



IBRG

IRISH IN BRITAIN REPRESENTATION GROUP

THE PREVENTION OF TERRORISM ACT.

1. The Prevention of Terrorism Act came into force on 29 November 1974, eight days after public house bombings killed 21 people and maimed many more. The Act introduced sweeping new powers for the purpose of preventing events such as the Birmingham bombings - powers which many people considered to be 'draconian' in their effect. Even the then Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins, felt the need to justify its introduction on the basis of its 'temporary' nature.
2. Since its introduction, Civil Rights groups have voiced grave doubts about the implications of the Act and its application. The National Council for Civil Liberties have expressed the view that 'by giving the Home Secretary and police powers that cannot be challenged in court the PTA has destroyed at a stroke the edifice of safeguards built up in this country's legal system to protect the citizen against wrongful arrest, detention or conviction' (NCCCL 'PTA - The case for repeal'). In spite of this criticism the PTA has been renewed annually - though lately against growing opposition from many Members of Parliament.
3. The Act can basically be divided into three parts:
 - a) the right of the Home Secretary to ban (Prohibit) organisations;
 - b) the right of the Home Secretary to deport (exclude) those suspected of being involved in terrorist acts from Britain to 'Northern Ireland' or the Republic of Ireland;
 - c) the right of the police to arrest persons suspected of terrorism and to detain them for 48 hours on their own authority, and for a further five days with the approval of the Home Secretary. In addition, the police have the right, with the approval of the Home Secretary, to arrest suspects at a port or airport and detain them for up to 7 days.
4. It has been repeatedly pointed out that, despite the extensive powers given to the police under the PTA, the Act has failed completely to prevent the bombing of British cities. Its effect has, however, been to alienate the Irish community in Britain who see it as a repressive measure used unjustifiably and indiscriminately against them to prevent legitimate political activity. The NCCCL have pointed out that 'all the people detained under the Act and subsequently charged with criminal offences could have been arrested, questioned and charged without using the powers of the Act'.
5. Between 29 November 1974 and the end of 1984 5896 people were arrested under the PTA but less than 2.5% (147) were ever charged (and less than 50% of those received any prison sentence). A number of those charged and sentenced under the Act are the subject of controversy due to the flimsy evidence upon which they were convicted. Apart from a very, very small percentage, all of those arrested were Irish. 5749 people were detained for periods ranging from a few hours to 7 days and then released without charge and without right of redress.
6. The Greater London Council recently conducted a random survey of the conditions faced by those arrested under the PTA in the London area between 1976 and 1982. All of those arrested were denied access to a solicitor and effectively disappeared because neither family nor friends were informed of their

detention. On a number of occasions relatives heard of the arrest through the media or were themselves threatened with arrest when enquiring after their relatives. Detainees complained of physical ill-treatment, threatening behaviour on the part of the police and severe mental pressure. Some required medical assistance following release (at least one required long term medical treatment) or lost their employment as a result. Others found that their families had been subjected to harrassment and even assaults by their neighbours. Children were placed in care, families broken up and at least one suicide reported as being linked to detention under the PTA.

7. In 1982 Mr Robert Parry M.P. asked the House of Commons, "Is the House aware that over the past 7 or 8 years many people who have been detained and then cleared of any offence still have their photographs, personal details and fingerprints on the police files? This is a gross infringement of civil liberties and the Irish Societies believe that the Act is used purely to collate information for the police so that it can be put on a police file or computer".

There is a strongly held belief among the Irish community that anyone charged under the PTA has no hope of a fair trial and is already convicted by the media i.e. by the smear of terrorism.

8. The two largest Irish community groups (the Irish in Britain Representation Group and the Federation of Irish Societies) are both committed to the repeal of the PTA. The IBRG have stated their conviction that 'the PTA is used unjustifiably and indiscriminately against the Irish community in Britain to stifle lawful political activity'. The Federation have referred to the PTA as 'institutionalised terrorism'.
9. In July 1984 the IBRG called upon the Irish Government, through it's Embassy in Britain, to support the Irish community by:
- a) issuing a clear and unequivocal statement of condemnation of the PTA as a racist and discriminatory weapon of repression against the Irish community in Britain;
 - b) investigating each and every case of an Irish person being detained under the Act and publish quarterly statistical reports on the purpose of arrest, type of questioning, length of detention, access to a solicitor or relatives etc;
 - c) retain a solicitor to be made available to each and every Irish person detained under the PTA.

IBRG felt that this form of action would provide immediate, relevant and practical support to our people at a time of great emotional and psychological confusion and distress.

10. At the beginning of November 1984 the Irish Government declined to adopt the strategy proposed by IBRG. Shortly afterward an IBRG Welfare Worker in London was detained for 13 hours under the PTA. IBRG responded to this action by announcing an international campaign for the repeal of the PTA. During the Christmas and New Year holidays a further four IBRG members were detained in Birmingham and Bristol while at the same time two Irish visitors to Britain (over here to do Christmas shopping) were detained for 5 days under the PTA for using false names. A number of the IBRG members were subsequently charged with 'conspiracy to cause an explosion'.
11. IBRG re-iterates its statement that the PTA is a racist and discriminatory weapon of repression used primarily against the Irish community in Britain to stifle lawful and legitimate political activity. We call upon all Community groups, Trade Unions, Politicians, Churchleaders, Councils and democratic peoples to support the campaign for the repeal of this pernicious Act.