

# Fourthwrite



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## STILL BEYOND REFORM

**T**his edition of *Fourthwrite* is going to press before the Ulster Unionist Party meets to decide whether or not to resume its position in the Executive. Few commentators are willing to forecast what the result will be and this magazine is not in a position to guess the intentions of UUP delegates. What may be said though is that whatever way the dice falls at the meeting the six will still belong to Britain and Unionism with the reactionary wing of the latter dictating the political pace for the foreseeable future.

The Provisional IRA has taken an enormous step by offering to put its arsenal verifiably beyond use. The magnitude of this concession has only been exceeded by the Sinn Fein party's acceptance of the Good Friday Agreement with the implicit recognition therein of the Union and Partition. Unionism, nevertheless, has not responded to this situation with anything resembling magnanimity.

Predictably, the DUP is self-evidently hostile to any settlement that includes nonmembers of the Free Presbyterian congregation. In greater need of explanation, however, is the degree of opposition from the seemingly more strategic UUP to what, for them, is surely an excellent deal.

Yet their resistance to an accommodation is formidable. The young and academically brilliant Peter Weir, the still young and popular Jeffery Donaldson and the respected elder grandee William Ross are all fundamentally opposed to the concept of cohabitation in Northern Ireland. Nor are they isolated and lonely figures in their party. They enjoy significant support among the grass roots and their popularity has the potential to grow. Coupled with the DUP, they form a major and almost unappeasable constituency within the unionist heartland. In reality, this community is what makes Northern Ireland an unmanageable and unworkable entity.

**F**or British ruled Northern Ireland to function, the Good Friday Agreement has to be able to work. And for the Agreement to work, republicans have to recognise and operate within the state on one hand while the British and unionists have to encourage republicans to participate within that state on the other hand. Any renegeing by either side on the spirit and practice of the *entente* renders the whole project inoperable.

With the exception of a resolute handful, the majority of republicans in the form of Sinn Fein have, for the present at least, agreed to make Northern Ireland work. Indeed the party went so far as to organise street demonstrations demanding the return of Stormont institutions following the suspension of the Executive.

Unionists, however, show no similar enthusiasm for partnership in the governing of Northern Ireland. A protracted squabble over decommissioning unused weapons is followed by an endless wrangle about flags, emblems and the RUC makeover. It appears that the unionist appetite for absolute power is as strong now as it was in the first fifty years of the northern state's existence. It also seems clear that many unionists view any substantial reform as intolerable capitulation.

For Northern Ireland to have a long-term future as a separate entity, substantial reforms must be enacted and every constituency must be welcomed into the management of the region. By remaining incapable of accepting this logic and by frustrating its accomplishment, hard-line unionism provides us with one of the most amazing of paradoxes - they reinforce the claim that the 6-County state has not got a long-term future as a separate entity.

**I**t is important though that this fact does not become a cause for inertia. The northern state will not dissolve by itself nor through republicans working it. Republicanism, because it is about something radically different from any of that, still faces the task of breaking the political connection with London and establishing an island wide democracy in Ireland. For republicanism, this remains the historic task and one which remains uncompleted.

# EDITORIAL

The reaction to the first issue of *Fourthwrite* was encouraging. There were supporters and detractors of the views expressed and that was welcome. The essence of mature debate is being afforded the time and space to articulate one's point of view and at the same time having the maturity to accept that others have the same inalienable right to disagree in a constructive manner and to set out their own perspective. To blandly cast aside another's considered analysis as being symptomatic of some form of 'pique', as one critic stated, is hardly scientific and probably says more of the troubled commentator who made it.

Throughout this past thirty years all of us at one time or another have provided, through our energy, our ideas and our efforts the fuel which kept the revolutionary fire burning. Like all fires it needs to be replenished constantly with renewed energy and fresh ideas. Without this our fire will suffocate and die. The members of the Republican Writers Group will continue to strive for thorough going debate on the way ahead. As part of a wider debate we offer the pages of *Fourthwrite* as a forum for anyone who feels s/he has something to offer. Material shall be evaluated solely on its quality and not its content. For this purpose, articles submitted but not carried shall appear on our web page.

One thing we do say though is that we have received a large number of compliments and suggestions from those who insist that for one reason or another they wish to remain anonymous. We shall always respect peoples right to privacy and will not attempt to take unfair advantage of what is said to us in confidence. Nevertheless, the real impact of a platform such as this is when republicans take their convictions into the open arena and speak their mind before the whole world.

There is no point in saying in a few years time that you always felt that something was amiss but that you considered it best to stay silent. Silence can border on complicity and where it prevails it is in that mute corner where the battle is lost. If those who know better remain silent, they are almost as responsible for the outcome as those who effect the situation.

Stand up, speak out and be counted

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*The Irish Republican Writers' Group is a body open to any republican thinker who believes in the unfettered expression of republican ideas.*

*The purpose is to facilitate discussion and analysis of republican ideas. Of primary interest are those ideas which deal with strategic matters and which address the question 'what is to be done?'*

*However, this paper is open to all republican ideas and related contributions, regardless of the field - political, cultural, social or economic.*

# Those Coalition Rules

by Tommy McKearney

Whenever a political party insists on retaining something as an option, it usually means that given the opportunity they will take that option. In reality, things could not be otherwise. What party could consider doing something that is fundamentally at odds with its basic strategy?

Politicians may play "hard to get" in order to drive a bargain or some win tactical advantage. Such manoeuvres are only possible though when the leadership of a party is able to contemplate making a deal. If political differences were irreconcilable there would be no value in confusing the party's faithful supporters and activists by sending out disturbing signals.

The recent decision by Sinn Fein at its Ard Fheis to refer the question of entering coalition means that if they are asked to so - they will. By reserving the right to convene a special conference, Sinn Fein is keeping its options open. It is disingenuous of the party's president to say that he may not wish to enter coalition with another party. He did after all put his personal authority behind the motion to reserve the option of governing in tandem with whomsoever.

There is nothing new of course about what Sinn Fein is proposing. In fact it is almost a constant of political life in Southern Ireland that a smaller, one time radical party joins a government coalition. It is also just as constant a fact of political life that the smaller coalition party eventually loses its "vinegar" while in office. Indeed, this course has been so often followed that the only surprise is that there are still those who protest that "it won't happen to us". Perhaps not and perhaps the old cat will stop supping cream.

The difficulty with entering coalition

is that it involves a trade-off. In order for two or more parties to form an alliance, it is necessary that there is an agreed programme and an agreement on a share out of ministerial responsibility. Many innocents believe that at the pre-government forming or bargaining stage, it is possible to improve conditions on the administration to be. Such people envisage a scenario where five or six deputies holding the balance of power are able to write the agenda for the new cabinet. The reality is quite different.

A substantially larger coalition partner would commit political suicide by accepting the junior partner's entire programme. Why would anyone bother to vote for a party that merely acted as lobby fodder for its smaller ally? It may be argued of course that the junior partner might have only one core demand and that this would be easier for the larger party to accept.

*"..entering coalition involves a trade-off.."*

This might be possible under some circumstances but it really depends on what that core demand would be. No large party is ever likely to concede a major point of policy.

When this happens and therefore deprived of any chance or hope to affect the key elements of its programme, junior coalition partners then work to increase the party's influence and profile. This can only

be achieved by working diligently within their allocated department of state. Before long the only practical remaining goal is to expand the party and put former objectives on the long finger. As the Austrian social democrats used to say, "maintaining the Movement becomes the objective".

A genuinely revolutionary republican political party would set out its non-negotiable agenda and work to have it implemented. The sine qua non of such a party would be its unwillingness to dilute its core programme on one hand and its commitment to enact that programme on the other hand.

In order to build a new and radical republicanism it is necessary to demand full, properly paid employment at all times as a constitutional right. There must also be a constitutionally guarded right to decent housing and the constitution must declare that the state will offer lifelong education as a right along side adequate and equal health-care. There must moreover be a clear declaration that all privilege due to class, creed or colour or wealth is inimical to the constitution of an Irish republic.

Radical republicanism must finally indicate how such a programme might be made a reality. It is not enough to have revolutionary programmes serve as eye-catching wallpaper in constituency offices while awaiting the coalition Mercedes to take one into middle-class conformity. It has to be said that this stricture applies to all and not just to those accepting parliamentary office.

*Tommy McKearney is a former political prisoner and a founding member of the IRWG*

# The Nomenclature of Groups

by Councillor Sean Hayes

The nomenclature of groups, organisations etc., is more than a lexicographer's dilemma. Labels, names and terms denote characteristics and properties that help form opinions and viewpoints. It is, therefore, important that political groupings are correctly named and labelled.

There is currently a helpful media who allow self proclaimed 'dissident' groupings to label and name themselves. This is contrary to their attitude to the IRA who they have insisted for thirty years be referred to as 'Provos' and never as Oglai na h- Eireann, its proper name.

Given the unholy relationship between the Brit sponsored media and some of these groupings it is obvious they are being promoted as 'Real' or as some sort of 'Continu-

ity' of the Republican struggle. Even a passing perusal of their activities, stated policy positions, etc. shows these groupings to be anything but what they claim to be. They really aren't the IRA and they certainly are not continuing the same struggle.

**T**hese darlings of the media are projected in this manner to sow confusion among the Republican base in order to help undermine the ability and capacity of Republicans generally to operate within their own community. Why else would they be given such air time and column inches out of all proportion to either their relevance or support especially when the representatives of the Republican community still have such major problems being heard?

It is a sad sight that former Republican activists have to go to increasingly desperate criticisms of Republican leaders, policies and, now it seems, personal lives. They have fallen into the age old trap that in order to justify their new found media friends' approval and continually massage their own egos they concentrate not on the Brits but their former comrades. It seems they want none of the responsibility of the struggle but want to direct and criticise, mostly from the security of their well paid jobs.

*Sean Hayes is a long time republican activist and now sits as a Belfast City Councillor with the Sinn Fein party for South Belfast*

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## Meehan versus Regina

by John Meehan

**A**fter the Good Friday Agreement was massively endorsed in referendums on both sides of the Irish border in May 1998 numerous stories appeared suggesting that the British Monarch, Elizabeth II, might visit Ireland. The Dublin and London governments have not announced dates, but chances of an Irish royal tour are becoming greater all the time.

Cheerleaders include Irish News columnist Roy Garland, who wrote "many people in both Belfast and Dublin might actually take kindly to a visit by the British monarch to both parts of Ireland. The last queen (Victoria) was greeted enthusiastically and generally warmly welcomed during a three week visit" (Irish News, June 1 1998). We should recall dissidents who opposed Victoria's visit in 1900 - the best known was Maud Gonne. The British gov-

ernment organised a free treat for 5,000 children to "honour" the British monarch. Gonne and 14 other women formed a "Patriotic Children's Treat Committee" which attracted 25,000 kids. Thousands paraded through Dublin's streets with placards proclaiming "No Flunkeyism Here". The women proceeded from this successful protest to form the militant feminist/nationalist movement Inghinidhe na hÉireann.

Twenty-first century Irish royalists might also acquaint themselves with Victoria's only other visit to Ireland - she came in 1849 as part of a government public relations exercise deflecting criticism of policies that had caused the "The Great Hunger" (Famine). So many citizens had died or emigrated they had no energy left to protest, but Christine Kinealy reports the following black humour ditty was sung on the

streets: "Arise ye dead of Skibereen, And come to Cork to see the Queen."

A final thought - when Elizabeth II proposed a visit to India in 1997, anti-Royalists raised the issue of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. General Dyer, in April 1919, ordered his infantry platoon to fire into assembled citizens taking part in the Baisakhi celebrations. Officially 379 citizens were killed and around 2,000 were wounded. Dyer thought the carnage was a "jolly good thing", and the British Foreign Office refused to apologise for this incident, or any incident connected with British Rule in India.

Activists can draw inspiration from these little history notes, and set about a decent sized protest against any 21st century royal tour in Ireland.

*John Meehan is one of Dublin's best known left-wing activists*

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

# Disarming Republicans

by Malachi O'Doherty

The question of whether the IRA ought to disarm, and whether by disarming they would be conceding defeat, would have been a lot easier to deal with but for the Republican reverence for history.

What the IRA was being asked to do was concede that its own past campaign had been brutal and unnecessary, criminal rather than patriotic. Why else would weapons be a problem? If they were the means by which national rights had been justly won, then they were no embarrassment to anyone but those who opposed those rights.

If the IRA was still the legitimate armed defender of Irish national rights, having already served its cause with courage and distinction, who could reasonably insist that it disarm, even to secure what agreement had already been reached, let alone to help facilitate further progress?

Of course Unionists read the history of IRA militarism differently, as an unwarranted assault against them. As they see it, the past was bloody, their own pain was undeserved, and they could not be expected to seal political deals with Republicans unless the threat against them was lifted. Their myth extended to a sense of never having wronged anybody - honest.

So they were in dispute with Republicans over the past. You can see the importance of the Republican history to Republican people in their commemoration of the dead and in the nostalgic writings of Danny Morrison, among others.

Their difficulty, and it is a real one, is reconciling the Good Friday Agreement with the bloody doings and bloody sacrifices of people who thought they were fighting on for a united Ireland.

The Republican Writers Group has described their dilemma astutely, and I find myself agreeing with their analysis, while rejecting their conclusion, for I am not an Irish Republican.

I applaud the changes republicans have made to their ideology and their redefinition of the Republican goal. It was the only way out of a pointless past; and I can see what a problem history is for them.

I have my own history to preserve too. It is a history which tells me that chauvinistic Unionism would have preferred to ignore me than squash me, and also that the IRA campaign was wholly inappropriate way of dealing with that, that the long war was the wrong war, an appalling waste.

I want to preserve the integrity of my reading of the past too, and I think it is easier to knit into the present than is the historic vision of the Provisionals. I am afraid however that in the coming years our children will learn in school that it was all somehow necessary and worthwhile. I am afraid constitutional nationalism will not have the stomach for a quarrel over history or the vision to find the authority in their own past for a distinctive vision of the future.

*Henry Patterson occupied this column in the first edition of Fourthwrite. Malachi O'Doherty, whose book "The Trouble with Guns" published by Blackstaff at £11.99, writes for us this issue.*

## Letter to the Editor

Dear sir,

Your website is very interesting, although I don't share the politics of anyone I've read there.

I'd be interested to read a response by your collective to the piece by Stephen King who argues that the campaign was 'undoubtedly sectarian' all along. Your man Liam O'Ruairc seems to believe that the IRA planting bombs for 30 years and cleaving the working class had some connection with the 'tradition of the oppressed'. Perhaps he can show how the campaign wasn't sectarian, divisive and ultimately a terrible waste of life and talent.

Was it all worth it? In my view it was not. And this is not the time for resurrecting the whole thing again. Your correspondents seem to fear a sellout on the issue of class. But the sellout is a chimera since the 'socialist' in the 'socialist republic' that the Provs sought was always a pious nothing-word with as much substance as the Holy Ghost. The time now is for uniting people in opposition to global capital as it confronts us in this wee place.

Yours sincerely,

J. O'Hagan

*To contact the IRWG or submit an article please write to webmaster@rwg.phoblacht.net or Fourthwrite @ PO BOX 31 Belfast BT12 7EE*

# Hobson's Choice

by Billy Mitchell

So long as there are sizeable numbers of people aspiring to either a United Ireland or to the maintenance of the Union with the rest of the United Kingdom, there will always be conflict. As a Unionist, all that I ask is that the conflict is conducted through the medium of politics and not by the use of violence.

Bulmer Hobson was a physical force republican who sat on the Supreme Council of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, forerunner of Sinn Fein. Although a physical force man who was cold and calculating in his views on the use of armed force, Hobson insisted that before starting an insurrection republicans should await the decision of the majority of the Irish people. For Hobson, the justification for physical force lay in the will of the Irish people and not in the will of an elite republican vanguard. Even then, Hobson insisted that it was wrong to engage in physical force unless there was a clear possibility of victory.

In his *"Defensive Warfare"* (Belfast, 1909) Hobson argued that it was wrong to engage in armed conflict if it was clear that there was no chance of victory. *"We must estimate our resources and those of our opponents and only venture into conflict where the chances of war are in our favour. We must not fight to make a display of heroism, but fight to win"*. As far as Hobson was concerned the key question to be asked before engaging in armed conflict was, will it achieve our objective? In an address to a gathering of Irish Volunteers a few days before the Easter Rising (1916) Hobson argued that *"no man has the right to risk the fortunes of the country in order to create for himself a niche*

*in history"*. His opposition to the insurrection led to his marginalisation within republicanism.

James Connolly was another republican who believed in the right to engage in the armed struggle. Yet Connolly argued that the moral justification for armed action lay with the people. Writing in 1896 he argued that before anyone engaged in insurrection they should come out into the open and fight elections to gauge whether the people were ready for it or not. *"To counsel rebellion without first obtaining the moral sanction of the people, would be an act of criminal folly..."* (Shan Van Vocht, October 1896). It could be argued that Connolly ignored his own counsel when he agreed to participate in the Easter Rising without obtaining the sanction of the Irish people, but that can be accounted for if Easter 1916 was meant to be a Blood Sacrifice as opposed to a protracted armed struggle.

Frank Ryan, close associate of Peadar O' Donnell and leader of the Irish Republican contingent that served with the International Brigades, came to believe that politics and dialogue should replace the armed struggle. Tom Jones, one of Ryan's fellow prisoners in Spain, said that *"Frank believed that the whole of Ireland would eventually re-unite, not so much by force of arms but through British and world public opinion and by agreement with the Protestant people of Northern Ireland"* (Recollections of Frank Ryan, p4).

It has become obvious to most people in Northern Ireland that no one side will achieve a military victory. Twenty-five years of violence and

counter-violence has not succeeded in forcing either Republicans or Unionists to surrender their ideals and aspirations. If anything, violence has sought to strengthen rather than to weaken the resolve of both communities to remain attached to their beliefs. Where it is clear that military objectives cannot be achieved the sacrifice of life becomes futile and senseless. I believe that Hobson would argue today that it would be wrong to continue with the armed struggle knowing that it could not achieve its objectives.

Both Hobson and Connolly argued that armed action ought to enjoy the moral sanction of the Irish people. The referendum on the Good Friday Agreement was held in both political jurisdictions and the overwhelming majority of the Irish people endorsed the terms of that Agreement. Although the Irish Diaspora was not included in the referendum, there is substantial evidence that the key players and opinion makers amongst the Irish abroad also support the terms of the Good Friday Agreement. If anyone now enjoys the moral approval of the Irish people it is those who endorse the terms of the Good Friday Agreement. No organisation, republican or nationalist, which claims to be acting on behalf of the Irish people, north and south, has a mandate to engage in aggressive armed conflict.

The danger for all of us, Unionist, Republican and Nationalist alike, is that if the Good Friday Agreement is scrapped then the result of the referenda, including the mandate for non-violence, could become meaningless. Yet the desire of the vast majority of people, Unionist and Nationalist, is that the conflict be

carried out in a non-violent and purely democratic manner.

Tommy Mc Kearney, in his article "Republicanism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" (Fourthwrite, Spring 2000) seems to question the idea that "supporting the armed struggle is of itself somehow the essence of republican fidelity". Such questioning, from someone whose credentials as a republican are impeccable, must carry some weight in the debate about the use of armed force as part of the

republican strategy. He is not saying that the use of arms is wrong in all circumstances, but simply that republicanism is not wedded to a strategy of armed conflict. There are other means open to republicans and, as someone who is committed to trying to transform the conflict from one of violent encounter to peaceful encounter, I would urge republicans to help radical thinkers like Mc Kearney to develop a fresh nonviolent approach to the conflict.

*Billy Mitchell is a former UVF lifer and a senior member of the Progressive Unionist Party. He is Programme Manager for a community initiative that seeks to transform conflict through the process of constructive dialogue and project participation. Billy regards himself as a Radical Christian and would be left-of-centre in his politics.*

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## Sinn Féin's Electoral Growth

By Tony Catney

The electoral growth of Sinn Féin has continued against a backcloth of decreasing electoral involvement throughout the western democracies. In the North of Ireland the percentage voter turnout come election time has steadily risen. Sinn Féin have benefited most well from this trend.

Having experienced ups and downs in its electoral fortunes since embarking on an electoral strategy in 1981 the present ascent may be traced to the recapturing of the West Belfast seat by Gerry Adams in 1997. This victory did not arise from a vacuum but was the culmination of extensive campaigning and work made more productive by the emergence earlier in the decade of the Hume/Adams initiative.

Undoubtedly, part of Sinn Féin's vote relates directly to the popularity of the party's analysis and management of the current peace process and the way in which that process appears to offer for the first time a method of transforming the conflict which is inherent in the forcible partition of any country. The way in which Sinn Féin has refused to allow that process to be hijacked or diluted by the unionists has also struck a note with the Nationalist electorate and gives credence to Sinn Féin's claim that the process

belongs to the people and not the politicians.

This coincided with the rise of a monied class, which had previously felt that its interests were best served by remaining politically anonymous, now wanting to assert itself in any new political dispensation. This view I will describe as 'new Catholic money'. Largely apolitical but nationalistic in its aspirations this section of the electorate found much that was attractive in Sinn Féin's demand for parity of esteem and equality of opportunity. It may not agree with the ideological and philosophical tenets of Sinn Féin but the fact that Sinn Féin will stand up to the unionist oligarchy and face it down - Belfast city council as an example - gives this view the confidence that Sinn Féin will ensure that 'the fenian pound will be worth as much as the orange pound'.

Together these two factors have caused a section of the electorate - hitherto apathetic towards electoral politics - to feel that its vote can really count and to believe that for the first time in the history of the state nationalism has been legitimised as a political goal. However, a third

factor is necessary to advance the electoral march; that is, keeping on board the republican base. The importance of this can be seen in the amount of time and energy which the Sinn Féin leadership has devoted to the management of the decommissioning debate which has the potential to destabilise the delicate balance within the republican movement. While this debate is becoming more and more transparent to the electorate as an indication of unionist foot dragging, the leadership's refusal to bow to the Unionist demand has served to reinforce in the eyes of the republican grassroots that leadership's commitment to one of the sacred cows of republicanism.

Despite the unchecked electoral growth, republicans are well advised to think cautiously where it may all lead. Riding the two horses of working class resistance and Catholic new money - unnatural bedfellows - carries with it an inherent contradiction. That contradiction may be masked in a state of political flux but it carries the potential to arrest progress once the political dust has settled. Therein lies the danger.

*Tony Catney is a senior election director with Sinn Féin*

# Breandán Mac Cionnaith.....No Pawn in

*A long time opponent of Orange marches down her local Lower Ormeau Road,  
Meg Robinson, interviews Breandán Mac Cionnaith  
of Garvaghy Road Coalition for Fourthwrite*

*Q/ An Phoblacht/Republican News recently described the Orange Order as a supremacist group. How can any real understanding be reached with such a body?*

*A/ There can be no doubt that the Orange Order is a supremacist organisation much akin to the Ku Klux Klan in the US or the Broderbond in South Africa. If one examines the criteria for membership of the Order this can be clearly seen. A prospective member of the Orange Order must be born of Protestant parents, must not be married to a Catholic, must resist the doctrines of Roman Catholicism and must not give countenance to Popish worship. Let's go back in time some seventy years ago. I'm sure every one can remember a certain organisation whose criteria for membership included being born of Aryan parents, not being married to a Jewish person, to resist the doctrines of what they termed "international Jewry", etc. Sounds familiar? No-one would hesitate in terming the Nazi Party supremacist, so why should they hesitate about viewing Orangeism in the same light? Imagine a situation in Britain in which a racist supremacist order demanded the right to march through a black area. There would be uproar.*

*Q/ But do those double standards not also apply to issues like the use of plastic bullets? Is it not the case that the Orange Order is not alone in its racism - that in fact the British state is administratively and culturally racist when it comes to dealing with the Irish?*

*A/ That is indeed true of the British establishment and it makes matters no easier for us. The truth of that is reflected in the fact that the British have used groups like the Orange Order everywhere they have been. It was the first counter-revolutionary group the British created.*

*Q/ What's your opinion of the decision by the Orange Order not to proceed with its march in Dublin?*

*A/ Well, first of all, a pro-Unionist Dublin clique which has been doing its utmost to portray the Orange Order as a harmless body of well-meaning people received a very great dent to their egos. I believe that many people were surprised and amazed at the depth of opposition to that march. People saw through the propaganda and questioned the reasoning behind the march. It also has to be said that on this occasion it was not the 'usual suspects' who were gathering to oppose the Dublin march. Most twenty-six county Protestants did not approve of it. The Church of Ireland in Dublin clearly showed that they abhorred the political nature of Orangeism when they closed the doors of the church to the order. Many Protestants in the South were opposed to the idea of the Orange Order purporting to be representative of the broad Protestant mass. The ethos of the Order was exposed and when it was exposed, it had no choice but to drop the plans for a march.*

*Q/ Given the brutality frequently used against the residents of*

*Garvaghy Road does the Patten Report offer any hope of real change?*

*A/ In reality, the Patten findings could have been applied to any police force in a normal society. And this is its failing. Patten tried to deal with the RUC as if it was such a force experiencing a few problems - modernising was the answer. The RUC was not treated as a partisan force with a very definite history. It was not treated as a body which had played a considerable role in the conflict which has existed in the North since partition. Patten said 'This a force with some problems which is at point A - it needs to get to point B'. But the report said nothing meaningful about how to get to B. Patten could have opted for a major international monitoring agency to oversee policing through any period of change, which could have effectively been on the ground monitoring policing operations on a daily basis. Patten reassures no one. Realistically, what is there in Patten to assuage the fears of people in my community that another killing like Robert Hamill's will not occur again?*

*Q/ So you think it comes no where near to disbanding the force?*

*A/ It is far short of that. Patten had no inclination to even consider that as an option.*

*Q/ How can you be so sure?*

*A/ At the public hearing held on the Garvaghy Road, Patten and other commissioners were told of very*



# a Game

Interview  
by  
Meg  
Robinson

definite RUC involvement in murders of Catholics and they were asked to come back to investigate more fully. I want to make it clear that local people who testified that night did not make unsubstantiated claims of possible RUC collusion in murders or attempted murders in the Portadown area from the early 1970's right through to the Nineties. The people who testified that night spoke not of collusion but of active RUC participation. They courageously and publicly identified by name and rank those RUC men who were involved in the murders and attempted murders of their loved ones. Everyone present in the hall that night spoke of how powerful and how vivid those testimonies were. If Patten and those who accompanied him that night had ever wished to get to the truth about policing in the North, then they would have followed up on the statements made by ordinary men and women that night – they never returned, there was no follow-up.

Q/ This must have implications for the Good Friday Agreement given the link between it and Patten. Has anything improved since that agreement and how do the residents view it?

A/ Within weeks of the Good Friday Agreement Adrian Lamph was killed by Loyalists at his place of work in the centre of Portadown. From the summer of 1998 we have been faced with six killings by Loyalists, nightly attacks, Catholic shops burned, on-going RUC violence against and harassment of national-

ist youth. What is the difference before and after Good Friday 1998?

Q/ Is it not 'transitional' to something better?

A/ It might be – but when is the period of transition due to start and when will it end? We have yet to see it. However, I can see potential in it. But at all times there is the need to watch the British agenda and British duplicity. It can halt progress and actually reverse what potentially may be nationalist political advances. Nationalists in this town deal with deliberate British frustrating practices all the time.

Q/ Can you be more detailed?

A/ Last year Tony Blair told the Parades Commission that his preference was for the march to go down the Garvaghy Road. This led to a row with those members of the commission who sought to maintain their own integrity and independence. Because of their opposition Blair then sought to shape the composition of the commission in order to ensure that it would produce the determination that he wanted.

*“Treating this community as a pawn in a game is something they most definitely will not accept.”*

Q/ To get the Orange down the road?

A/ Yes. Indeed that was why we attempted, unsuccessfully, to challenge the appointments made by Mandelson to the commission. Given that only one of the seven members can be said to be from a nationalist background and that the absence of women demonstrated a basic failure to ensure even a gender balance, by no stretch of anyone's imagination could the composition of the Commission be described as “balanced or representative of the community”. We had a good case, but unsurprisingly Lord Chief Justice Carswell declared oth-

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erwise. He has only delivered his decision – he has still to supply a full written judgement setting out his reasons for dismissing the case – that, I think, will make interesting reading.

Q/ But it seems that the British loaded the dice in such a way that the only decision the commission could make would be one that the British Government would itself make if it had the political honesty to do so and admit it.

A/ That's right. The commission shall now seek to create the conditions in which the march will be forced down the Garvaghy Road on the basis of the Orange Order posing the biggest threat to public order.

Q/ But will the Order not be more isolated on the issue given that Trimble seems likely to move against them within the Unionist Party?

A/ Not at all. In fact this may possibly strengthen the position of the Orange in relation to the Garvaghy Road. In order to secure his own position in the party Trimble must ensure the Orange get something in return for the link being cut. And that will be even more pressure to push the march down the road. At the present time many people are worried that this nationalist community in Portadown may become a bargaining counter as Trimble attempts to squeeze further concessions out of the British. People here are not pawns in a game; they are men, women and young people entitled to the same rights as everyone else. They ask for nothing more and expect nothing less. And what they have clearly demonstrated in recent years is that they will no longer lie down or accept second class citizenship. People here will stand by that which they see as right. Treating this community as a pawn in a game is something they most definitely will not accept.



# The Peace Process for the Springfield Road

*Frances McAuley writes about life on the Springfield Road*

I am a 42 year old mother and Grandmother. I am also a member of the Springfield Residents Action Group. This group was elected and established at a range of public meetings in September 1996. We organised specifically to oppose the three times a year invasion of our community by triumphalist Orangemen, their only intention being to disrupt the life of the local Nationalist community.

1,200 *homes*, not houses, but homes, are directly affected by the marches which take place 3 times a year, once on the last Saturday in June, and twice on July 12<sup>th</sup>. These unwanted and unwarranted marches pass through a 'peaceline' that is only opened on these three occasions to facilitate the marches.

We surveyed the above 1,200 homes on what we thought would have taken 3 nights but which turned out to be a week long job—the reason being that 99.9% of the homes we went to, the families had each their own horror stories to tell of how they were directly affected. The results of our survey were as follows:

- 1,180 voiced fervent opposition to Orange marches through their Catholic/Nationalist area
- 16 did not know what they thought
- 4 approved.

As soon as the group was formed, we immediately tried to initiate talks with the local Orange Lodge responsible for the marches. On a monthly

basis since September 1996, we have sent a registered letter asking for dialogue to try to resolve what we see as more of a problem for us than for them—not a word in response has been forthcoming.

I say it is more of a problem for us (the Nationalist community) because the R.U.C. seal off our community the night of a march and for hours after, taunting and harassing the local youths.

*“..all these families live with heavy grills on their windows and iron bars blocking a vulnerable*

**D**espite our best efforts to strongly steward the protests (against the march) the R.U.C. inevitably turn on the protesters and serious injuries have been sustained over the years. A bedridden mother's only carer (her daughter) was denied access to her mother's home because the Nationalist/Catholic community is in effect put under curfew before, during and after these marches. A 13-year-old girl was arrested when she tried to get to her home through R.U.C. lines after spending a night at her grandmother's.

Protesters are seriously beaten and

brutalised on a yearly basis by the R.U.C. to facilitate the marches taking place. Needless to say, all this does nothing for attempts towards community relations in the area. Local families living directly at the interface survive in a living hell. The row of homes facing the gate were actually built back to front. What did the planners know?

All these families live with heavy grills on their windows and iron bars blocking a vulnerable door to prevent them from being smashed in. I must point out at this stage that the peaceline gate also has a pedestrian entry attached which is opened constantly; the keys and locks being held by the people on 'the other side'. We are not allowed to even know who these people are—so much for equality.

This smaller gate is how the supporters of the Orange lodges come and go as they please. Typical attacks are paint bombs with nails inside (glass jars, bottles), being lobbed at passing residents and homes along with rocks and bricks. Verbal abuse in the form of sectarian threats and foul language are on a daily basis also; these, however, are directed at the most vulnerable: women and children.

Children out playing as recently as May 6<sup>th</sup> were attacked with snooker balls and bricks by a group of about 6 big brave men in their late 20s/early 30s. At the same time, an attempt was made to snatch a 7-year-old boy—to what end? God alone knows.

This attack took place on a Saturday

afternoon at 1 p.m. On the same day, attempts were made to break down the front door of two homes, one of which succeeded. The man at home was feeding his 8-week-old baby when the door was kicked in—he escaped through the back door. They eventually left the house, after destroying everything in their path. Obviously, a crowd of neighbours gathered when word spread of this horrendous attack and local representatives were also alerted (S.D.L.P. and Sinn Fein). It was reported by a local paper the next day as an exercise by Republicans (the gathering crowd) to heighten tension in the area in the run-up to the marching season, this being a statement given by a Shankill community worker.

When the R.U.C. eventually decided to turn up, they were told by one local woman that she could point out the attackers and the house they came and went from as she had witnessed it all from her bedroom window, which gives her full view of both the gate and wall. The R.U.C. told her this “was not a good idea as it would only agitate them.”

Over the years at least 30 people in my community have suffered death at the hands of the U.V.F. and U.F.F. yet their banners are allowed to be displayed, and anti-Catholic tunes played at all these marches— all breaking the rules set out by the Parades Commission. Military uniforms and U.V.F. colour parties also accompany the marches. What little restrictions that have ever been put on the Orange marches have been constantly flaunted.

Where does this leave my community? The R.U.C. have played a determined role in isolating the community over the years, pointing out homes and people, myself being one whose name was screamed during a march and at the passing of a colour party.

Our main aim is to give our community a chance at normality in the face of other obvious local problems experienced by any community. An alternative route much more con-

venient and viable has been shown both physically and in map form to the Parades Commission, but like out letter to the Loyal Orders it goes unheeded.

In June 1998, again protesters were attacked by the R.U.C., resulting in severe head wounds and broken limbs. Kathy Sheridan, writing for the *Irish Times*, reported on the Monday after the march (29.6.98) “It cleared up for the Orangemen who finally got to parade past the Catholic homes, in a march notable, not for its festive joy, but for the frenzied, triumphalist, head-wrecking aggressiveness of the drummers (playing with such ferocity that one shattered his drum), the

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children being whipped up to roar out The Sash at ‘appropriate’ moments, the sinister U.V.F. colour party (which a police commander claimed not to have seen), the R.U.C. dog handler winking at the Orangemen, and whooping harridans taunting residents with Union Jacks.”

My fervent wish is for my grandchild to come to me one day and ask, “Granny, what was it like when.....?” — this meaning it has all being consigned to the history books, God willing.



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# Discussing the Solutions

by Des Wilson

**W**e have learned some lessons during the past thirty years. One is that any people who can invent ten different solutions for one political problem must be political geniuses. Another is that political differences should never again be allowed to destroy friendships.

The first of these lessons may seem just a pleasant joke but it is not - the really skilled approach to problems is to look not only at all the reasons why the problem exists but at all the possible ways of solving it. Recognising all the possibilities and treating all the solutions with respect leads on to the second lesson we learned, that profound differences and deep friendships can co-exist.

For a very long time we were told that if we disagreed with people we should not be friends with them - political differences lead to isolation, economic differences to ghettoisation, religious differences to segregation. This was a propaganda ploy used by our opponents who knew very well that decent people do not want to lose friendship and may even be forced to hide their opinions in order not to lose it. But once people realise that differences of opinion not only need not destroy friendship but can actually enrich it, then life becomes more free and more satisfying for us. And more dangerous for our oppressors.

People become even more creative and self-confident. And in the long run there will probably be a fusion of the best of our ideas provided we express them. We risk defeat when we believe we cannot express different ideas to each other lest we risk the friendship we built up through so much pain and hope. A

free people will always create ideas and try them on for size. And we have never been short of ideas.

The Eire Nua four provinces idea is a good one, so is the idea of a unitary Irish republican state. Add 'socialist' to each of them and the idea becomes better still although not all republicans will heartily agree with that. But however good an idea, the really good part comes when you have an opportunity to try it on for size among people who know that the only valid reason for getting rid of an idea is having a better one.

Decades ago in some terrible times, including the seventies, a lot of people were trying hard to accommodate each others' ideas - they got little credit for it - and some of them talked about creating an independent northeast where one-time unionists could feel secure and all of us could get rid of the burden of London misgovernment. The Eire Nua proposal recognised why people had this idea and tried then to provide a solution for unionists who were afraid of a United Ireland and yet disgusted with the London government which had done such damage to all of us.

**F**or all republicans the vital question was the future shape of a democratic Ireland, unitary or federal, best able to satisfy the needs and potential of us all. Even John McKeague used to say 'Yes, a united Ireland could be, but we would have to enter it as a free people, even if we are only independent from twelve midnight to five past, it has to be a free choice...' But the propaganda, widespread, well funded and ruthless, said that Irish people and especially Catholics and Protestants could not live

together in peace and therefore they could not work out a solution around the negotiating table. Those who put forward the idea of an independent northeast did not insist that that was a perfect solution - indeed given the history of the near independence of the previous fifty years it could be a highly dangerous one - but they did say that the discussion which this idea would give rise to could eventually lead to an honourable compromise between people courageous enough to bring their own ideas to the table and respect all others who did the same.

**T**he trouble always was that we were not allowed to discuss our own solutions - this is one of the strangest aspects of the situation in the northeast, we are never negotiating about our own solutions. The London administration said a united Ireland, unitary or federal, was not to be discussed, neither was an independent Ulster nor integration with Britain nor a return to the old Stormont regime. Yet these were solutions, good or bad, that we, the people in the area, had suggested. The only plan allowed on the table was the solution proposed by the London administration - which none of us had asked or voted for! - namely, London control with devolved government and contrived partial responsibility sharing.

Unsatisfactory for all us, it was the only solution on the table. London's solution not ours, not the solution of any of us. And with the money, arms and propaganda of the London administration behind it there was no alternative to trying to make the most of it, relatively satisfied that if this much could be wrung from London against its will then more would inevitably follow. Provided

of course that London was faced with people determined to be free citizens, and united and competent enough to achieve it.

As long as London could keep on inventing initiatives which could not work because they belonged to London and not to us, it was satisfied that it could fend off international public opinion and keep us taking about how we could administer their plans for our government. Meanwhile our plans for our government would never be on the table. So, what the London administration is afraid of is that our plans should be the only ones on the table and should stay there until they are either fulfilled or replaced by better ones also invented by ourselves.

That being so, the best plan for us, and for them, is to put all our solutions on the table, respectfully proud of them, and discuss together how we can make the honourable compromises that our people deserve. The London solution can be, if they wish it, on the table among the rest in any such future negotiations. The present political process can be seen as an operation to clean up a corrupt regime which the London administration is primarily responsible for. We are right to do that. No matter who is in power the regime must be cleaned up. Many of us believe the regime cannot bear cleaning up - once you clean up a regime like that of the northeast you thereby dismantle it. While we get on with that political, economic and judicial cleaning up we can also be getting our people together to negotiate all the solutions that we - and not only London - have created for discussion.

We can be proud of those two things - one, our inventiveness, and two, our respect for each other which can and should lead to workable solutions which we can be proud of and London will have to learn to live with.

*Des Wilson runs the Springhill Community Trust in West Belfast.*

There is an old republican saying which runs some thing like this: 'It is not those who inflict the most, but those who endure the most who shall be victorious.' That may have sounded apt at one time in Cork, even Havana or San Salvador, but not in the streets or cul de sacs of West Belfast today. The people who for 30 years endured loyalist death squads, Brit raids, shoot-to-kill by the RUC, now have to endure a new phenomenon: 'the social thug'.

in West Belfast would like to hear it. Even if it is only to counter the culture where a mother can openly boast about how good a joyrider her son is, or a drunk can threaten to stab people (after a man was murdered in his home) then it must be worth a try.

So how much more must we endure to be 'victorious'? How much longer are the people going to be left helpless? There are many questions, very few answers. Maybe through the

## The Social Thug

by G. Bradley

People are now more frightened than they were at the height of the conflict, and they are left helpless despite two murders of members of this community in as many months and an attempted murder in the local cemetery. Some in the area are quick to respond when a republican is shot in the leg by a hood. But when ordinary people are murdered or tortured the republican silence is deafening. This epidemic has no boundaries. But it has to stop, it must stop, or we will have the Charles Bronson type figure evolving and handing out the type of justice the people are yearning for.

medium of this magazine we might get a few answers. Let's hope so, because if we don't, the future in the areas we live in is not pleasant to think about.

*One time IRA prisoner G. Bradley who describes himself as 'a former republican - now a realist' expresses his fears that people in West Belfast are being abandoned in the new political climate.*

There is no quick fix, or is there? Maybe someone will conclude that a few bodies left lying in alleys, or a few families exiled might, just might, sort things out short-term, thus enabling a long-term solution to take root. Maybe someone who reads this has another solution. If so, we

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# There is No Alternative to Compromise

by Sean O'Hare

There are those among us who would regard international politics as a mere distraction from the real thing. They view politics of the left and right as an unnecessary complication, with socialism as an addendum in solidarity with other revolutionary causes. Whether we like it or not, that what has become our nationalist/squabble is secondary to both these. To the outsider, republicanism equates to insular Irishness and nationalism. At its inception, Irish republicanism was based on the opposite, egalitarianism and internationalism aligned with the most progressive thinking in the world at the time. How and why did the positions reverse? Instead of arguing and even feuding over the interpretations and positions in our tribal camps, we should be looking at our standing in the world and our attitude to the "new world order".

We now have, I believe, the best opportunity in eighty years to achieve that reality. I must state here my unequivocal support for the peace process and the efforts of all those parties, working honestly to implement it. There is no let off clause in the present negotiations.

No side can afford to claim that they

have done their best but it just didn't work, the voters will not accept this and will eventually seek alternative voices. There is no alternative to compromise.

Each side must admit that both ethos are equal and none should override the other. The word victory should only be used at election times.

Nationalism and Unionism must be examined to evaluate their relevance within the modern Europe. What is the feasibility of a united 32 county Irish Republic, independent of Europe and with no association with Britain? What is the practicality of a Northern Ireland continuing with a Britain that is becoming

more and more fragmented? Both of these scenarios would leave a hostile, disenfranchised mass of the northern population. Can we afford to sit, arms folded, in splendid isolation waiting for the other side to dissipate or come round to our way of thinking?

The unthinkable must be considered by both sides, with an open and unprejudiced mind. The majority of the Irish people have voted for resolve, and that vote validates the

need for realistic and productive discourse.

If the present parties cannot agree the next step to resolve the problem, we will be shepherded by the Dublin and London governments until we elect those capable of solving it. It is the duty of those who profess to represent the interests of the people of little or no property, to further their emancipation, to draw them from the margins of society and strive to achieve a better life for all our children.

The finer points and meanings of socialism and republicanism are for a less urgent day. In order for even the blandest form of real politics to flourish, as a basis for progress, all radical thinking people must support the parties in their endeavours within the peace process, even though they may not agree with their party political philosophies.

Militant Nationalists are attempting to crucify the Adams leadership as traitors. What is their alternative? Any further attempts at so called liberation campaigns by zealots or backwoods men, will not enjoy the support of the nationalist people, and at best will fade to oblivion like the '56 campaign or at worst disintegrate into a sectarian war.

There are those who call on Sinn Fein to be in opposition at Stormont. As Sinn Fein is not a socialist party, this is not their role. This position must be filled by a left party or an alliance of left parties drawn from both communities.

As the fear of domination diminishes, there will be a natural transformation and realignment of political parties. The old certainties will fade and all must meet the challenge of where they stand on the real politics and economics which govern our lives. None of us have all the answers so there must be no more self-righteous conspiracies.

*Sean O'Hare, is an Official Republican who strongly supports the peace process.*

In a book published in 1996 entitled "The real Irish Peace Process" my co-authors, Joe Craig and Paul Flannigan, and I argued that the process represented a major imperialist offensive, that the republican leadership were capitulating to that offensive and that a new, socialist, political opposition would have to be built.

The first two propositions have been convincingly endorsed by events since then. It's time to move on. The first issue of *Fourthwrite*, I believe, showed a general acceptance even by those of the contributors who were not republican that the process involved republican defeat. We need to start constructing an alternative and it is relatively easy to demonstrate that that alternative must be socialist. The starting point is republicanism itself.

Irish republicanism's history is of a revolutionary and democratic tradition - a movement for national liberation. As such it contains the hidden assumption that Irish democracy should be the property of all classes.

The truth is that this idea has been a pipe dream. Neither Irish capitalism as a whole nor any substantial section of it endorses a programme of democracy in Ireland. On every practical test over the past thirty years the SDLP and Fianna Fail have been on the same side of the barricades as the British, with Fianna Fail mobilizing Southern state forces in defence of partition. Mobilisations against repression have equally consistently involved alliances between republicans and socialists. The Good Friday Agreement wipes away the last visages of nationalist rhetoric and spells out publicly the Nationalist programme, now endorsed by Sinn Fein, for continued British rule, partition and a Unionist veto.

Many republicans would answer this critique by pointing mutely to the record of those who claim to represent the working class. Trade unions and so-called socialist parties in Ireland have an absolutely appall-

ing record when it comes to opposing state repression and defending democratic rights. The truth is that they have appalling records on every other issue as well - only matched by republican leaderships when they themselves come to the negotiating table. Isn't the class metaphor for the Good Friday Agreement the Programme for Fairness and Prosperity agreed by the trade unions in the South? Socialists explain that bureaucrats act in their own interests when the working class is passive and that the answer to betrayal is working class mobilization.

Socialists would argue that much of the British action of the past thirty years was constrained by their private concerns about the possibility of such working class mobilization. It was both within their power and a routine of their history to follow up Bloody Sunday with overwhelm-

into the hands of John Hume.

Again the decisive argument is from the international stage. The fog surrounding the collapse of what used to be called "actually existing socialism" is beginning to disperse. What is revealed is still the working class and the capitalist class. They are still locked in conflict. And, as recent examples like the Scottish Socialist Party and the London Socialist Alliance show, when recomposition occurs it is the ideas of socialism that provide the foundation for such recomposition.

Those who reject capitulation and also reject the militarist misconceptions that led to that capitulation must look to the working class. An identity as a member of the Irish working class offers an immediate alternative to the increasingly sectarian identity politics of the Good Friday agreement. If we go on to ask people to mobilize

## Today is Orange Tomorrow Will Be Red

by John McAnulty

ing force. The fact that they did not is largely due to the reaction of the Southern working class and, more generally, to the reaction of a worldwide solidarity movement which was largely socialist.

In contrast to the British, republicans paid almost no attention to this wider working-class support and did not modify their politics to the left in response. They stayed in their ghetto and when they finally broke out did so decisively to the right and

as workers we must adopt the political programme that represents working class interest.

*John McAnulty is a member of Socialist Democracy and previously served as a Belfast City Councillor*



## Anthony McIntyre calls for republicanism to move beyond both Omagh and Stormont

Despite the release of almost all republican prisoners as a result of the Good Friday Agreement there remain, amongst those opposed to the accord, some who manage to find their way back into rapidly emptying penal institutions. Portlaoise and Maghaberry are now home to increasing numbers of physical force republicans in-

common sense underpin and justify the actions which led to such imprisonment is quite another. What is the moral, political or strategic advantage in being a legitimate political prisoner, if actions which expose the innocent to risks such as those posed by the Omagh or Enniskillen bombs are what leads to imprisonment? In a McCarthyite atmos-

not be so strategically bankrupt that it can accept the notion that there can be no possible alternative to republicans having to administer British rule. Nor can it be so heavily blinkered that it can imagine armed struggle having any role to play in the creation of an alternative. Are things so bad that the choice is Omagh or Stormont?

# Never Reinforce Failure

by Anthony McIntyre

tent on completing the unfinished business initiated and then abandoned by the leadership of the Provisional republican Movement.

The people incarcerated are political prisoners. Republicans are obliged to defend the political status of those imprisoned as a result of political activity. Those who bombed Omagh are no different from those who bombed Enniskillen. Each can honestly claim to have been motivated by Danny Morrison's publicly expressed illogic that if one Irish person feels subjectively oppressed by British rule that person has the right to bear arms against such rule. Being political prisoners is one thing. Having strategic

where where screams of 'there is no alternative' to the Good Friday Agreement fill the air, the intellectual space to think about different options is heavily shut down. When the Agreement is seen to either collapse or is so heavily plagued by a virus of irreformability the 'no alternative' argument not surprisingly leads to republicans feeling that they should go back to doing what 'they do best'.

Increasingly it is being said that politics have not worked. If so that must also include military politics. Perhaps it is certain strategies that do not work rather than politics *per se*. Republicanism can-

For those who think armed struggle is the way forward their very actions make the Stormont route all the more plausible. Whatever the mistakes of the Sinn Fein leadership they are not being counted in body bags on an Omagh street. And until such times as Omagh type threats are non-existent the Stormont option will for many remain an attractive option, if only by default. An Ireland free from British rule is for any republican a cherished goal. But the path to freedom cannot be paved with the dead of Omagh or Enniskillen. While Ireland holds these graves Ireland *free* shall never be at peace.

## Irish Republican Writers Group

To contact the IRWG or submit an article,  
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[webmaster@rwg.phoblacht.net](mailto:webmaster@rwg.phoblacht.net)

or Fourthwrite @ PO BOX 31

Belfast BT12 7EE