thing left to say is—go there and see for yourself!

We would like to arrange a delegation to Belfast for IBRG members and other interested Irish people for spring 1988. Please contact Virginia Moyles, c/o An Pobal Eirithe, if you are interested in joining us.

Language and Culture

Pat Reynolds describes the Irish language summer school at Glencolmcille.

Glencolmkille was this summer the venue for a gathering of Irish people from America, Canada, England and Ireland who came together to learn about the Irish language and culture. The language school was organised by Oideas Gael and is an annual event. It was Caitlin Wright of Bolton IBRG who first mooted the idea of taking groups from Britain to the Gaeltacht area to learn the language back in 1985. In 1986 the first group from England went to Carna in the Connemara district where they had a week of culture and language and a memorable holiday. This year the Brent Irish Cultural Centre organised a group from London and members of IBRG and Cairde na Gael in Newham joined that group.

The week included language classes divided into three groups—bun rang, mean rang agus ard rang. An Gaeilge was the only language of the classroom and, with brilliant teachers, most people were able to converse in the language before the end of the week. The method used in the teaching was one of the most effective available, that of using ordinary events and people as background to give the individual command of their everyday environment. We also learned the richness of the Irish language, much of which was lost in translation to the English. The afternoons were devoted to Irish songs, dancing, crafts, music and literature.

In the evenings we had various activities such as sean nos singing, a folklore evening, the Irish poet Cathal Sharkey, a meal in the Folk Village followed by a concert, a number of ceilithe, parties and a few hours of sleep. We had a day trip out to Glenveigh Park and a visit to Gweedore. Glencolmkille is famous for its ancient stones (many court cairns are to be seen in the district), for its early Christian settlement and, today, for the work of Father McDyer who re-vitalised the area with his ideas and work. What a pity he did not make the Gaelic language a part of his cultural revival; without it Glencolmkille is nothing but another frontier post open to the colonial powers. The area has beautiful scenery, beaches, mountains, walks, fishing and crafts. It has everything for a good holiday and even the weather can be ignored!

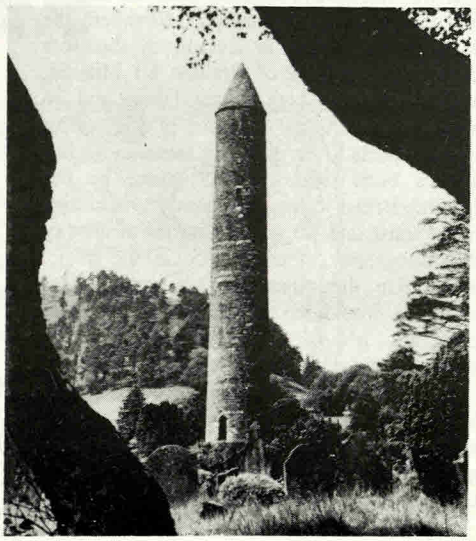
It was a full week of learning and speaking the Irish language. We met people from the North of Ireland who had made Irish the language of their homes. Here the people with the cupla focail (few words of Irish) were respected and we were far from the perfectionists who often hinder the language. One was reminded here of the phrase 'Is fear Gaeilge briste na Bearla cliste'. In Tigh Biddy we had many discussions on the role of language and culture and the politics of resistance to the colonial culture. The words of the Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o come to mind 'the biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against that collective defiance is the cultural bomb. The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them wont to distance themselves from that wasteland' (*Decolonising the Mind*). We debated what centuries of colonisation had done to Ireland and what the present neo-colonial government in Dublin had done to their people that many see their country as a wasteland, but we also debated the culture of resistance which is alive and growing. Language and culture are a vital part of a people's identity. We came away from the week in Glencolmkille enriched by our experience and our energies refreshed; we took back words and ideas with us having shared many more during the week.

Here in England we must salute the older generation who have passed on the culture to us in difficult times. It is our responsibility in the present generation to build on the bun cloch that they laid. That culture was kept alive in the community outside school and church and is strong in music, song and dance. We have now the revival of the language here and there is no reason why our community here cannot be bi-lingual. The IBRG has a central responsibility in promoting the Irish language and culture. Already the IBRG run a large number of Irish language classes, Irish dance and music and are involved in all aspects of Irish culture. There are in addition a large number of other Irish organisations in Britain involved in various aspects of language and culture. All have a responsibility to make the language and culture more accessible and to provide the venues and space for people to express their rich heritage.

For a start, it would be useful to have a local venue where people can meet weekly on a social level to speak the language. Isolation is great in a foreign land and we need to provide the network for the language and culture to flourish. The fight against anti-Irish racism is necessary but it is a defensive fight back; expressing our culture openly is going on the offensive. We need to take control of our self-definition and our language and our culture are our tools for doing so. Without our culture we can only accept the coloniser's view of the world and of ourselves. We need to create our own future for ourselves and our children and part of that heritage is our language and our culture.

Pat Reynolds, Haringey IBRG.

If you are interested in going to the Gaeltacht next year write to : An Stiurthoin, Oideas Gael, Droim Rua, Gleann Cholm Cille, Co. Dhun na nGall, Eire.



Racism and Work

Laura Sullivan shares her experience as an Irish woman working in London.

I have always been conscious of racism and, equally, have always regarded myself as Irish. Yet for many years I felt separate from my own community. This contradiction can sadly be a part of the racism we experience here. I was interested in politics and concentrated my efforts on politics that were concerned with class issues. I lived with the luxury of choice when it came to anti-Irish racism; I chose to turn off the TV, avoid certain newspapers and either to avoid people or live with offensive comments. This is probably not an exceptional reaction to experiencing racism—especially for a second generation Irish person.

My present job challenged my attitudes. I work in the public sector. Policy in a system which is unjust cannot fail to have racist elements to it. The interpretation of the Homeless Persons Act in the housing department where I work is a good example. Investigations are carried out under the Act to determine a person's right to housing; Ireland is the only overseas country which we investigate. This, to me, is blatant racism. In Ireland there is a different housing system to that in England. Ireland doesn't benefit from any arrangements such as Council house exchanges; English law should not be applied in Ireland. Discrimination in policy leads to racist practices—working in the central housing department opened my eyes to this. For instance, investigations of a recent immigrant might be carried out by a telephone call to check accommodation and no written confirmation would be sought before a travel warrant was issued. People would be sent back to Ireland without proper confirmation that they had a home. This was a policy based on expediency to keep bed and breakfast figures down. Another example is the expectation of travelling people to comply with the same investigations without really taking account of their culture and the conditions of their life. It is through racist practice that racist attitudes inevitably emerge.

I now work in a decentralised office and I find it a much more supportive and encouraging environment. I am probably lucky in my office but there are other offices operating differently with unfair policy which can be applied in an unfair way. I am active now in Irish politics and have spent time learning about my country's history and culture and about the origins of anti-Irish racism. I confidently bring up Irish issues at work and try to raise the consciousness of others on the question of anti-Irish racism. At times I am faced with people's anger, with comments such as ''Irish people don't experience racism'', ''If my grandfather's Irish, what does that make me?''. The most hurtful comments for me are those made by other Irish people suggesting that there is little unfairness and that we do not need rights. It is not easy taking an assertive position on your own.

To challenge racism and challenge policy one has to work with others. Irish groups are forming in Nalgo to do this and being successful. We are beginning to do this in Islington with the help of other already established groups. As Irish people we must make our own struggle important; no-one else will. After the way I've seen racism work in practice I realise that by silence racism is condoned. Even with support outside work I have found it difficult taking up issues. Ireland is a struggle too close at hand for people to continue to feel comfortable after our comments. Our very invisibility allows them to ignore this issue and be derisive about the position of Irish people here. Uniting together we have a strong voice and far greater influence. We are no longer invisible and can't be ignored.

Irish place names

Place-names in Ireland are sometimes used in humour and one cannot always put the blame entirely on the shoneenism of those involved nor on big-city contempt for the countryside. The names do sound strange and are devoid of their original meaning; indeed sometimes they are invested with unflattering meaning in the majority's vernacular. I refer, of course to Irish place-names in English, or rather, to the English corruption of the Gaelic names for places.

It was not always so, even after the coming of the English. For example, Elizabeth the 1st's representative in Ireland in the 16th century at the time of Grainne Ui Mhaille, apparently gave both a translation and an approximation of the meaning of Irish terms in his reports to his queen. If translations had always been used then and since by our English/British rulers, the names would now make sense and we would have the history or the topography of each place in the names alone. On the other hand, I suppose the conquest would have been that much more complete. It's hard to know which is the worst scenario: the one just mentioned or the cutting off of people from their place-names. When Irish people give directions or include in any way in their English conversation the names of places in Ireland, they are indeed talking gobbledegook.

I remember when Paul McCartney's record 'Mull of Kintyre' came out and it dawned on me that I probably knew what the place looks like although I've never been there. 'Mull of' is almost certainly a corruption of the Gaelic 'Mullach', which means (among other things) a peak or a top; 'Kintyre' would be 'Ceann tire', which translates literally as 'headland'. The place therefore must be a headland and, furthermore, a fairly high one. Years after I made that deduction based on my native knowledge of the Irish tongue, I met someone who had been in that place. It turned out that my description of the topography was correct.

A person's experience of Ireland would be enriched if she/he knew the names of the places in Irish. Of course one of the best ways of doing that would be to learn the language itself, but one could instead learn some of the more common words in the names of places.

'Bally' is one which occurs at least a few hundred times throughout the country. The original was 'Baile', which is pronounced 'bal-yeh' ('eh' being my way of denoting a short 'e' as in 'let'); it means a town or a village. 'Baile mor' would be a large town.

'Mor' is another common word and means large or big. It's pronounced as in the English 'more'.

Another word which one frequently meets is 'Dun', 'Don' or 'Doon'. It comes from the Irish 'Dun' which means a fort, a keep or a defensive enclosure. The word is pronounced 'doon'. Two well-known examples of the use of this word are in the names 'Dunleary' and 'Donegal'. The first is 'Dun Laoghaire' or 'Dun Laoire' and means 'the fort of O Laoire' —a king who bore the name now anglicised as O'Leary. The second refers to 'the fort of the foreigners (or aliens)' and the word 'Gall' (pronounced 'gol') was probably originally a reference to the Gauls.

'Glen' is a word with which nearly everyone in Britain is familiar from its use in Scotland as well as in poetry and song. The original was 'Gleann' and, of course, means a valley. It is pronounced 'gl'yawn'.*

Another familiar word because of Scotland is 'Loch' or 'Lough' (indeed this is the only way I've found to convey in writing the sound of the Irish 'ch'). As most people will be aware, it means a lake.

I believe that eventually everyone in Ireland should be bilingual; if people then leave the country they should pass on that bilingualism to their children wherever possible. In the meantime, whether just to enhance people's experience of Ireland and things Irish, or as both an encouragement and an aid to learn the language, shouldn't we be learning (and teaching) the meaning of the place-names?

Diarmuid Breatnach.

* The apostrophe is a guide to pronunciation and indicates that the sound made before it is not connected to the one after it.

Are you Irish?

Have you heard of the

British Nationality Act?

Read on and find out what it means to you...

Who does it affect?

In 1981 the British Government passed an Act of Parliament which has an effect on every Commonwealth citizen or Irish citizen who settled in Britain before *1st January 1973*—even those who were born prior to 1949 when the Free State declared itself a Republic or prior to 1922 when the twenty six counties acquired Free State status.

If you settled in Britain after 1st January 1973 you will *not* be affected and if you were born here you will also *not* be affected.

What does it mean?

At present you have the *right* to register as a British citizen (on form 'R') if you settled in Britain prior to 1st January 1973 and if you have continued to live here since that date.

The Home Office have recently hinted that they will adopt a reasonable approach to the length of time you have been in this country and will ignore brief holidays abroad (or even absences of up to one year unless the absence was to make a home in another country).

Do I have to register?

No. Not unless you wish to.

So what advantage is it to me?

At present it is probably of more relevance to Commonwealth citizens as Irish citizens have many rights under EEC law which are not enjoyed by others (for example freedom of movement rights).

But, if you do register, you confirm your right to live in Britain for the rest of your life. However long you stay away from this island you will have the right to return and live here. You also confirm your right to vote, hold public office and work for the British Government. These rights are currently held by Commonwealth and Irish citizens but, prior to the British Nationality Act 1981, the White Paper on British nationality hinted that this might not remain the same in future. While it cannot be said with any certainty that a future Government would alter this position it equally cannot be said that these rights will continue indefinitely.

By registering you also ensure freedom from deportation on the grounds of nationality. And you gain the right to a British passport (but you have to apply separately for this).

Are there any disadvantages?

Yes. If you decide to register, it will cost you £60. The Home Office will not proceed with an application unless the fee is enclosed. If you are on Supplementary Benefit or low income you *cannot* get help from the DHSS to pay this £60 though it may be possible to obtain help from charities.

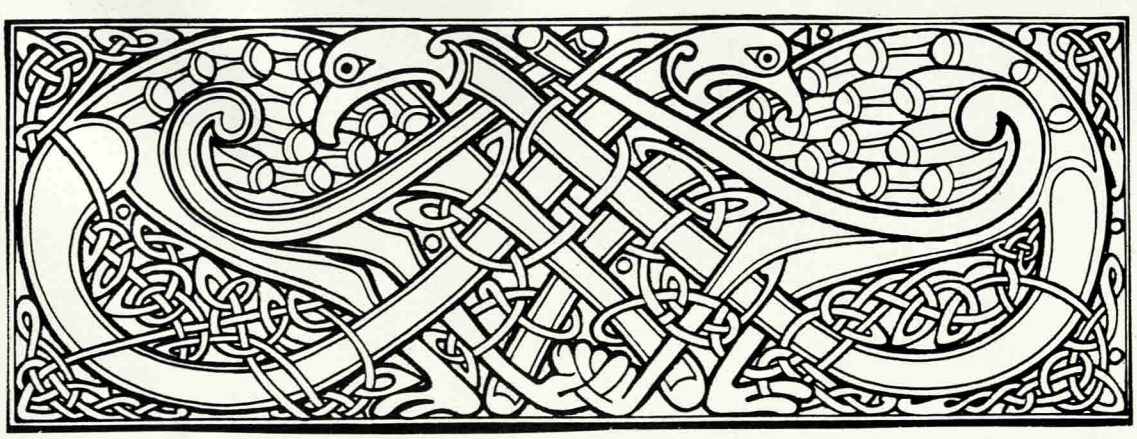
If you fail to register before 31st December 1987 you may only obtain British citizenship at the *discretion of the Secretary of State* (it will not be an automatic right) and the fee will be £170.

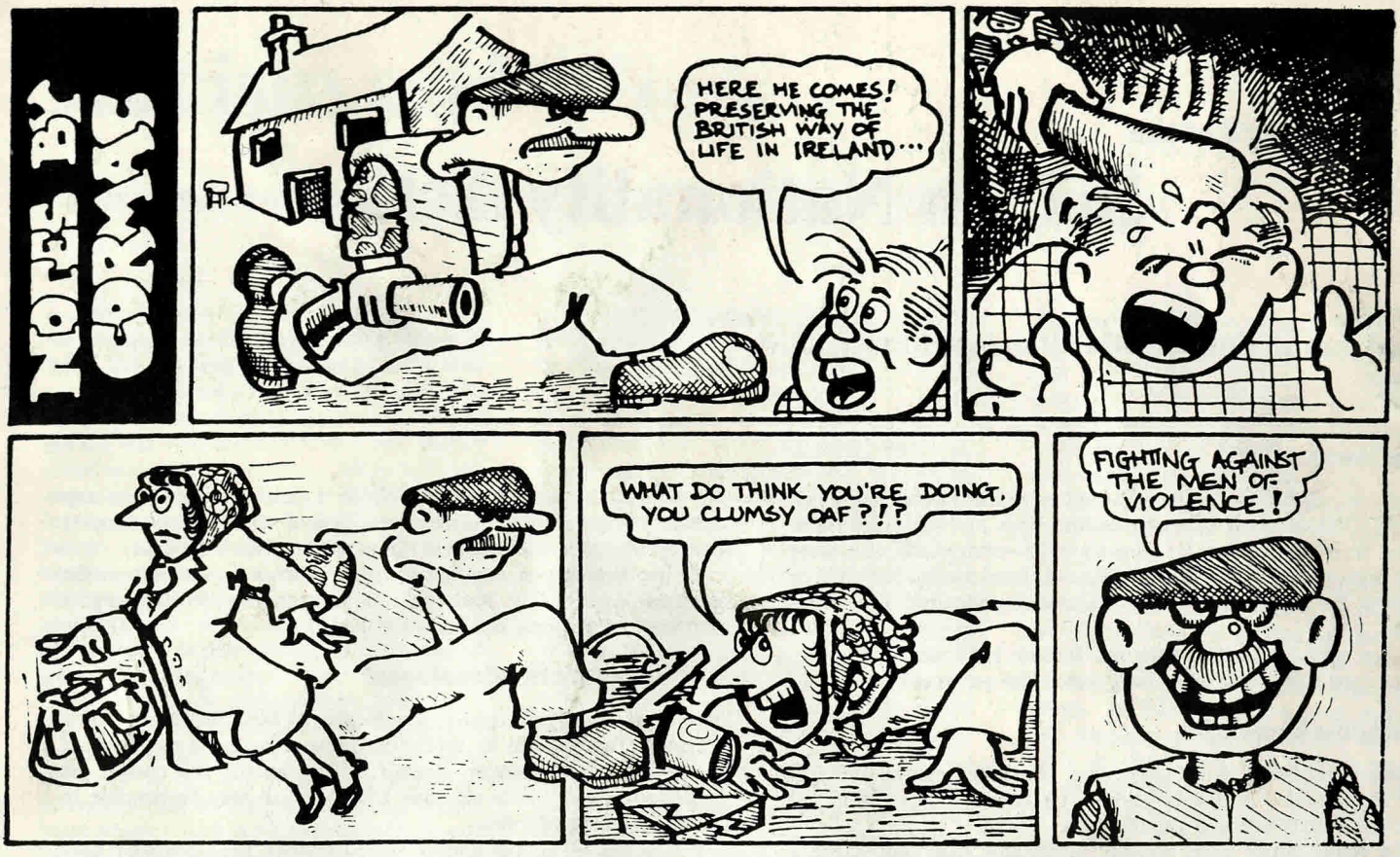
So should I register?

This is obviously a question that only you can answer.

Ireland allows dual nationality so that, if you do register, it will not affect your status as an Irish citizen. However, many Irish people may find it difficult to come to terms with applying for British citizenship. But it is worth bearing in mind that the situation in Britain with regard to citizenship is likely to change over the next decade and Irish people are likely to be affected by such changes. It is also worth bearing in mind that there have been moves in recent years to disenfranchise Irish people resident in Britain. There is little doubt that this Government is looking to reduce the numbers of people eligible for benefits in Britain (whether welfare rights, health service, employment, etc) and this Act should be viewed in that context. At present Irish people enjoy rights which are in addition to their rights as EEC nationals. It is always possible that this may change in the future.

At the end of the day you must decide whether you feel more secure by registering as British or whether you feel that such action would go against your history, culture and politics as an Irish person.





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