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# IRISH POLITICAL REVIEW

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## Settlement ?

As far as democracy is concerned, Northern Ireland is a No-man's-land between two states. The two states threw it into chaos in 1969, and Provisional Republicanism emerged from the chaos. The two states have ever since had the object of tidying away the North, sealing it up, and forgetting about it until the next time.

It may be that they are about to succeed. The signs are that Sinn Fein is about to sign up for a pig-in-a-poke in the matter of policing; and that the DUP is about to accept as democracy an arrangement which it understands very well not to be democracy.

A subordinate layer of local government, conducted under the supervision of the state authority, with its power of decision crippled by peculiar arrangements designed to shackle the majority, is not something which would be recognised as democracy by the political strata of the British or Irish states if applied to their own affairs. But both have agreed to call it democracy if it can be cobbled together in the Six Counties.

The North might be democratically governed as part of the British state or of the Irish state, but it cannot be democratically governed on its own, because of all that is implied by the fact that it is not a state, never has been, and is incapable of being.

We advocated that it should be democratised into the British state. For twenty years we campaigned actively for that object. But the democracy of the British state was unalterably opposed to the project. And the Unionists, while repeating parrot-like that they were British, were unalterably opposed to it too, on the ground of a suspicion of the British state which might be described either as neurotic or apolitical.

The only alternative is democratisation within the politics of the Republic. And the only difficulty there is getting the 6 Counties within the Republic. Once in, they would not be excluded from the democracy of the Republic, as for 85 years they have been from the democracy of the British state.

The Republic would have no reason to exclude the North from its democratic life, as Britain has done.

The reason Britain excluded it was that its purpose in creating Northern Ireland was to retain some purchase on the part of Ireland that was escaping from it. If the Six Counties had not been structurally excluded from British politics at the time of Partition,

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## The Haughey Blackwash:

*Moriarty Presumes*

After the great age of the Enlightenment the Germans brought forth a mouse. That was Friedrich Nietzsche's contemptuous comment on Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation. And we hear that Dermot "the Kaiser" Desmond has said the same about the Moriarty Tribunal following the millions it has spent on investigating Charles Haughey and Michael Lowry.

The media reports have given the most painstaking details about the money that Haughey received and, courtesy of Moriarty, have even calculated the value of those receipts in today's money, or at least Moriarty's version of today's money. We learn that Haughey received €11.6 million. Moriarty implies that in "today's terms" this amounts to €45 million. But how does he arrive at that figure? Moriarty says that the midpoint of the period covered by Tribunal was 1988 and he uses this as his base year. However, if the consumer price index is used the value of €11.6 million should be multiplied by 1.7 to give a figure of €19.7 million so where does the €45 million come from?

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## The Killing Of Saddam

The trial of Saddam Hussein for genocide was cut short so that he could be hanged.

He was hanged for "*crimes against humanity*". These crimes against humanity were the execution of 140 people following an assassination attempt. A hundred and forty killings would be a low figure for a week under the 'democracy' which has replaced the 'tyranny'.

Sir Jeremy Greenstock was British Ambassador to the UN in 2003, and he helped to peddle the lie that France had said it would veto a second resolution on Iraq regardless of circumstances. (What France said was that it would not support a resolution authorising invasion until the team of UN Weapons Inspectors completed their inspection and made a report.)

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by the establishment of the strange Constitutional entity called Northern Ireland, the strong possibility is that they would have settled down within the party-politics of Britain.

Vincent Browne said in a recent issue of *The Village* that the trouble in the North lay in the fact that the Catholic community refused to accept the state. The actual trouble was that the state did not present itself in a political form to the Catholic community, and it was not there for them to accept or reject.

The Catholics did not carry on voting Nationalist, generation after generation, in preference to voting Labour or Tory. The Labour and Tory Parties did not solicit their votes. The Catholics voted for their own community, because the alternative was to vote for the Protestant community. The entities called political parties were mere expressions of community. And so it remains.

Jeffrey Donaldson is a refugee from Trimbleism to Paisleyism. During the years of his opposition to Trimble in the Unionist Party he was generally depicted in the media as being on an ego trip. We never agreed with that. We thought there was an element of role-playing in their conflict and that they had the common purpose of ending the Good Friday Agreement, one from within and the other

from without, and we stand by that assessment. But an element of genuine antagonism appears to have set in. (Trimble was undoubtedly a very bad party leader.)

Donaldson took some trouble to look at the other side. Not a lot, but some. And he is at ease on Dublin television, which Trimble never was. And he even flirted with the project of democratisation within British politics, though he drew back from it. And, having drawn back from it, all he can be is a communal Protestant politician, though with an unusually wide range of debating skills.

BBC Radio 4 ran a little series around Christmas on the theme of: If you could repeal any existing law, which one would it be. One candidate was the 1688 Act Of Settlement, which makes it unlawful for the monarch to be a Catholic or to marry one. There was a brief debate on the question on 29th December. Somebody called Dalrymple spoke for the proposition that it should be repealed. Donaldson spoke against. He said the liberty of the Protestant state, won in 1688, would crumble if the Roman Catholics weren't kept out. Dalrymple jeered that the BBC had to go to Ulster to find somebody to support the Act.

But the reason such a person could be found, even in Ulster, was that Ulster has been excluded from the processes of British democracy (which consist of much

more than voting) for four generations.

What is called 'progress' is not spun out of the head as pure reason. It is something that happens to people who are immersed in the dense atmosphere generated by the actual processes of democratic government. And it has much more to do with the fashions and clichés and shibboleths of that process, than with reason.

And it is something that cannot happen in the arid routines of communal politics in Northern Ireland, which have never generated a general atmosphere encompassing both communities.

\*

Reg Empey's leadership of the Unionist Party has been largely unnoticed. Perhaps that Party was wrecked beyond repair by Trimble and isn't worth noticing. But Empey has been acknowledging realities in a way we have not noticed before in any leading Unionist, except Brian Faulkner thirty years ago. He acknowledges, for example, that Unionist politicians have had an ongoing relationship with 'men of violence'. It was not an open relationship, like that between Sinn Féin and the IRA, and its existence could be denied, but it was not less real for that.

If Empey had been in Trimble's place eight years ago, and had adopted that approach, how different things might have been.

\*

We have always said that Provisional Republicanism was a specific product of the undemocratic system of Government called Northern Ireland. If it makes a deal on policing now, the case will be proved conclusively.

A United Ireland has not been achieved, but the whole atmosphere of life in the Catholic community has been improved out of all recognition since the early seventies. And the change has not come about through 'constitutional nationalism', but through war.

We opposed the war, though not in the sense of supporting the 'security forces'. We tried to direct all the energy unleashed by the 1969 pogrom into the project of democratisation within the existing state. But we did not go along with the 'constitutional nationalist' view that the only right of the Catholic community in this No-man's-land was a duty of obedience. A natural right to make war was inherent in the circumstances.

The 'Northern Ireland State' was never anything but the Ulster Volunteer Force authorised by Westminster into a police force. We offer the following letter from *The Village* (mid-Dec) as a reflection on that fact.

Vincent Browne writes (29 Nov): *"The problem of Northern Ireland since 1922 has been that a sizeable minority have not accepted the police force, had not accepted the state".*

What was the "Northern Ireland state" (a widely-used term)? It was a police force, and little else. In every other respect the state was the British state.

The Northern Catholics were the only people in a state that was called a democracy for whom the state was reduced to a police force.

The way people 'accept a state' is by participating in its political institutions. There were no political institutions, of either the British state proper, or its reduced Northern Ireland form, in which Northern Catholics might participate. The state was a hostile police force and nothing else, except a kind of make-believe politics that would not be accepted for an instant by the electorates of either Britain or the Republic. And that is why a basic re-ordering of police affairs remains a precondition of Catholic participation in the new scheme. What is real is the police, not the make-believe of politics.

**Jack Lane**

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### The Non-Person Of The Year

*Time Magazine* failed to report they held an online poll for "Person of the Year" and then ignored the results when they turned out not to their editors' liking.

Time's *Person of the Year* "is the person or persons who most affected the news and our lives, for good or for ill, and embodied what was important about the year".

It turned out Hugo Chavez won their poll by a landslide at 35%. Second was Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad at 21%. Then came Nancy Pelosi at 12%, The YouTube Guys 11%, George Bush 8%, Al Gore 8%, Condoleezza Rice 5% and Kim Jong Il 2%.

For some reason, the magazine's December 25 cover story omitted these results, so their readers never learned who won their honor and rightfully should have been named *Time's Person of the Year*. An oversight, likely, in the holiday rush, so it's only fitting the winner be announced here: *Venezuelan President Hugo is Time Magazine's 2006 Person of the Year*.

**Tim O'Sullivan**

## The Killing Of Saddam

continued

Sir Jeremy was interviewed on BBC Radio 4 on 30 December, the day Saddam was hanged. Asked if he thought the trial was fair, he replied that Saddam's guilt was so clear that people were not going to quibble over how the verdict was arrived at. And that, of course, is the rationale of Lynch Law.

Sir Jeremy, who was Ambassador in Iraq for a while under the Occupation, was asked if he thought Iraq was a democracy. He said that certain desirable things, such as law and order and civil institutions, were missing, "but not the fact of democracy itself".

So "democracy itself" can exist without law and order or civil institutions, in a situation of general mayhem.

BBC television reporter, Matt Frei, reporting from Washington on the same day, said:

"American soldiers on the ground in Baghdad are having to deal with the inheritance of Saddam Hussein, and that is a country in meltdown".

Hitler said he learned propaganda methods from England. The public should be treated as children and told lies, the

bigger the better. And this is a real whopper.

Iraq is in meltdown because its apparatus of state was systematically destroyed by the US/UK invasion force (with marginal Irish assistance), and the religious communities in Iraq were incited against each other. There was media talk of civil war within weeks of the invasion; it was said that the Shia had been kept down by the Sunni under the tyranny and should have their day, and general looting and destruction was approved of as a sign of liberty.

Political philosophers over many centuries were of the opinion that democracy, free action by the populace, inevitably led to chaos. The US/UK invasion force (authorised after the event by the UN) seemed determined to prove it.

The farce of Saddam's trial was an Ameranglian, not an Iraqi, affair. He was only handed over to fundamentalist Muslims for killing the day before he was killed. This was done during the genocide trial, and so that the genocide trial could not continue. And so the Kurds had to be cheated out of 'justice' before American complicity in the alleged genocide became an issue. It was a genocide committed in defence of our civilisation—one of many. And not one of the greatest. After all the

Kurds still exist, and are governing themselves and others.

And the exterminated Tutsis are governing the Hutus. But none of the people we exterminated—and right-thinking Irish of the present generation are identifying with Anglo-Saxondom—ended up governing us. When we do it, we do it right.

## EMPIRE

"Every single empire in its official discourse has said that it is not like all the others, that its circumstances are special, that it has a mission to enlighten, civilize, bring order and democracy, and that it uses force only as a last resort. And, sadder still, there always is a chorus of willing intellectuals to say calming words about benign or altruistic empires:"

Edward W. Said - "Orientalism 25 Years Later," Counterpunch.org website, 4 August 2003.

## The Haughey Blackwash:

Moriarty has an 'innovative' approach to what €11.6 million means in today's terms. He calculates it on the basis of the ratio between the €11.6 million and the Taoiseach's salary in 1988. The ratio in mid-1988 was 171. He then multiplies that figure of 171 by today's Taoiseach's salary and *voilà!* He arrives at the €45 million figure. But of course the Taoiseach's salary has risen well above the rate of inflation since Haughey's time and indeed has risen well above the average rate of increase of salaries in general making his arithmetic practically meaningless. So why does Moriarty engage in such dubious calculations?

The media has been far more coy in calculating the costs of Moriarty. The truth is that nobody really knows. Here is what the *Sunday Independent* says in its editorial of 24th December 2006:

"The cost so far of this part of the inquiry is €25m. But as 66 different parties were granted legal representation—who will now be seeking their costs—the taxpayers' burden is set to soar."

Presumably "*this part of the inquiry*" means the part of the inquiry specifically relating to Haughey. Liam Collins on the same page of the newspaper has a different estimate of the costs:

"But it is something of a mystery as to why it took nine years and over €60m (and rising) for Judge Moriarty to give his verdict on the lifestyle of the flawed Taoiseach."

We have already had the McCracken Tribunal on Haughey and Lowry and before that there was the Buchanan Tribunal, so what has the Moriarty Tribunal added to the sum of our knowledge? If the media reports are anything to go by the answer must be zero.

Since McCracken, it was well established that Haughey received large sums of money from wealthy benefactors. There are plenty of precedents for this in history such as Winston Churchill and Benjamin Disraeli. The real question is: did the benefactors receive specific favours in return for that money? The Moriarty inquiry seems to have conducted exhaustive investigations and has an opinion on everything. For example the Revenue's dealings with Haughey were "*unimpressive*". Nevertheless, "*...the tribunal is satisfied that Revenue neither sought nor did in fact extend untowardly favourable treatment to Mr Haughey*"

*continued*

(*Village*, 21-27 December 2006). According to *The Irish Times* (20.12.06) Moriarty has strong views on the performance of Allied Irish Banks:

"Mr Justice Moriarty says the bank took no action to curb Mr Haughey's mounting debt in the 1970s, exhibited a marked deference to him and was disinclined to address or control his excesses as a banking customer."

All very interesting, but what business is it of Moriarty? It wasn't Haughey who saved AIB from bankruptcy. That was Garret FitzGerald who, after retiring from politics, had a substantial loan written off by the bank. When the matter became known about, the loan was subsequently repaid by his millionaire son Mark.

Moriarty also has views about what might have been.

"The tribunal heard evidence in relation to three possible favours to donors by Mr Haughey, and found against him in relation to two. But in a very damaging finding it said that this did not mean that other acts and decisions of Mr Haughey's over the course of his career were "not devoid of infirmity" (*The Irish Times*, 20.12.06).

So, after all the millions spent by the Tribunal, the question of possible favours arises in three cases. But Moriarty and the media have not confined themselves to these three cases. A large proportion of the coverage related to the money raised for Brian Lenihan's liver transplant. The fund raising was initiated by Haughey and the claim of Moriarty is that some of the money was diverted for Haughey's benefit. No one claims that anything that Haughey did resulted in anything less than the best treatment for Lenihan. The Lenihan family regard the matter as closed. Both Brian Lenihan and Charles Haughey are dead. Conor Lenihan said that, if any private individual feels aggrieved at the way the money was spent, that is a matter for that person to pursue in whatever way he sees fit. The Haughey family believes that not all the money spent on sending Lenihan and his wife to the United States, and Lenihan's treatment, was formally accounted for as expenses, and therefore the costs of the undertaking were not fully recorded. The dispute, in so far as there is a dispute, amounts to tens of thousands among private individuals. Again the question must be asked as to what business

Moriarty has in investigating this.

The three possible favours that were investigated relate to:

- 1) Glen Ding Wood
- 2) The sale of passports
- 3) The Dunne Family Trust

Regarding Glen Ding Wood Moriarty found no evidence of corruption relating to Haughey.

Regarding the alleged sale of passports, Moriarty claims that there was a payment of £50,000 from the late Mahmoud Fustok. This money was supposed to have been paid for a horse. Moriarty claims that this sum did not represent a payment to Mr Haughey for a horse. But, according to *Village* (21-27 December 2006), Moriarty also concludes that, if it did, the non-existent horse (Shergar, perhaps) wasn't worth that amount.

According to *The Irish Times* (20.12.06), the Haughey family claim that "*all of the evidence available to the tribunal supports the evidence that a sale involving a horse took place between the late Mr Mahmoud Fustok and Abbeville Stud*".

The question regarding the horse involves tens of thousands but the most serious allegation is that Haughey attempted to reduce the Dunne Family's tax liability following the receipt of IR£2 million from the Dunes between 1987 and 1993.

The possible tax liability of the Dunne family became an affair of State in the 1980s because of the amount involved in that era of high public debt. The tax liability arose from the setting up of a Trust in 1964, which was due to expire in March 1985. Subsequent to the setting up of the Trust the tax laws changed, which resulted in a possible liability which would not otherwise have occurred.

It appears that it was by no means clear as to whether a liability was in fact due because the legislation was introduced after the setting up of the Trust. However, the initial estimate from the Revenue Commissioners was £38.8 million, which represented a sizeable proportion of the value of the Trust of £120 million. It was thought at the time that the only way that the Dunes could pay this back was through raising the money publicly (i.e. diluting the family ownership of the Dunes Business) or selling off a portion of the business. In short, the matter had very serious implications for the largest Irish-owned Retail chain in a business which was beginning to see incursions from foreign owned Supermarkets.

Haughey asked the then head of the Revenue Commissioners, Seamus

Pairceir, to meet Ben Dunne. According to *The Irish Times* (22.12.06):

"...the chairman of the Moriarty tribunal, Mr Justice Moriarty, found that there was a real and tangible benefit for him, in that it provided Dunne with an option that had not previously been available to him."

But Colm Keena in the same report seems to indicate that the Fine Gael Finance Minister did exactly the same:

"An early contact in the matter was between trustee Frank Bowen and Dukes. The meeting was organised by the late Hugh Coveney TD and Mr Dunne attended. Dukes expressed the view that the group could fund the tax bill. After the meeting he told Bowen that Pairceir would be in contact, and that how the matter was handled was a matter for the Revenue and not for him as Minister."

Nevertheless, the future Fine Gael leader offered Dunne the "*real and tangible benefit*" of a meeting with the head of the Revenue Commissioners before Haughey was involved.

Following Haughey's suggestion that Pairceir meet Dunne (a meeting which Pairceir told the Tribunal he intended to have anyway) there was some serious "*horse trading*" (in the metaphorical sense as distinct from the metaphysical sense mentioned earlier).

Pairceir made an offer to reduce the liability to £23.6 million and then further reduced the liability to £16 million. Why did Pairceir do this? Practically all the media coverage suggests that the reason was the corrupt influence of Haughey. In Colm Keena's article, for example the opening paragraph says:

"Former taoiseach's intervention with the Revenue led to an offer to cut Dunnes Stores tax bill by £22.8m, the tribunal found, writes Colm Keena, Public Affairs Correspondent" (*The Irish Times*, 22.12.06).

But, as far as it can be discerned from the media coverage, the Tribunal did not say that Haughey influenced the negotiations between Pairceir and Dunne. There is another perfectly logical explanation for the behaviour of Pairceir. As the negotiations developed, it became very clear that the legal foundation for the tax liability was very shaky. Pairceir knew this and not only did Pairceir know this but so did Ben Dunne. And that is why Dunne **rejected** the offer to reduce the tax bill to £16 million. And it turns out that Dunne was right to reject Pairceir's offer because when the case went before the Appeal Commissioners the Dunnes **won**, and the bill was dropped.

It is difficult to disagree with the Haughey family's view that the findings

of the Moriarty Tribunal are unfounded on the basis of the evidence. It also made the following pertinent points:

"...the family stated that at no stage was Mr Haughey ever made aware before he died of the proposed findings of the tribunal and never was it communicated to him by the tribunal that adverse opinions were to be made against him.

"If he had been made so aware in 2001 (when his dealings with the Tribunal ended), it would have given him an opportunity of dealing with each of those allegations and of answering them or tendering such evidence as might be useful for the tribunal to consider", it submitted" (*The Irish Times*, 20.12.06).

So what has it all been about? Ben Dunne thinks he knows the answer. In a *Sunday Independent* interview with Jody Corcoran (24.12.06), he contrasts the treatment of his evidence with that of Peter Sutherland whose involvement arose as part of inquiries into possible payments to public office holders from the Ansbacher accounts. First, here is what Moriarty says about Dunne's evidence:

"While it is accepted that Mr Dunne was a courteous witness, and one who regularly attended public sittings when requested to do so, the tribunal cannot accept what has been conveyed to it, in submissions and medical reports furnished on his behalf, to the effect that several instances of further payments on his part discovered by the tribunal had eluded his memory."

And now here is what Moriarty says about Sutherland's evidence:

"Even after careful consideration of the evidence and such documents as were to hand including such documents that were found and produced after the evidence was heard... the understandably imperfect recollections of Mr Sutherland... and the limited documentation leave elements of confusion and uncertainty over the matter, and inhibit the degree of confidence with which findings can be made."

Could the different treatment be explained by the snobbishness of old money against those who are associated with trade?

If it is a choice between the squeaks of Moriarty and the deeds of the former Taoiseach, the *Irish Political Review* finds in favour of Haughey.

**PS** Dermot Desmond issued a statement on the Moriarty Report. The *Irish Times* reported this fact and gave a snippet from it, with the comment:

"Elements of Mr Desmond's strongly-worded statement are not being reported in *The Irish Times* on legal advice..." (21.12.06).

This was written by Colm Keena, and no doubt endorsed by Editor Geraldine Kennedy, the heroes of the Ahern 'revelations' stolen from the Mahon Tribunal. Was this legal pretext used to curry favour with the Tribunal establishment in view of possible forthcoming prosecutions, or was the Desmond statement really libellous? This magazine determined to try to find out.

We tried to trace Mr. Desmond's full statement on the Internet, but were unable to find the full text, though it appears that it was read out on radio.

The *Irish Times* article did include Desmond's statement that—

"I am thrilled at the nine years and millions of euros the tribunal spent to verify the information, which I issued in press statements in January 1998,"

Here are the additional pieces of Desmond's statement which we found and which were too strong for the *Irish Times* to publish:

"He then criticised the Moriarty legal team for the length of time they had taken and said the inquiry should have been completed at "a fraction of the cost".

He said it was "ironic" that last week's report drew an analogy between the payments he made to Haughey and the taoiseach's salary, "when each of the tribunal counsel earn annually almost three times Bertie Ahern's salary".

"If the current taoiseach wants a change of career, a better paying job and apparently no accountability, I suggest he applies for a cushy job at the Moriarty tribunal." (*S.Times*, 24.12.06)

"Mr Desmond said the tribunal legal team had been paid over €19 million and spent nine years to audit two individuals, adding that if he had employed them, he would have fired them after a year." (*RTE News* 20.12.06)

We leave it to readers to judge for themselves the motives of Mr. Keena and Ms Kennedy in withholding this information from their readers.

## EMPIRE 2

"To plunder, to slaughter, to steal, these things they misname empire; and where they make a wilderness, they call it peace"

Publius Cornelius Tacitus - 55-117. Roman historian.

"Sovereignty over any foreign land is insecure."

Lucius Annaeus Seneca : 4 BC-65. Roman philosopher and playwright

## Ireland's Greatest Editor

*Bright Brilliant Days: Douglas Gageby and The Irish Times* is a valuable contribution to understanding the man as well as the newspaper. It is a collection of essays by people who knew the most successful Editor in the history of *The Irish Times*. In the last half century he was one of the two most influential people who shaped the newspaper's destiny: the other person was Major Thomas McDowell. Gageby achieved his influence through sheer talent, McDowell by bureaucratic manoeuvring and a little help from his friends. Not much is known about either person, but this book at least helps fill in some gaps regarding Gageby.

The major (pun unintended) weakness in the book is the invisibility of McDowell. In my view Gageby and indeed the newspaper itself cannot be written about in isolation from McDowell. And yet the British Army Major is hardly written about at all. Apart from a reprint of *The Times* of London obituary, there are only two references to the "white nigger" letter in which the British Ambassador, Andrew Gilchrist, wrote in 1969 that McDowell wished to place the newspaper under British State influence and indicated that McDowell referred to Gageby as "a renegade or white nigger" on Northern matters.

The first reference is from the Editor Andrew Whittaker's opening essay. He has the following curious speculation as to what Gageby's reaction to the letter would have been:

"I don't know what Gageby, then in his second retirement, thought of his old friend after that, but I bet he stood by him, for Gageby was a man at ease in his world. His good humour kept him so, insulating him from the intensities and jealousies that distracted those around him, for whom there was no man so awe inspiring as their calm and cheerful captain steering into a rising storm" (page 10).

What rubbish! There is absolutely no evidence whatsoever that Gageby would have reacted with equanimity if he had known that his Chief Executive was talking to a foreign government in an attempt to undermine him. Indeed Whittaker himself indicates in the same essay that Gageby felt quite strongly about whether *The Irish Times* was a national newspaper or not and found it necessary to obtain assurances on the matter before accepting the senior position of Joint Managing Director in 1959:

"When Hetherington (the Managing Director of *The Irish Times* in 1959—

JM) first approached him it was to become editorial director of *The Irish Times* for the purpose of rescuing the company's audacious new tabloid, the Sunday Review, which needed more readers and advertisers. Gageby said no, but astutely added that if they wanted to come back and ask him to become a full board director, and if the board was truly 'national' in its interests (meaning not west-British) as Hetherington claimed, then he would listen. Hetherington was back to him within the year" (page 4).

The second reference to the "white nigger" letter is in Martin Mansergh's contribution, which is even more curious:

"A meal has been made by a left-wing school of thought of an offer of assistance by *Irish Times* chairman and shareholder Major T. B. McDowell to the British ambassador in 1969 (only revealed in 1999), where he complained that his editor had gone native. Douglas Gageby more than once expressed utter contempt for British Intelligence, and there is not the slightest evidence that he was deflected from his editorial line by any intervention by McDowell" (page 162).

Well, no one could accuse the Irish media of making a "meal" of this extraordinary letter. And what sense can be made of the comment that the letter was "only revealed in 1999"?

It was only after the letter appeared in the *Irish Political Review* of January 2003 that the *Sunday Independent* published details of it and then only in its first edition (*Sunday Independent*, 26/1/03). *The Irish Times*, which had ignored the letter despite being made aware of it, (see letter to Geraldine Kennedy dated 10/01/03 in the November 2006 *Irish Political Review*) felt it necessary to respond to the *Sunday Independent* report with a denial from Major McDowell (*The Irish Times*, 27/1/03).

Certainly, the letter was made "available" in December 1999, among thousands of other documents by the British Public Records Office. But in what sense can it be said to have been "revealed"? Is Mansergh confirming the rumours that it was discovered in December 1999 and was widely known about among a media and academic coterie, which decided to cover it up?

And what point is Mansergh trying to make when he says that Gageby would have resisted interference from McDowell? The contents of the "white nigger" letter confirm this. If Gageby had not resisted McDowell, the latter would

not have felt it necessary to seek help from Downing Street. But can Mansergh be so confident that other *Irish Times* Editors, who were appointed by the *Irish Times Trust*, which was set up by McDowell, were impervious to McDowell's influence.

Of all the Editors of *The Irish Times*, corresponding to the forty years of McDowell's tenure, Gageby would have been the least amenable to influence from McDowell. McDowell did not have a boss-subordinate relationship with Gageby. Gageby was joint Managing Director of *The Irish Times* before McDowell joined the paper in 1962 (as Managing Director replacing the other Managing Director George Hetherington) and therefore was not McDowell's appointee in 1963 when he first became Editor of the newspaper. Subsequent to Gageby's departure in 1974 McDowell had assumed extraordinary powers following the setting up of *The Irish Times Trust Ltd*. However, when Gageby was appointed Editor in 1977 for his second stint, the company was in such financial trouble that Gageby was, in effect, the appointee of the Bank.

But can any Editor of a national newspaper claim to be impervious to the influences around him? Indeed, it could be said that a great Editor like Gageby should be sensitive to such influences. For example, Paul Tansey in his contribution says that in the early eighties Gageby resisted attempts by some of his leader writers to advocate a vote against Haughey's Fianna Fail before the February 1981 election. However after five drafts he relented and agreed to "a lukewarm endorsement of the Fine Gael-Labour coalition, criticising their economic ineptitude but praising their honest effort" (page 138).

Gageby tolerated Kevin Myers even though he was using "The Irishman's Diary", which was supposed to be a social column, as a political platform.

But even if it could be proved that Gageby resisted all influence from McDowell, despite not being aware of who or what was behind the latter, does Martin Mansergh not think it was a scandal that such influence was exercised?

Whatever about Gageby, Mansergh, it seems, has not always been so blasé about British Intelligence. According to the book on Charles Haughey, *The Boss*, by Joe Joyce and Peter Murtagh, Mansergh:

"...firmly believed that since 1979, MI6, British Intelligence, had been plotting the political destruction of Charles J. Haughey" (*The Boss*, page 267, 1986 edition).

Unlike Mansergh I can't claim to know what Gageby thought of British Intel-

ligence but there is no doubt that he was proud of the achievements of Irish Independence. Every essay in this book, whether critical or sympathetic, confirms this assessment. One of the most interesting essays is from Colonel Doyle, a lifelong friend of Gageby's, who wrote on military matters for *The Irish Times* and also served in the army with Gageby in the 1940s.

There must have been a great sense of national pride that following the outbreak of the Second World War Irish men joined the Irish rather than British army in contrast to the First World War. Doyle records that when de Valera and Cosgrave issued a united appeal for new recruits into the army the manpower doubled from the pre-war level. Generations of Dubliners who had fought for the British army were now in the Irish army.

Reflecting on how history has recorded certain matters Doyle makes the valid point that:

"The significance of the land annuities and the importance of the 'economic war' seem unduly diminished" (page 36).

He goes on to give the astonishing statistic that in the 1930s the Irish were paying to Britain in land annuities about "...£4 million a year out of a national purchasing power of about £30 million" (page 36).

According to Doyle the small farmers, who had suffered most from the economic war, continued to support de Valera's policy of withholding land annuity payments. A final settlement was reached when Ireland agreed to pay £10 million to Britain in 1938 and we also obtained control of the "Treaty ports".

Doyle makes an interesting digression into a discussion of the Second World War and gives the impression that his views were identical to those of Gageby's. He makes the point that nothing effective was done to help Poland, despite guarantees from Britain and France. He also points out (as has Pat Muldowney in the *Irish Political Review*) that the Poles were the first to break into the German 'Enigma' enciphering system and praises the Polish contribution to the Battle of Britain. The Polish 203 squadron shot down the highest number of German planes in that battle. He also demolishes the view that Polish troops were responsible for the allied defeat at Arnheim:

"By the 50th anniversary in 1994 the military historians had cleared their minds: 'A shameful act by British commanders,' was Martin Middlebrook's summary in his excellent *Arnheim 1994*" (page 37).

Reflecting on the achievements of

independence Doyle says:

"We are rebuked for not doing enough for public buildings after Independence. The critics don't mention that our inheritance included the worst slums in Europe. The state's priorities lay, not in neo-colonial dreams of architectural perfection but in the green fields of Marino, Donnycarney, Cabra, Ballyfermot, Raheny, Finglas, etc" (page 41).

The interest that Gageby had in military matters and his pride in the institutions of the State is confirmed by other contributors to the book. Regarding military matters Wesley Boyd says that Gageby had no doubts as to who was the greatest military leader in the Second World War: Marshall Georgi Zhukov (of course).

Olivia O'Leary says that he hated *Irish Times* journalists to refer to our army as the "Irish Army". It was "The Army". John Horgan in his contribution indicates that Gageby was not pleased at an article Horgan wrote questioning the need for a standing army. His article was published a week after it was submitted and only then opposite another much longer piece from one of his military buddies castigating Horgan's outrageous proposal (page 62).

Although most of the essays are sympathetic to Gageby there are three contributions, which if they praise Gageby at all seem to be written merely to bury him.

By far the most interesting of the three is written by James Downey, who was one of the candidates to succeed Gageby as Editor in 1986. In my view he accurately describes the political dilemma that the Protestant Directors of *The Irish Times* had to overcome in appointing Gageby:

"If the Freemasons on *The Irish Times* board knew all that, they must have agonised when they made him first, joint managing director and then editor" (page 23).

There is one criticism of Gageby that Downey makes which I agree with and that relates to Northern Ireland. Gageby was a great Editor, but he wasn't perfect.

In particular Downey has some harsh words to say on Gageby and his journalistic friend John Healy's coverage of Captain Terence O'Neill's politics in the 1960s:

"Infinitely more serious was that the paper failed in its duty to the readers by substituting dream for fact in Healy's coverage, and by the editorial treatment of the 1969 Stormont election which put an end to Terence O'Neill's premiership and signalled the coming victory of the extreme unionists. Gageby and Healy convinced themselves that O'Neill would wipe out his opponents, and credited him with wholly imaginary political skills. Most weirdly, Healy

wrote about old-time republicans overcoming their prejudices and coming down from the hills to campaign for him in his Antrim constituency. In all my life I have never heard anything resembling confirmation of this. I regard it as fantasy" (page 26).

This view of Downey confirms my own impression of 1960s *Irish Times* editorials that I have recently read. In particular, some of the 1969 editorials show *The Irish Times* floundering in its attempts to understand what was happening in the North.

Of course, it was not Gageby's misapprehensions of Ulster Unionism that offended Major McDowell. It was much more likely that it was his enthusiastic support for the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association that drove the Major to Downing Street.

But, of course, in mitigation of Gageby, it should be said that he was no different from the mainstream of Southern Nationalism. Indeed, Downey in his essay seems to acknowledge this:

"There is a marvellous paradox here. The confusions, contradictions and departures from reality mirrored the gut feelings of many readers, perhaps most readers, and buttressed their love of *The Irish Times*" (page 27).

Downey goes on to criticise *The Irish Times* coverage of the Ulster Workers' Strike and in my view his criticism is valid. (Gageby's flawed understanding of Ulster Unionism is confirmed by other contributors such as Wesley Boyd and Mary Maher).

Downey then indulges in a personalised tirade against Gageby's management style. I have no wish to comment on this except to say that Downey's views are contradicted by other contributors to the book such as Olivia O'Leary, Maeve Binchy and others. Also, his success as Editor is indisputable whatever about his alleged methods as Downey himself admits:

"For all his flaws and all his eccentricities and all his refusal to entertain wise counsel and all his capacity to be grotesquely and flatly wrong, was he Ireland's greatest editor? I say yes. There are probably at most three other contenders for the title, only one a contemporary; there will be no more" (page 29).

Downey is most interesting on Gageby's coverage of the Arms Trial of 1970. At first he seems to castigate him for going against the conventional wisdom:

"Gageby's reaction to the arms importation crisis of 1970 was remarkable. Anyone who at a generation's distance looks up editorials he wrote at the time might expect them

to have concentrated on constitutional proprieties and the stability of the state. Instead, the tone is one of ‘Aha! It’s all coming out now’” (page 29).

But then Downey seems to admit that the conventional wisdom is flawed and that maybe Gageby was right all along:

“The realities of that murky affair supply him with some justification. We still do not know for certain the full truth of the parts played by Jack Lynch as Taoiseach and James Gibbons as defence minister. I intend to examine the subject more thoroughly in my memoirs. For the moment, let me just say that the received wisdom that both Lynch and Gibbons behaved impeccably is untenable.

“Gageby regarded Lynch with such contempt that he blackballed him from a club of which he was a member. (He was eventually persuaded to relent.) He was infuriated by the scapegoating of the chief of military intelligence, Colonel Michael Heffernan” (page 29).

In my view Gageby was right and his contempt for Lynch will be vindicated.

The other two critical essays on Gageby are more revealing of the writers themselves than of Gageby.

Bruce Arnold (OBE) criticises Gageby for failing to recognise his talent. He also feels that Gageby should have continued the Southern Unionist traditions of the Arnotts, who before Gageby arrived were proceeding to run the newspaper into the ground.

I suppose the question of whether Arnold is a talented writer or not is a matter of taste. Here is the concluding paragraph of Arnold’s essay, which in my view is incoherent drivel:

“Behind the cultivated stance, the patrician accent accompanied by the deprecating, faintly mocking laugh, the sense of ‘civilised man’ adjudicating upon the society to which he never seemed really to belong, I never thought there was much there. I still feel the same about him. And the lightness of weight became, both under him and afterwards, something of a hallmark of the paper he no doubt influenced and changed, to its commercial value, it bank rolled security, but not necessarily any more than that” (page 75).

I think Gageby was right both on aesthetic and political grounds to sideline Arnold.

There are two curious elements in Arnold’s essay. The first is a reference to the *Irish Times Trust*. He has a quote from “a former colleague” in *The Irish Times* who described it “*bluntly in the following terms*”:

“The owners of the ordinary shares in the paper asset-stripped *The Irish Times*,

got the Bank of Ireland to bankroll it and set up the *Irish Times Trust*, and left the former owners (themselves) in charge of running the whole operation. And they were sainted by the Irish establishment for it because they prevented the dross, like Tony O’Reilly, Hughie McLaughlin et al, from getting their filthy paws on it. I have been in awe of their skills for years” (page 74).

The above quotation is an amalgam of half-truths and inaccuracies, the purpose of which seems to be to imply that there was something unseemly in Gageby’s involvement with the Trust. And why is he so coy about naming this source more than 30 years after the event in question took place? The above quote is preceded with a comment that Gageby had “*made a personal fortune*” amounting to “*tens of millions*”. Gageby is the only person named in connection with the Trust.

He actually received £325,000. If it is assumed that he received his shares for free as part of a management bonus scheme—which I doubt—that means that he made a large sum of money, but considerably less than the “*tens of millions*” claimed by Arnold even at today’s prices. A factor of 12 at most (see historical inflation statistics. [www.cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie)) will give an idea of today’s value of 1974 money in euros (i.e. less than 4 million euros in the case of Gageby).

Arnold follows the quote from the unnamed source with the following sentence of his own:

“It is, to me, inconceivable that earlier *Irish Times* directors like the Arnotts would have done the same”.

What a pompous piece of sly innuendo!

The other curious feature of Arnold’s essay is that he holds Gageby directly responsible for the sacking of Alec Newman as Editor in 1961:

“Alec was put under editorial pressure by Douglas Gageby. Gageby sought a significant change in one of the paper’s leaders. At first Alec Newman agreed, but during the course of the evening felt that this threatened his editorial independence and changed his mind, reinstating his original copy. He was removed as editor and Bruce Williamson left with him, in sympathy. This happened not long after I joined the paper” (page 69).

The reason why I say this is curious is that another essay in the book entitled “*The sacking of Alec Newman*” by Donal O’Donovan makes no mention of this. This essay starts in dramatic fashion with O’Donovan vomiting into *The Irish Times* reporters’ lavatory. This was not a considered response to one of Bruce Arnold’s articles that had slipped through, but an over enthusiastic imbibing of the

black stuff.

Alec Newman walked in and remarked both sympathetically and wistfully:

“Be thankful, Donal,” said the Editor, “that you can still get sick. The time will come when you will no longer be able to throw up.”

The point of this story is to show the relative low status of the Editor of *The Irish Times* at that time. He had to share the same toilets with the other *Irish Times* employees whereas the Editor of the *Sunday Independent*, Hector Legge, had his own private lavatory key. The successor to Newman, Alan Montgomery, seems to have had no hesitation in leaving the Editor’s job for a PR position in Guinness’s.

O’Donovan had been working for *The Irish Times* for seven years when Alec Newman was sacked whereas Arnold had just joined. Arnold was a sub Editor while for all but a few months of the seven years preceding Newman’s sacking O’Donovan had worked in the Editor’s office and therefore would have been much closer to Newman. And yet Arnold appears to know why and who sacked Newman whereas O’Donovan is unsure.

O’Donovan’s version of events contradicts Arnold’s on one key point. He says that it was the board of Directors who sacked Newman. Following the fateful meeting Newman came out with the memorable line: “*The bastards have got me*”. Note: bastards (plural) rather than bastard (singular).

Gageby was a member of the Board, but the Chairman of the Board was Frank Lowe, a prominent Freemason.

O’Donovan suggests a number of reasons for the sacking such as Newman’s addiction to alcohol and his disorganised *modus operandi*. However, he does not rule out editorial reasons.

Bruce Williamson who temporarily resigned in protest at Newman’s sacking and subsequently had no difficulty working for Gageby admitted years later that Newman was a good no. 2 but not a great editor (see *The Life And Times Of Douglas Gageby* by Gene Kerrigan, *Magill*, December 1979). However, it could be said that he was an interesting editor. Although a Protestant, his first marriage was to a Catholic woman and when she died he married another Catholic.

There is a myth being perpetuated by current *Irish Times* writers that since the Treaty the newspaper was somehow a dissenting liberal voice in a conservative Catholic society. Nothing could be further from the truth. It consistently supported the most Catholic party in the State:



Cumann na nGaedheal and then Fine Gael, whose first President was the Blueshirt Eoin O'Duffy. The reason for its support for these parties was that they were less likely to loosen the imperial connection after the Treaty.

However, there was a definite change in line under Newman. O'Donovan in his essay suggests that the coverage by *The Irish Times* of the Fethard-on-Sea boycott of local Protestant businesses in 1957 was significant. I agree. The interesting aspect of the dispute was that IRA veterans of the war of independence opposed the boycott, as did Eamon de Valera who was warmly congratulated by *The Irish Times*.

There is a real sense of engagement in the coverage by the newspaper of this controversy, which in my view is missing from its coverage of the earlier "Mother and Child" controversy under Smyllie's editorship. Under Newman's editorship there was also a growing if cautious support for Fianna Fail.

If Newman was sacked for editorial policy reasons in my view we will have to look elsewhere than to Gageby for the cause.

Whatever about my reservations concerning Arnold's views on Gageby, his essay is by no means the worst in the book. That honour must go to Kevin Myers's effort.

Myers begins his *By That Sin Fell The Angels* essay (yes, that's the essay's title) with the following plaintiff and weasel words:

"There were many differences between Douglas Gageby and me: age, politics, accent to start with. But the greatest difference was that whereas I disliked but respected him, he disliked me and felt no respect for me whatsoever. He did not tell me why he felt like this. It was just thus. What follows will, alas, not please his family, and I regret this, because I am in particular a great admirer of his daughter Susan, who I hope one day to see as chief justice. However, my job is to tell the truth, not to make myself popular" (page 119).

"*What follows*" is in fact a sentimental, subjective, nasty little tirade, which is riddled with factual inaccuracies.

Frankly, it is not worth wasting too much time on Myers but the following poisonous paragraph needs to be dealt with:

"So I admired him for his patriotism. But he was still a crook, as the creation of the Irish Times Trust suggested. Did Gageby feel guilt that he had encumbered the company with debts that took 20 years to pay off, in order to buy his shares, while he remained in control of

the newspaper through the Trust? Possibly—and perhaps that is why he allowed the constant expression of Lefty sentiments in the news and comment pages. How could a newspaper which tolerated such socialist thoughts possibly be at its heart and soul corrupt" (page 124).

The facts of the matter are that Gageby was not responsible for setting up the Trust. Gageby was never a member of the Trust and therefore could never have had any influence over its control of it. The loan was paid back to the bank after eleven years and not twenty as Myers states. And the person most responsible for clearing the loan was Gageby himself who was called back by the banks following the disastrous tenure of Fergus Pyle.

So much for the upholder of "truth"!

The only one of the five owners who retained a controlling influence in the newspaper after the setting up of the Trust was Major Thomas McDowell, whose legacy is still honoured by *The Irish Times* with the title "*President for Life of The Irish Times Group*".

All of this has already been dealt with in detail by the *Irish Political Review* but the dominance of McDowell is confirmed in the most extraordinary essay in the book, which is written by Andrew Whittaker.

Whittaker's essay begins with this stunning paragraph:

"On Wednesday 23 March 1977 I walked from *The Irish Times* to the office of Ian Morrison, managing director of the Bank of Ireland, and asked him to remove the editor of the newspaper, Fergus Pyle, and to reduce Major Tom McDowell from chairman and chief executive to non-executive chairman. The changes were needed to secure the finances of the newspaper and its journalism, I said" (page 171).

The remarkable thing about this is that Whittaker was a middle-ranking executive at the time and was doing this on his own initiative. As astonishing as this, is the fact that Morrison seemed to take all this quite seriously.

Vincent Brown on his radio programme (14.12.06) asked Whittaker about this. He explained it to Brown and the other amazed participants as if it was the most natural thing in the world. Nell McCafferty thought that he was "quite the revolutionary".

Even more incredible was the idea suggested by Whittaker of putting The Irish Times into receivership.

"Morrison disliked my simple idea that the bank appoint a receiver to *The Irish Times*. 'It would be the last resort,'

he said. It would collapse *The Irish Times*'s credit. Suppliers, such as those of newsprint, would demand cash up front before delivering. Also it would raise problems with preferential creditors. It would cost a lot of money. Then there would be the problem of who to put in as receiver. 'However, it might be used as a threat,' he said" (page 177).

This is a complete reversal of roles. In such a situation the last thing you would expect a businessman to do in such a situation is to raise the spectre of "receivership" with all its attendant problems. You would expect, as Morrison eventually suggests, that the creditor—in this case the bank—would threaten a company with receivership. There is no doubt that the Bank eventually did this, which explains Gageby's return as Editor in 1977.

According to Whittaker the meeting lasted an hour and forty minutes. In the course of the meeting Morrison had to express scepticism re: Whittaker's attempted "coup d'etat":

"Morrison listened, made a note, replied that the problem with making changes was 'the Major's contract'. He meant the nature of the trust, which gave McDowell dominance of trust and board. 'We may not be able to remove him', he said. He spoke with finality, even resignation" (page 177).

Let us dwell on the above paragraph and remember that McDowell is the person whom Myers and Arnold don't see fit to mention in their discussion of the Trust. He is also the person whose influence Martin Mansergh dismisses.

But how did *The Irish Times*—or more to the point the Bank—allow itself to arrive at this situation? It put £1.6 million into the pockets of the five owners and then allowed the terms of the Trust to put McDowell in a dominant and unassailable position. Here is what Whittaker says:

"I asked why the bank had financed the Irish Times Trust in 1974. He replied that McDowell 'is a good advocate.' McDowell had put the trust plan to Bill Finlay, a senior counsel who was then governor of the bank. The bank knew it was 'not a normal business investment' but had not expected things 'to go so badly wrong so fast,' said Morrison" (page 176).

I think to say that it was "*not a normal business investment*" is to put it mildly. Bruce Arnold's unnamed source says it was asset stripping, but asset stripping at least has an economic logic even if it can have damaging social consequences. The financial arrangement for the Trust defies all business categories and logic.

Elsewhere, Morrison is quoted as saying that the bank "*wanted The Irish Times to be there as 'at least one voice of sanity', even though the paper was not controlled by the bank*".

I hadn't realised that the inhabitants of Abbey Street and Burgh Quay were complete lunatics! But even if this were true, we still return to the problem of why the bank thought that putting money in the pockets of the five owners—as distinct from the company itself—would help *The Irish Times*.

It is very clear to me that someone wanted to put McDowell in a dominant position and that was the overriding consideration. A second consequence of the Trust was that Gageby was taken out of the picture. After the setting up of the Trust he remained as director of *The Irish Times Ltd* which was subordinate to the Trust, but resigned a year later.

One of the people, who was involved in the setting up the Trust was Lord Arnold Goodman. It would be very understandable if the bank was impressed less with McDowell advocacy skills than the people who were backing him. Goodman has been variously described as being "*Harold Wilson's Mr Fixit*" and "*The most powerful man in Britain*".

There are many other fine essays in this collection. I particularly enjoyed Conor O'Clery's in which he describes dinner with Charles J. Haughey, Gageby and P.J. Mara. Haughey and Gageby spent the whole evening discussing trees. At the end, Mara took O'Clery aside and asked: "*what in the name of jaysus were we doing there?*"

Whittaker has also reproduced in this book some fascinating articles by Gageby on post war Germany, which he wrote for the *Irish Press*.

There is also a very interesting abridged version of an interview with Gageby, which John Bowman did for RTE.

In the course of the interview Gageby says some kind things about Vivion de Valera who was the head of the Irish Press Group and a Major in the Irish Army. He has less to say about the British Major with whom he had a longer association.

Gageby recounts an interesting exchange, which he had with Vivion de Valera who asked a question that many people must have been wondering about:

"Doug are you with us? Or did we merely hire your sword" (Page 152).

For all the errors, omissions and questions that are begged rather than answered, this book provides a wonderful service and all those involved in producing it should be congratulated.

In my opinion it clears up any doubts which there may have been about Gageby. He was a great editor and most of all, to answer de Valera's question . . .

He was without doubt with us!

**John Martin**

## Is *The Irish Times* View Of Irish History Becoming the National Record?

On the 28th June last, Dick Roche, TD, Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government signed a contract with *The Irish Times Ltd*. Under the terms of this contract his department agreed to contribute half a million Euros to a joint fund to digitise the back-file of *The Irish Times* covering the period 1859 to 2004. The project was to be called "*Times of Our Lives*" and *The Irish Times Ltd*. also contributed half a million Euros towards the overall cost of one million Euros. The project is due to be completed in early 2008.

At the time of the announcement Dick Roche is quoted as saying that the project would "*bring history to life*" and that—

"as the paper of national record, *The Irish Times* archive is a rich resource. When the project is complete... we will be able to search for any location, for example our place of birth, or where we live, and all articles about it will be listed. We can then select an article, read it and print it."

He further claimed that—

"*Times of our Lives*, which will be available free of charge to the public and to students in Irish Public Libraries and in schools through the *Ask About Ireland* website, will bring to the public and to school children, online access and indexes of the entire archive of *The Irish Times* from 1859 to 2004."

Maeve Donovan, Managing Director of *The Irish Times Ltd.*, described the project as an example of the extraordinary potential of computer technology to serve the needs of education and research.

Another "stakeholder" in the Project is the Library Council of Ireland, An Comhairle Leabharlanna, and the Assistant Director of that body, Annette Kelly, claimed that the digitised back-file represented the "*most important source of content in relation to the history of Ireland for schools and the general public*".

The "*Times of our Lives*" Project is an initiative of the larger *Changing Libraries* project for public libraries which was launched by the same minister in Autumn 2005 with a fund of two million Euros. According to the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, the *Changing Libraries* Project was established to "*provide access to a variety of important national content sources for use by the public over the internet free of charge in public libraries*" (Departmental press release, 28 June 2006).

On the surface the "*Times of Our Lives*" is a laudable and worthwhile project as it opens access to the back file of an important newspaper for study and research purposes. As Minister Roche emphasized, it will enable schools and public libraries to glean information on family and property history and thereby prove a useful tool in this type of research. However, there are other considerations that, in the context of the current climate of revisionist encroachment into the world of education, must make this particular project somewhat disquieting.

Unfortunately we have the 'problem' of history and the role of historical accounts in any nation's sense of its own identity. History generally has become rather out of fashion and we are constantly urged, if not exactly, to forget the past at least not to dwell upon it. Modern Ireland needs to move on. The problem with history is that it keeps intruding and without it there is no reference point with which to understand the present. Because we need an historical context to help us understand the present and because individuals need to make some sense of their experiences in the present, if a nation, or any community, does not sustain its own history, the gap will be filled by someone else's account of that history. History is not genetic, it is not embedded in the DNA of any people, it is a cultural thing, and, unlike genetics, it cannot simply be left to get on with it on its own in the confident belief that it will always be there as a reference point. Even folk history diminishes with time unless there is a means by which it is sustained and handed down through the generations.

The question that needs to be asked is whether the Government should be co-funding a project that essentially provides an alien view of Irish history. In certain circumstances this could be acceptable. Providing for instance that there was a counter-balancing project which ensured a more authentic account of the past for researchers, schools and public libraries. There's enough alternative sources out there on which half a million euros could usefully be spent. The problem is that the "*Times of our Lives*" project ensures a virtual monopoly, in the context of online access, for the unionist view of Irish history.

But it is worse than that. In the light of Minister Roche's description of the *Irish Times* as "*the paper of national record*" and the Assistant Director of the Library Council's claim that the back-file of the paper represented the "*most important*

source of content in relation to the history of Ireland for schools and the general public" it can only be concluded that it is a widely held view in Government that the *Irish Times* account of Irish history has now become the accepted national interpretation of our past. Not only is a Government department providing funds to ensure a monopoly of online access to a unionist view of Irish history but such a view is being described by a Government Minister as one that represents the national record.

#### HOBBIES, POLITICS AND *THE IRISH TIMES*.

What are we to make of Dick Roche's description of *The Irish Times* as, "the paper of national record"? If Minister Roche believes this he should say so boldly and justify the expenditure on such terms. This, at least, would provoke a healthy debate about the nature of Irish history and the role of *The Irish Times* in that history. However, in good modern populist-speak he conceals his national record description by concentrating on the importance of *The Irish Times* backfile as an aid to personal research, thus "we will be able to search for any location, for example our place of birth, or where we live, and all articles about it will be listed. We can then select an article, read it and print it". All very well and good but surely Minister Roche does not believe that this is the only potential use for such an on-line resource. One must be suspicious that the entire political context is left out of the equation. In other words, we are being asked to ignore the political nature of such a project and instead to look at the genealogical and house-history potential of the resource.

It is a fact that *The Irish Times* was the willing partner in the attempts by British Imperialism to counter the development of Irish nationalism during the 19th century and to destroy the emerging Irish state in the early 20th century by performing the role of Dublin Castle mouthpiece during the War of Independence. After independence, under John Healy's editorship it remained staunchly unionist and remained so until he died when he was replaced by R.M. Smyllie in 1934. Smyllie then "tucked and turned by small degrees to bring the paper more into line with the political realities of the day" (Hugh Oram, *The Newspaper Book: a history of newspapers in Ireland, 1649-1983*). In other words, it had to be dragged into a gradual acceptance of the Irish state as a political reality. Even so, it was not until 1963 when Douglas Gageby assumed the editorship that it began to engage seriously with Irish society. In the course of his editorship Gageby repositioned the paper as a liberal voice in opposition to Roman Catholic conservatism in the 1970s. However, such was the covertly Protestant Unionist instincts of the paper that during

the first real test of its new identity in 1969, the shadowy influence of Major T.B. McDowell (director and later chairman of the paper) came to the fore when he described Gageby as a "white nigger" in the context of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights campaign in discussions with Sir Andrew Gilchrist, British Ambassador to Dublin, and offered to put the paper at the disposal of the British government. The sectarian nature of the management of the paper is also evidenced by the fact that in 1986 Conor Brady became the first Roman Catholic editor of the paper. In fact many *Irish Times* staff believed that Douglas Gageby, Conor Brady's predecessor, was only favoured over Donal Foley in 1963 because the latter was a Roman Catholic (see Oram, p324). By 1986 of course the term Roman Catholic ceased to have the relevance it had a couple of decades earlier. Roman Catholicism in 1986 was already in decline and presumably by then *The Irish Times Ltd.*, felt it safe to appoint a non-Protestant to the editorship.

By the mid-1980s the re-positioning of the paper as a liberal organ was complete. The process was made possible by the fusion of two distinct elements—the residual British Unionist traditions of the paper combined with the emergence of a cadre of disenchanted doctrinaire journalists of the left, who, in their enthusiasm to take on the influence of Catholicism in Irish society and acting on the absolute premise that Irish Roman Catholic values were bad and British values good, took their cue not from the democratic traditions of Irish radicalism but from a distinctly British world outlook and began to question the validity of the whole struggle for Irish independence. The paper was well-placed to become the natural outlet for such journalists and thus became one of the leading vehicles in the attempt over the past 20 years to revise the interpretation of Irish history, a revision that emerged not from within the Irish body politic but in keeping with a distinctly British word view. It is this medium that is now given the mantle of the newspaper of national record by a Government Minister.

#### THE OTHER NEWSPAPER OF RECORD

The description of "newspaper of record" was first applied to *The Times* (of London) which began publication in the late 18th century when the concept of the official gazette and the newspaper had not become entirely differentiated. A formal definition of such a newspaper dictated that it should include a parliamentary report; law reports; obituaries of the great and the good; university, service and ecclesiastical appointments; the Court Circular; and wills etc. However, many newspapers of the period included most of these elements and for *The Times* to

become THE newspaper of record something else was required. Essentially this something else was a gradually won reputation for political insight of sufficient calibre to ensure that the Establishment felt compelled to read and take account of its position on any given issue. It laid the foundation for this role when it became the first newspaper to break free from direct Government bribery and subsidy in the early 19th century. It was also the first newspaper to establish its own corps of foreign correspondents. This ensured that it was not dependent on the Government supply of news and enabled it to rely upon its own independent sources for foreign news. So efficient was its foreign news network that in several instances it got news back to London before the Government's own sources. This is not to say that it was, or sought to be, outside the British Establishment. Even during its most radical years leading up to the 1832 Reform Act and its exposure of the debacle of the Crimean war (when it contributed to the downfall of the Aberdeen Government) it remained true to the values of the Establishment. Its view of itself was that although it was conservative (with a small "c") it was not the mouthpiece of either Tory or Whig and reserved the right to criticize either in the event of one Party acting in a way detrimental to essential British interests.

#### AN IRISH NEWSPAPER OF RECORD?

It's patently obvious that, given the particular circumstances in which the Irish sense of political identity evolved and the way the Irish nation struggled to find expression through an independent state, such a thing as a newspaper of national record in the British sense would be difficult to conceive. The British newspaper of record emerged in a specific environment and one of the characteristics of that environment was a long period of political stability when the development of society was unhindered by outside forces. Another was the emergence of an Establishment which could act independently of Government and bring pressure on the State in a way that did not create political chaos (the event which came closest to destroying this "harmony" was the Irish crisis surrounding the Curragh Mutiny but the fallout from this was deflected by the First World War). *The Times*, since its foundation in 1785 to around the 1960s can claim to have represented something substantial in British society and continued to reflect contemporary events in a way that enabled its readership to comprehend these events in the context of an historic continuum. Since the 1960s it continued to reflect British society but that society began to lose its way in the world with the emergence of the European Union (it has in the past couple of decades begun to re-orientate

itself with a role once more in shaping the world—more recently in tandem with the U.S. in the “crusade for democracy” but by now the influence of newspapers were in decline generally and the idea of a newspaper of record ceased to have any meaning).

Thus, the concept of a newspaper of national record is something that emerged in particular British conditions. This is not to say that such a newspaper could not have emerged in the Irish context but it would have been more problematical. The closest approximation to such a thing, that I can think of, might have been the *Freeman's Journal* if it had continued into independence and began to reflect the changed circumstances of that independence. Such a newspaper need not have been a republican newspaper as long as it reflected the substance of Irish society in its evolution through its nationalist and republican phases. No matter that the *Freeman's Journal* during the formative period of modern Irish politics was the paper of the Nationalist Party or that it supported Parnell and then became anti-Parnellite, or that it supported Redmond's recruitment campaign and then campaigned against conscription in 1918 as the Nationalist Party changed tack in the face of the growing influence of Sinn Fein. The point is, that during this period it was a genuine expression of a substantial section of opinion within the Irish body politic. Because a newspaper of national record needs to provide a continuum it does not mean that it is required to follow a consistent political line from the past to the present (*The Times* of London for instance first supported appeasement during the Second World War and then adopted a contradictory position - it also supported British entry into the Common Market and later opposed the implications of that decision). What it does need to do is to reflect something substantial in the body politic of society and give expression to the changes experienced by that society in a way that enables its readership to make a sensible link from the present to the past.

#### WHY IT NEVER HAPPENED

The Civil War was probably the main obstacle to the emergence of an Irish newspaper of national record. The abiding damage caused by that civil upheaval was the fissure it created in the body politic. The political sensibilities generated in the wake of that upheaval disrupted the political continuum and proved too much for any newspaper to negotiate. An example of the impact of this fissure is the way Irish history was taught at least in the schools in my part of Dublin. My formal education began in Blackpitts National School (off Clanbrassil Street) and then the Dominican Nuns and the De La Salle

Brothers in Ballyfermot. It ended in Mount Street Tech. Throughout that education our exposure to Irish history ended with the outbreak of the Civil War. Any questions on why our teaching of Irish history did not progress beyond the Civil War were met with the response that it was too recent (this in the early 1960s!) The rent in the body politic in the aftermath of the civil war obviously had implications for any attempt to make sense of the link between the present and the past. There was no contemporary newspaper with the standing to make sense of the development. The *Freeman's Journal* was already in decline and when the *Irish Independent* took it over in 1924 it possibly eradicated the only newspaper with the potential to overcome the shift into independence in a way that might have allowed it to embrace, and eventually make sense of, the full political experience of the civil war.

The civil war created a split in Irish politics that continued for generations. If one side or the other had gained a comprehensive victory it might have been possible to repair the implications of that split fairly quickly and politics could have developed along normal right-left lines. But because the civil war resulted in a virtual stand-off, in order to ensure the sustainability of a democratic system, it was necessary for each side in some measure to take account of the sensibilities of the other (by the way, it is a testimony to the democratic instincts of Irish republicanism that both sides, with the exception of some elements, saw this as the only possible way to organise national politics). Of course as long as the participants were alive it was impossible to avoid knowledge of the issues surrounding the civil war but this knowledge only sustained the fissure and as time went on in order not to rake the embers the issues were discretely laid to rest and, in the process, the political continuum dissolved. Thus by the time my generation began their education it had become a no-go area.

#### QUESTIONS FOR MINISTER ROCHE

To describe the one newspaper that, more than any other stood outside the Irish body politic and acted as the enemy of the evolving Irish identity and one that opposed the emerging state—and indeed for some time afterwards behaved in a way that continued to harp for the return of the supplanted British State, to describe such a newspaper as the Irish newspaper of national record is ludicrous. Mr. Roche needs to be asked on what basis can *The Irish Times* be construed as an historical source which will inform and educate students and researchers on the history and nature of modern Irish society?

*The Times* of London sustains an archive which is responsible for collecting

and organising the records of that paper. This includes minutes, inter-personal and departmental memos, as well as correspondence with the editors from outside individuals and agencies. This material goes back to the mid-19th century and, with the exception of those documents that are less than 30 years old, is made available to outside researchers. The paper also publishes an ongoing official history of itself which has reached volume 7 and brings the story up to 2002. That's the kind of self-confidence that any newspaper seeking the mantle of a newspaper of record needs to display. What similar facilities does *The Irish Times* offer researchers? With regards an official history of that paper, as far as I am aware, one was commissioned but it was scuppered by *The Irish Times* management before it could see the light of day. *The Irish Times* is a shadowy institution that consistently acts in a way damaging to the Irish body politic (the most recent attempt to bring down the Taoiseach through the illegal use of a leaked document at a critical stage in the run-up to the St. Andrew's Talks is a case in point.) All of this makes it impossible to comprehend Minister Roche's financial generosity and political endorsement of *The Irish Times*.

Another question that Mr. Roche needs to be asked relates to the more mundane issue of the commercial arrangements of the partnership with *The Irish Times Ltd.* Although *The Irish Times Ltd.*, agreed to foot half the costs of digitising the backfile of the paper and agree that access should be provided free to schools and public libraries in Ireland, what happens the undoubtedly large revenue stream that will accrue from selling it to those markets outside Irish schools and libraries? For instance the institutions of higher education both here and abroad (the U.S. market is a particularly significant one for this kind of product). At present *The Irish Times* online archive back-file only goes back to 1996 and it charges 79 Euros for an annual subscription, 14 Euros for a monthly subscription, and 7 Euros for a weekly subscription. The revenue coming in from the full on-line backfile will expand enormously and there is no indication in any of the press releases or reports on the project as to the ultimate beneficiary. Will it be divided between the State and *The Irish Times Ltd.*, or will *The Irish Times Ltd.*, pocket the lot?

I was involved in a minor consultative capacity in the early days of the plans by Gale Publishing to digitise *The Times* of London. This has proved to be a very useful tool but at the time it did open the possibility of historians receiving a somewhat one-sided view of the past—a danger acknowledged by some academics at the time and since. Nonetheless, it was

seen by Gale Publishing as a product of interest to many institutions of higher learning and therefore offered great commercial potential. The costs involved in this type of digitising project have fallen significantly over the past 5 years and there is little doubt that the digital backfile of *The Irish Times* represents an attractive commercial investment—all the more so now that the Irish Government has paid for half the cost and provided *The Irish Times Ltd.* with the imprimatur of the Irish newspaper of national record.

Eamon Dyas

## Report

### A Meeting On Lebanon

I attended a strange sort of meeting in Belfast on 13th December organised by the Belfast Anti-War Movement. David Morrison gave a short talk describing who was who, what was what, and what was happening in Lebanon to a mostly uninspirable audience. This was followed by a long film shot on Lebanon by a visiting group associated with the Reytheon occupation in Derry. Even if it was a bit too long, I found it quite informative—especially when the Lebanese were speaking. But I got the impression that the people who went to the Lebanon were not much wiser after the event—though some of them were quite emotional.

Then a man who'd been there gave a talk which consisted of telling people that nationalism was not the answer to imperialism.

During questions and discussion I asked what else there was apart from nationalism. I imagined that he might have said Islam, and a good discussion might have ensued. But he just said something incoherent about the workers and, pause, the peasants. The fact that he was here able to speak means he had the wit not to have called anyone in South Lebanon a peasant while he was there!

Nobody asked or said anything about what David Morrison had said or indeed about the politics of Lebanon at all. And the Reytheon occupation, the reason I thought for the whole meeting, was not mentioned. Though a friend of the Derry speaker backed him up against nationalism in the context of Ireland and warned that nationalists always sell out.

Responding to clips from the film showing a young mother saying the deaths of her children in Quana in the recent war made them martyrs, and an animated little speech from a girl of about ten, one woman in the audience abhorred the use of children in war, and denounced the Lebanese for not providing shelters in the way that the Israelis did. She was joined by a Serbian woman who denounced Milosovicz for keeping his armies in civilian areas and anyone else who did the same.

Nobody showed the least interest in politics generally, or Lebanese politics in particular except for one seriously baffled Palestinian. I have been to Belfast Anti-War affairs which were interesting and purposeful. This could have been the same if there had been people there who were interested or had a purpose, though it was well attended. Perhaps holding it in Queen's University was not a good idea. I couldn't find out who or what the "workers and peasants" fellow was.

Conor Lynch

# Shorts

from

## *the Long Fellow*

### THE DISCREET CHARM OF THE BOURGEOISIE

The present writer's career as a social(ist) diarist began at the book launch of *Bright Brilliant Days: Douglas Gageby And The Irish Times*; a collection of essays on the most successful *Irish Times* editor in its history.

Amidst the atmosphere of moral rectitude and political correctness I fell in among some low life elements from the PR industry with whom I felt very much at home. They were able to tell me that the person who was supposed to launch the event, Geraldine Kennedy, was not going to attend because (allegedly) of a despicable contribution to the book by Kevin Myers. The Gageby family had also (allegedly) boycotted the event for the same reason.

But not to worry there were plenty of interesting people there. The very charming and attractive Olivia O'Leary told me that her husband Paul Tansey wrote leaders for Gageby in the early eighties. Most of the leader writers at that time were anti-Haughey and they wanted to advocate a vote against Fianna Fail before one of the elections in that unstable era. Gageby resisted this pressure at first, but O'Leary, who seems to be very anti-Haughey herself, told me that he eventually relented. She gave this as an edifying example of Gageby's ability to listen.

The very intellectual Martin Mansergh was also at the event but left early so I didn't get an opportunity to thank him for his heroic efforts in bringing the *Irish Political Review* to a new audience.

Paddy Prendiville, the Editor of the *Phoenix* stopped for a few words. Kevin Myers wasn't there, nor did I see Gageby's successor Conor Brady. Could the latter have been part of the alleged boycott?

In the absence of Kennedy, it was left to Editor of the book Andrew Whittaker to give an urbane and witty speech, part of which was taken up by an explanation as to why Kennedy was unable to attend. She was recovering from a hip operation and had attended another book launch earlier that day, but a second book launch would have been too much for her. The little soldier! I could see that my PR pals were weeping with emotion.

On the way out I met the debonair Wesley Boyd who has a mischievous glint in his eyes and a very strange sense of humour. Andrew Whittaker introduced me as someone who writes for "*an extreme left wing publication*".

Boyd responded: "Oh. *The Irish Times*?"

*Au contraire!*

### FROM BORAT TO BORING

A brief glance of the Gageby book indicates that the second worst essay is written by Bruce Arnold. Arnold is incapable of being either the best or the worst at anything he does. He will always be mediocre.

The worst essay is written by Kevin Myers. Some of my Fianna Fail friends have expressed disappointment that Bertie Ahern spoke at the launch of Myers's recent book. But at least Myers knows his place in the world. Here is Myers in a recent article on Ahern:

"He is unquestionably the most popular and successful Taoiseach in the history of the state. He truly is a remarkable man. Perhaps the most distinguishing feature about him is a sense of inviolate decency....Bertie's secret is probably that he is actually a great man...He has the greatness gene..." etc. etc. (*Irish Independent*, 13.12.06).

Maybe we should all lighten up. I was thinking of going to see the film *Borat* until someone explained the plot. It's about a man from a strange land who arrives in a country that he doesn't understand and commits one egregious *faux pas* after another. But why see *Borat* when you can read Myers in the *Irish Independent*?

The same could almost be said of Bruce Arnold. But Bruce is not Borat. He's just boring, boring, boring.

### CARTER ON PALESTINE

Nobody could accuse ex-US President Jimmy Carter of being boring. This is how he describes his recent book *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*:

"The book describes the abominable oppression and persecution in the occupied Palestinian territories, with a rigid system of required passes and strict segregation between Palestine's citizens and Jewish settlers in the West Bank. An enormous imprisonment wall is now under construction, snaking through what is left of Palestine, to encompass more and more land for Israeli settlers. In many ways, this is more oppressive than what blacks lived under in South Africa during apartheid. I have made it clear that the motivation is not racism but the desire of a minority of Israelis to confiscate and colonise choice sites in Palestine, and then to forcefully suppress any objections from the displaced citizens" (*Los Angeles Times*, 10.12.06).

### YEGOR GAIDAR

Another person who couldn't be accused of being boring is Yegor Gaidar.

The recent spate of poisoning of Russian nationals has given rise to a number of conspiracy theories. It is therefore interesting to read what one of the alleged victims had to say. Although

the cause of his collapse in this country is disputed, Gaidar claims it was indeed as a result of poisoning. In the *Financial Times* he also had an interesting opinion as to who was responsible:

“I rejected the idea of complicity of the Russian leadership almost immediately. After the death of Alexander Litvinenko on November 23 in London, another violent death of a famous Russian on the following day is the last thing that the Russian authorities would want. In case of an explosion or skirmish in Moscow, one would think about radical nationalistic thugs first of all. But Dublin? Poisoning? This is obviously not their style.

Most likely that means that some obvious or hidden adversaries of the Russian authorities stand behind the scenes of this event, those who are interested in further radical deterioration of relations between Russia and the west” (*Financial Times*, 7.7.12).

#### CHUMP OF THE YEAR

Congratulations to Mark FitzGerald, the son of Garret, who was considered among the top ten entrepreneurs by *Business Plus* Magazine (December, 2006). *Business Plus* tells us that the success of his company *Sherry FitzGerald* estate agents was “fuelled by a home run on the internet”. *Sherry FitzGerald*, which owned 23.5% of the property web site *MyHome.ie* was the main beneficiary of its sale to *The Irish Times*.

*Business Plus* was very impressed with FitzGerald’s selling skills. *MyHome.ie* had a net worth of 6.3 million euros at the end of 2005 and made an operating profit of a mere 1.7 million in that year at the height of the property market. And yet it was sold to *The Irish Times* for a cool 50 million!

If FitzGerald is one of the entrepreneurs of the year, who is the chump of the year?

#### BRITS OUT!

Bertie Ahern is certainly not a chump as no doubt Kevin Myers will confirm. His refusal to bend to pressure from the health insurance company BUPA proves it. He also put the European Commission in its place. When asked about a letter the Commission sent to the Minister for Health, Ahern responded by saying: “The Commission are always writing letters.” (*The Irish Times*, 16.12.06).

At an EU summit in Brussels he explained the situation in his own inimitable style:

“I’ll look after the people who need looking after. If insurance is all about going out and getting 100 people who are unlikely to get sick for the next 10 years so they make greater profits, that’s great, that’s marvellous. And I am meant to be impressed by that argument?”

“And then you get 100 people who are like myself and half-crooked and we

have to pay far more for it. That’s fair? Market forces? Competition? Who are they coddling?” said the Taoiseach.

Even Mary Harney has accepted that the Irish people want community rating. The announced departure of BUPA is excellent news. Health insurance is unsuitable for competition. The greater the number of people in one Health insurance company the less will be the average costs because of economies of scale and minimal marketing costs. The only way a rival company can compete is by offering a different ‘product’” (i.e. cheaper insurance for younger and

healthier people). Once the Government decided on a policy of community rating and “*riskequalisation*” to prevent cherry-picking, the viability of competition was always in doubt.

BUPA has made vast profits in the Irish market and now that it is due to compensate VHI for bearing the cost of its older and less healthy client base it looks like its going to cut and run.

The inevitable tendency towards a monopoly health insurance company should be seen by the great socialist Bertie Ahern as a stepping stone towards the introduction of full compulsory social insurance.

## Frank Aiken And The Question Of Reprisals

The RTE programme, *Hidden History*, was about Frank Aiken’s complicity in a reprisal in South Armagh in 1921/22. RTE’s website describes the content of the programme thus:

“On the 17th June 1922, a party of IRA men left Aiken’s Headquarters in Dundalk and headed for the small townland of Altnaveigh, just outside Newry. In the early hours of the morning, they rounded up the Protestant inhabitants and began a killing spree that lasted over an hour. Six civilians were shot dead, including an elderly woman.”

“Neither youth nor age was spared, and some of the killings took place in the presence of their families,” recalled Patrick Casey, deputy commander of the IRA’s Newry Brigade, in a statement given to Irish military authorities.

“Recently released—and reconstructed in the documentary—the testimony of Casey and others shows that the attack at Altnaveigh was sanctioned by Aiken himself.

““Nothing could justify such a killing of unarmed people and I was surprised at the time that Frank Aiken had planned and authorised this”, Casey wrote.

“New evidence unearthed in the documentary also places Aiken just a few miles from Altnaveigh on the night of the attack, and helps to explain his motive. A few days before, a friend’s wife had been sexually assaulted by loyalist ‘B Specials’.

““I swore that if I could take it out on the skins of the men who did it I would do it”, Aiken revealed in 1929. He personally led a diversionary ambush of a patrol of Specials near Altnaveigh on the night of the killings: “We shot a few of them. I am sorry we did not get them all”.”

Eoghan Harris seized on the programme to push the Peter Hart agenda in the *Sunday Independent* on 17th December. In a piece entitled, “*At the very Hart of our sectarian history*”. Harris

wrote, “*Last Tuesday I saw one of the greatest acts of good authority of this generation.*” The controls at RTE had evidently returned to the right hands.

For Harris, Frank Aiken represents, like Tom Barry, a nationalist icon to discredit. Aiken was a founding-member of Fianna Fáil, elected to Dáil Eireann in 1923 until 1973. He served as Minister for Defence from 1932 to 1939, was Minister for Co-Ordination of Defensive Measures during the Emergency, Minister for Finance after the war and Minister for External Affairs from 1951 to 1954 and 1957 to 1969. He was Tánaiste from 1965 until 1969. He is an even better target than Barry in many respects—being a member of the nationalist establishment. And Harris would like to follow up the job that Hart did on Barry with more of the same, this time on Aiken.

But Harris forgets the response there was to Hart’s accusations about Barry. Hart did Ireland a favour in raising the Kilmichael issue by drawing attention to the process of revisionist attrition that was being conducted against the national culture.

Harris has been very silent on affairs in Iraq of late and has, it seems, halted his propagandist work for his neo-conservative crusaders and the Labour Imperialists in Downing Street. There is only bad news out of Iraq these days that no amount of media wizardry can conjure away. And so Harris has returned to the democratic crusade nearer home to deal with the barbarians within the gates.

Harris was, of course, an adviser to Ahmed Chalabi, who was supposed to be installed as democratic leader in Iraq with a new functional state. But the peoples of Iraq are now in conflict with each other because the state has been systematically

destroyed by the democratic vanguard and Chalabi has been exposed as a charlatan and a cad.

In the ruins of the state that the forces of democracy destroyed reprisal killings are going on at a rate of dozens a day as Iraq has returned to a state of nature. This is the achievement of the forces of democracy and order that Harris has been championing. In an Iraq reduced to its fundamentals there have been large scale killings of Shiites by Sunnis through bombing, and also mass kidnappings and executions of Sunnis by Shiites connected to the Ameranglian "security forces", as well as high profile cases of rape and murder committed by US forces against Iraqi men, women and children.

Iraq has been democratised into chaos where reprisal is the main medium of politics. But Harris is not talking about that—what *his* boys have achieved—he is only talking about what happened 80 years ago in South Armagh.

Harris writes:

"On June 1922 Aiken's men descended on the defenceless village of Altnaveigh in South Armagh, pulled innocent Protestants from their beds and shot six of them, including a woman, for the murder of two Catholics. It was the single biggest atrocity in South Armagh until the night of the Kingsmill massacre of January 1976, when the Provisional IRA pulled 10 Protestant workmen from a van and shot them dead."

He praised Steve Carson for making the programme and "*recreating the little holocaust in Altnaveigh*". In these days of rogue states promoting holocaust denial, what could be better than a little "*holocaust recreating*"? And, of course, holocaust status is all about special status—status that entitles the victims to become the perpetrators in their turn without fear of reproach.

Talking of special status: let us visit the *Fair (Families Acting For Innocent Relatives)* Website and '*The history of hurt*' from a South Armagh loyalist viewpoint:

"The Altnaveigh Massacre... was the first and one of the clearest examples of ethnic cleansing in our area. It came about after the partition of Ireland, which was accepted by the overwhelming majority of people in Northern Ireland. However anti-democratic elements decided to oppose partition and erase the border by force of arms. To this end the IRA, with the support of Michael Collins and the Dublin Government attacked the fledgling Northern State in an attempt to destroy it and to force the majority population into a United Ireland against its will. In what was to be repeated decades later the republican movement took up the gun when its political aspirations were frustrated by democracy. Many facets of what can

only be described as the Ulster-Irish War of 1922, have been duplicated during the present conflict. The Dublin government continues to participate in collusion with the IRA at a number of levels, and Republican murder gangs are still engaged in sectarian assassination and ethnic cleansing of the protestant population along the border. This was brutally repeated in the 1970s with a series of massacres including Kingsmills, Darkley and Tullyvallen... There is a history of hurt in the South Armagh area that goes well beyond the present troubles. The protestant and unionist people of this area can trace their origins back for centuries and their bond with the land and faith in God has given them an amazing resilience. They are the same stock that went on to colonise and shape the United States of America, with their survival instinct and rugged individuality."

This novel version of history and its peculiar concept of democracy will probably find its way into Harris in the *Sunday Independent* one day. Maybe the South is not ready for it yet. But one wonders how this Godly people came about their land in South Armagh and how they "*went on to colonise and shape the United States of America.*" Did they ethnically cleanse the potential ethnical cleansers by any chance?

That is the ultimate result of the type of work that Hart and Harris is engaged in—where whole sections of human history are removed and replaced with incidents that turn history on its head.

Harris continues,

"he (Carson) did some service to those of us in the Reform Group who have been trying to put southern attacks on Protestants in 1921/2 on the public agenda. Hart's book hit hard at the most basic myths of modern Irish republicans—that unlike the lowlife loyalists of the North, our noble IRA did not kill for sectarian reasons."

And yet, if the IRA was used to killing for sectarian reasons and was motivated as such, why was Patrick Casey, deputy commander of the IRA's Newry Brigade, surprised by the incident?

Some of what Harris calls "*the most basic myths of modern Irish republicans*" are the very things that restricted the Provo war to a higher plane than the mire that Protestant paramilitaries descended into during the conflict. These "*basic myths*" were the things that kept many innocents alive in the Protestant community when it was often a matter of chance if you survived elsewhere.

Sometimes "*basic myths*" are an historical imperative of good order. That is what Robespierre realised during the height of the Revolution in France. He saw that the reckless anti-clericalism of the revolutionaries was leading to a pillar

of stability being removed—namely god. So although he had little time for god himself he tried to make sure the masses had a Supreme Being to keep their feet firmly on the ground. And Robespierre was a favourite of the Belfast United Irish paper the *Northern Star*, if I recall correctly.

If these "*basic myths of modern Irish republicans*" had been removed, if Hart and Harris succeeded in their endeavours to obliterate Irish national culture, what framework do they think the Northern Catholics would operate within when they were provoked into activity by the process of communal attrition they were subject to? We suggest it would be a kind of armed Hibernianism that would produce a lot more Altnaveighs and Kingsmills that republicanism did.

Harris pronounces: "*the truth we have to face is that every generation of the IRA—with the exception of the Dublin directed fifties campaign—engaged in sectarian slaughter.*"

Now, isn't it strange that if the IRA was motivated primarily by sectarianism, produced by their own extreme nationalism, they should be least sectarian when they were most Catholic and nationalist?

I submitted a PhD on the Republican movement, done in Queen's University, to the External Examiner in 1988. The External Examiner, an associate and friend of Harris, John A. Murphy, argued against my view that the people who conducted the "*Dublin directed fifties campaign*" were merely the most vigorous idealists of their society. Murphy preferred to see them as irrelevant cranks and pathological monsters, unconnected to their society.

Now everyone should know that the Border-campaigning IRA of the fifties—people like Sean South, Dave O'Connell and Ruari O'Bradaigh—were Republicans and Catholics of the deepest hue. They said their Decades of the Rosaries after operations and came from a society that had reached the zenith of its Republican and Catholic mission. And they gave up their lives, in one way or another, to its great unfinished business—recapturing the fourth green field.

And yet this—the most Catholic-nationalist and Republican—was the only "*generation of the IRA*" who were not "*engaged in sectarian slaughter*"!

This seems to suggest that 'sectarianism' and "*sectarian slaughter*" has another progenitor, rather than Irish Republicanism, as such. Could it be found in the political innovation called *Northern Ireland* by any chance?

History is meaningless outside of context. The thematic approach beloved of Hart removes the historical context and

makes any notion palatable, notions that would be absurd within their actual historical chain of causation. Kingsmills is a prime example.

The South Armagh Brigade of the IRA wanted to fight a military campaign purely against British forces. Their only requirement of the local Protestants was that they did not aid the enemy. Problems occurred in the mid-seventies when British forces, incapable of operating themselves in South Armagh, enlisted loyalists from the north of the county, from the Portadown district, to do their dirty work and further south as well.

The South Armagh Brigade had a simple rule of thumb with regard to sectarian killing in its area. Respond twice as hard to keep it out of South Armagh. Maybe they learnt this from the time of Frank Aiken.

They saw loyalists killing in the north of the County and in Tyrone and in 1975-6 saw them extending their campaign into the south of the County of Armagh. Loyalists became open to this because the British Labour Government in the Rees period was putting out hints of disengagement and encouraging Ulster nationalism. Loyalists began to take more interest in their borders and the independent minded croppies of South Armagh.

On the day before the Kingsmills shootings loyalists, with connections to the security forces, came to the south of the County and murdered four members of the Reavey family and three members of the O'Dowd family. How often do writers when selectively introducing Kingsmills into a diatribe mention this context? (An earlier reprisal at Tullyvallen Orange Hall is also removed from its context of the murder by loyalists in UDR uniforms of two GAA fans returning from Dublin.)

Kingsmills was a measured response to stop this kind of activity. The Republican Action Force claimed it but it was well known that the Provos did it.

This publication does not, and never did, condone this type of activity. In previous years in the *Workers Weekly* and the *Northern Star* we did everything to deter people from engaging in conflict by explaining the conditions that brought about this kind of thing and doing something to alter them. But neither did we publish meaningless condemnations of individual acts that arose within the communal war of attrition that the conditions of life in Northern Ireland encourage.

We pointed out that the republican campaign would not succeed because it was based on delusions about the Protestants of the north-east and that, even

at the height of its successes, it was ultimately incapable of breaking the resistance of this community to a united Ireland. The republican movement seems to have taken on board these considerations and is working at another way.

However, we never engaged in demonising republicanism or caricaturing it. We realised that there was a deeper logic to it than anything else it confronted, that it offered a functional solution to the problem of Northern Ireland, and it kept the conflict, which was communal in its essential character, at a higher level of idealism, at least on the nationalist side. The alternative to it would have been a kind of armed Hibernianism that might have been a mirror image of the paramilitary actions of Ulsterism.

The Provos, by and large, conducted a purposeful and disciplined war in a situation where sectarian slaughter may well have been the more instinctive activity.

During 1989-93 a situation developed in East Tyrone with regard to the question of reprisals. Loyalists were killing Sinn Fein Councillors and then turning their attention to the family members of Republicans without the IRA making any response. Sections of the East Tyrone Brigade were keen to reply in the manner of South Armagh to this campaign. There was an incident at Coagh when two elderly Protestant men were shot with a senior UVF man.

But the IRA leadership prevented reprisals by ordering that all operations be sanctioned at a high level—Brigade and above. It is no secret that the desire to shoot two DUP for every Sinn Feiner the loyalists killed was mooted. It is a fact that the IRA had the capability of enormous carnage if it put its mind to it. But the leadership ensured that the targeting of certain individuals was focussed—that large bombs that might have blasted half a housing estate away along with the intended target were not used. All this made the East Tyrone Brigade's job a lot harder. Many more risky operations had to be mounted against intended targets and information had to be provided up the chain of command, where suspected British agents lay. It is believed in some quarters that some Volunteers paid with their lives for this restraint. And in the end the operational capability of East Tyrone was seriously damaged by the failure of its units to respond to the loyalist campaign because of the restrictions placed upon them by the republican leadership. This is still a bone of contention today amongst some folk.

The Provos did not want to be diverted from their objectives by being drawn into

local conflicts with Protestant paramilitaries—whereas fomenting such always *was* an objective of the British state, so that the conflict in Northern Ireland could be characterised in the way Britain wanted it to be. That was because Britain desired attention to be taken away from its fundamental misgovernment in Northern Ireland. And we notice that Tony Blair is trying the same today with regard to Iran and Iraq.

The political set-up of Northern Ireland, which was constructed in 1920 by the Government of Lloyd George, Churchill, Bonar Law, Austen Chamberlain and Birkenhead ("*all the talents*"), had all the makings of sectarian war although it was designed to encourage and facilitate sectarian conflict within a controlled medium—the Protestant community policing the Catholics.

Peadar O'Donnell called the Northern IRA a "*battalion of armed Catholics*", but what else could they be in the situation? Already, before partition, Joe Devlin had moulded Belfast into a hub of Hibernianism in order to secure Imperial Home Rule. And Redmondism lasted a lot longer in the North because it was cut off from the national development that the twenty-six counties underwent through Sinn Fein, the Treaty War and the De Valera era. Hibernian nationalism of the AOH variety was very much the substance of Northern nationalism in the half century after partition. So, in 1969, when the security forces went berserk against Derry and West Belfast, everything was making for the sort of thing that is now happening in Iraq.

But, in the moment of crisis, the Northern Catholics, left to swill in the Stormont sludge, abandoned by Dublin under British pressure, were taken in hand by the Provos. Some of the Provo leadership were the people who had taken part in the fifties campaign and some were young northerners who eventually took over. But both were informed by the idealism of "*the most basic myths of modern Irish republicans*".

In 1970-2 the Provos trained hundreds of people who could have become sectarian killers into a disciplined fighting force, clear in its ideals and steadfast in its refusal to become diverted into communal conflict. These "*armed Catholics*" fought a clean war, and would have fought a cleaner one if it had not been for the British policy of Ulsterisation. The Altnaveighs, Kingsmills, and Darkleys, were the exceptions rather than the rule. (In the loyalist campaign the killing of 'enemy' civilians—i.e. Taigs—was the rule rather than the exception.)



The thirty-five year war was a product of the establishment of a pseudo-state in 1920/1 to serve Imperial purposes of leverage over the part of the country that had to be let go but which had now to be controlled until it could be brought back to the fold.

Henry Harrison (British Empire Military Cross) hit the nail on the head in 1939 in his book *Ulster And The British Empire*:

“Ulster was established with separate institutions in an area partitioned off from the parent Ireland, for Imperial and not for local reasons, and it was subsequently subsidised at the cost of the British taxpayer for the purpose of inducing and enabling it to continue thus to serve British Imperial policy... The Irish nation, a living organism, was carved up to retard its growth and to impede its progress. And this mutilation was so devised, with its creation of a new minority grievance, as to ensure the perpetuation of the sectional and sectarian rancours which it should be the first duty of all honest Statesmanship to assuage. The conditions necessarily created local irritation. And the fears haunting the privileged minority lest the victimised minority might seek effective redress, forthwith produced the repressive system of such draconian severity as to swell that irritation into a chronic and expiable resentment. If the policy of Partition in Ireland had been honestly intended, as a measure of minority protection, the Partition area would have been much smaller, and the privileged minority ensconced in its new domain would have had fewer causes for fear and much less embarrassment in the administration of its self government.” (pp40-1.)

Altnaveigh and similar incidents were the first products of the British Imperial policy of 1920-1. Irish Republicanism has always tried to rise above them and remove them at source. But the Imperial impulse is intent on creating similar situations wherever it goes and forever long it lasts.

It has its own “holocaust deniers”, of course.

Pat Walsh

#### Editorial Note:

There is a debate on the Aiken issue on the GAA website, which is far from salutary. Why not join in? The address is—

<http://www.anfearrua.com/db/default.asp?a=topic&tid=290761>

## Budget 2007

The 2007 Budget was Brian Cowen’s third and like his second Budget there were no surprises. His first Budget following McCreevy’s departure represented a change in a more socially conscious direction and that orientation continued in this Budget. There was also a continuation of trends which have not been noticed much outside the pages of the *Irish Political review*. There was very little evidence of Progressive Democrat influence. The emphasis seems to have been to avoid any banana skins in anticipation of the next election. It was risk averse and it is difficult to blame the minister in the absence of a credible opposition.

It would be difficult to say that this Budget was an attempt to buy the election, although that didn’t prevent *The Irish Times* from trying. Its editorial (7.12.06) claimed that the Government could be accused of “incaution” because its current spending will increase by 11% rather than the 8% in the Budget. Nevertheless, for all the “incaution”, the Budget anticipates a Government surplus of 1.2%.

Cowen increased the tax credits comfortably above the inflation level of 2.6% anticipated for 2007. The individual and married persons’ tax credits increased by nearly 8% to 1760 and 3520 euros respectively and the employee tax credit increased by over 18% to 1760. The employee tax credit is only available to individuals who are in employment. This credit was half the single person’s credit about six years ago, it is now equal to it: a reflection of the Government’s policy of encouraging people to enter the labour market. This policy is also reflected in the changes in the tax bands introduced by Charlie McCreevy a few years ago and continued by Cowen.

Following the Murphy Case in the early eighties the Haughey-led Government doubled the tax allowances and tax bands for married people. This policy has been reversed by increasing the relative importance of the employee tax credit and by increasing the individual person’s tax band by a greater percentage than the married persons’ band. In the 2007 Budget Cowen increased both the single and married tax bands by 2000 euros: an increase of 6.25% for the single band (to 34,000) and 4.88% for the married band (to 43,000). The ratio between the married and single tax bands is now 1.26 whereas it was double before McCreevy: a very significant change in favour of double income families.

It was very difficult to see any Progressive Democrat influence on this Budget. The top rate of income tax was reduced from 42% to 41%. It was both Fianna Fail and Progressive Democrat policy to reduce it to 40%, “*economic circumstances permitting*”, so the reduction to 41% can hardly be claimed to be a Progressive Democrat concession. And even this reduction in the top rate was in part counteracted by an increase in the health levy from 2% to 2.5% on income over 100,000 euros per annum.

In the lead-up to this Budget Michael McDowell campaigned for the abolition of stamp duty for first time buyers. He was given almost hysterical support in the weeks leading up to the Budget by the *Sunday Independent*. The Budget made no change in stamp duty. So McDowell has caused uncertainty in the property market without achieving his political objective.

There is no doubt that a reduction in stamp duty would stimulate an already inflated property market. The money given back to the taxpayer would just go into the pockets of property sellers. Fianna Fail has shown itself yet again to be the most responsible party in the state.

One of the strangest articles on the Budget was written by Marc Coleman. His article is entitled “*Failure to reform stamp duty could do lasting damage to property market*” (*The Irish Times*, 7.12.06). In fact most of the article has nothing to do with the property market. Most of the piece is a level headed analysis of how Cowen is perceived compared to McCreevy. He makes the point that the increase in spending under McCreevy before the last election was less than Cowen. He also points out that Cowen in his Budget has “undid some of his predecessor’s penchant for stealth taxation” by increasing income tax credits and thresholds above the rate of inflation.

Other reasonable points made are that social welfare expenditure will increase by 10% in this Budget, which Coleman thinks is “*admirable*” and that “*by giving emphasis to increasing contributory and non-contributory pensions, Cowen has wisely targeted this disproportionately on the elderly, people who suffer disproportionately in times of rising inflation.*”

But it seems all this sweetness and light was too much for Coleman and in the last third of his piece he launches a virulent

attack on the absence of any change on stamp duty. There is nothing strange in media commentators making both positive and negative remarks about the Budget. Indeed such a report could indicate a balanced analysis. But in my view Coleman's negative comments demonstrate a total lack of proportion.

Commenting on Cowen's reasons for not reforming stamp duty Coleman says:

"His objection to such a change—that stamp duty cuts would be incorporated in price rises and benefit the seller—is nonsense. Of course, such cuts would lead to house price increases, but buyers would still benefit."

The first sentence says that Cowen's objection is "nonsense". The second sentence says that it's not nonsense but is right "of course". However, we don't need to worry about the fact that Cowen's objection is valid because price increases also benefit the buyer! Coleman's argument in the next paragraph seems to be that the buyer once he buys also becomes a seller:

"Rather than paying stamp duty to the Government with no reform, the price increment arising from reform is retained in housing equity and cashed in on when the house is sold."

But the arguments in favour of the abolition of stamp duty are supposed to be to help people buy, *not to sell*. It is to help the nurse or teacher to own their own home not to preserve or increase its value on sale. Coleman goes on to make the following mysterious statement:

"And unlike stamp duty, that price increment (i.e. the price increase due to the abolition of stamp duty—JM) is easily and more cheaply funded by mortgage finance."

Is he saying that banks will lend at cheaper rates if the loan is 100% towards the value of the house as distinct from a proportion being paid to the Government in stamp duty? If he is saying this what is the basis for the argument: that banks are lending not on the ability of the borrower to repay the loan, but on the resale value of the house in the event of a loan default.

The next paragraph in my view is completely inconsistent with his previous points:

"Instead of reforming this tax, the Government will increase mortgage interest relief for first-time buyers. Apart from ignoring second-timers who had to trade up for family or job change reasons, this approach also ignores a hard reality of property markets—seasoned hunters that they are, estate agents can spot a first time buyer five miles away, and are adept at using ghost bidding to eliminate any benefits that the Government seeks to endow"

So property inflation as a result of mortgage interest relief is a problem but

inflation as a result of the abolition of stamp duty is no problem at all!?

Whatever about the merits or otherwise of mortgage interest relief, at least the tax benefits are spread over many years, whereas the abolition of stamp duty will give an instant benefit and is therefore much more likely to have a greater effect on property prices.

The next paragraph seems to be the clincher as far as Coleman is concerned:

"But most of all, the failure to countenance reform of stamp duty leaves one of the most inequitable and dangerous taxes in the world on our statute books."

Isn't it amazing that this most "inequitable and dangerous taxes in the world" has escaped everyone's notice until recently?

And then Coleman attempts to rally the PD troops:

"That failure also puts it up to the PDs to pursue the issue at the next election, or face the jeers of Labour and Fine Gael. And here may be the most significant impact of the budget."

The article ends with the view that the failure to "reform" stamp duty is prolonging uncertainty in the property market (I would have thought that the raising of this topic has been the cause of uncertainty). And in the final sentence there is a dark hint of 'redemption to come'.

Marc Coleman is a contributor to the property web site *DAFT.ie* and *The Irish Times* as well as benefiting from property advertising has also recently purchased the rival web site *MyHome.ie*. I can't say

that I have ever been a fan of Marc Coleman, but my impression of him was that he was a sober, reasoned analyst with a leaning towards free market economics. If such a journalist is reduced to gibberish in connection with property taxation there must be something very strange happening in that market.

#### CONCLUSION

There was very little of note in this Budget. About the only item of political controversy was a dispute between the state agency *Enterprise Ireland* and the Trade Unions over the merits of re-invigorating the Business Expansion Scheme, which confirms the suspicion that the substance of politics is taking place outside the parliamentary arena. No left wing alternative to Fianna Fail has emerged. Labour, by tying itself to Fine Gael, has neutralised itself. An example of this was demonstrated in a *Morning Ireland* debate about reducing the top rate of tax from 42% to 41%. The Fine Gael spokesman thought it should have been reduced to 40% while the Labour spokesperson (I think it was Roisin Shortall) wanted no reduction at all. Fianna Fail must have been laughing.

My impression is that Pat Rabbitte has become less hostile to Fianna Fail and that a Labour/Fianna Fail coalition is being considered. The PDs have been sidelined in the last few months following the so-called "Bertiegate" scandal and this Budget. If my impression is correct, Rabbitte has a lot of work to do before the next election. For the first time in many years a Fianna Fail single party Government cannot be ruled out.

John Martin

## My Re-education In Irish History

I have been reading *Charles Gavan Duffy: Conversations With Carlyle*, reprinted by Athol Books with an Introduction by Brendan Clifford. I was aware that Duffy was one of the founders, and also editor, of the Young Ireland newspaper *The Nation*. But I have never read that newspaper, only seen it open at a distance in the National Library when someone else was reading it. So this was my first acquaintance with Duffy the writer. He is a very good writer and, as that alone, deserves more prominence than he has enjoyed in our historical record. But what has struck me most forcibly is the kind of Irishman, from the middle and latter part of the nineteenth century, that comes across in this book. Observing and noting that has added yet another bit to my re-education in Irish history since the eighteenth century and to my understanding of how that history must be written for

it to be intelligible and true. Both of these illuminations have been proceeding for many years.

In his Introduction Brendan Clifford had already added a light. He writes there: "*The Young Ireland movement expressed the political, social and cultural ideals of the middle class of nationalist Ireland as it emerged from under O'Connell's wing*". So, I registered, nationalist Ireland in the 1840s had a 'bourgeois nationalism' of professional and commercial people such as could be found throughout Europe at that time. From primary school onwards, I had been led to regard Young Ireland simply as a movement of ideas. They were ideas conceived by young intellectuals in Dublin, and essentially by Thomas Davis who tragically died young. They amounted to the first appearance in Ireland of a coherent cultural nationalism, as distinct

from the political kind, and as such were a forerunner to the more powerful, Gaelic-centred cultural nationalism of the Revolution. But all that in disembodied form, without social anchorage; without the social anchorage which Brendan provided with his ‘middle class of nationalist Ireland’, and the Europe-wide intelligibility which derives from that. All that as just ideas—and another case of Ireland doing its unique, unconnected thing in a socio-historical void.

That sentence of Brendan’s prepared me for Gavan Duffy, gave him context, as he reveals himself in his account of his association with the Presbyterian Scot, Thomas Carlyle, a leading writer and thinker of Victorian Britain. Duffy, Ulster Catholic, son of a well-to-do merchant, formed intellectually by a mainly Ulster Presbyterian schooling that finished in the Royal Academical Institution in Belfast. Duffy, journalist, author and tough-minded nationalist, for whom nationalism means pride of race and an open-ended effort to do for the Irish nation what seems possible now. A gentleman and clubbable in the then understanding of those terms, extremely well-read in English literature, a member of the UK Parliament in the interest of Irish tenant rights, he becomes for some years an effective public official of the British Empire in Australia, is knighted for those services, and retires to the South of France. Thus far—it is not the entire life—Duffy in this book.

It made me interested in checking out the leading Young Irelanders socially, so to speak. Four of them shared with Duffy their Catholicism, a wealthy background and a top-class education. All of them, Catholics or Protestants, whatever their material starting-point, in Dublin in the 1840s wore top hats, felt at home in the grounds of Trinity College, or chatting with lawyer friends in the Four Courts

Perhaps those of you who have suffered from a maleducation in modern Irish history similar to mine will already see what I am getting at. About forty years ago I had a disturbing flash when the wife of an artist friend of mine in Dublin—they were living in modest circumstances in the Dublin mountains—told me that her grandfather had been a ship-owner in Drogheda. That meant that at the end of the nineteenth century there were Catholic ship-owners in Ireland and that the commercial set-up in Drogheda then was much like that in a similar Norwegian port. Oh, I had of course heard about the prosperous Catholic merchants in Cork in Penal times, men who became ‘merchant princes’ by provisioning ships setting out across the Atlantic. But that was Cork, and everyone was agreed that Cork was a place apart, not Ireland. Drogheda, for me a Dubliner, was real, and suggested other similar ports around the country. (I checked

Report

## Collusion

The following letter by Niall Meehan was published in the *Irish Times* in mid-December, but with a section deleted. The omission is indicated below

On RTE Radio’s Morning Ireland on November 30th Sean Ardagh TD mentioned British refusal of co-operation as a reason for not holding a public enquiry into “widespread collusion between British security forces and terrorists [that] was behind many, if not all, of a number of atrocities on both sides of the Border that resulted in 18 deaths in the mid-1970s” (Irish Times November 30th).

But an official tribunal might usefully also enquire into why the Gardai or the government were not “more vigorous in their attempts to identify and bring to justice the perpetrators”? Fianna Fail dismissed the then Garda Commissioner, Edmund Garvey, on its return to office in 1977. The reasons have never been properly explained. A sworn public enquiry might discover if the decision had any bearing on the issue of collusion, or if it there was another reason, such as the Garda ‘Heavy Gang’, or simply incompetence.

Some former members of the British security forces might cooperate. Colin Wallace and Fred Holroyd have spoken freely on collusion. Holroyd met then Garda Commissioner Edmund Garvey in 1975, with other British forces personnel. John Weir, a former RUC-UVF member, also appears willing to talk. Retired RUC detective Johnston Brown, who wrote ‘Into the Dark’, detailing his own impeccable record in the RUC, might have relevant information to impart. Others with information (as yet unknown) are likely to appear once an official enquiry, with all the required safeguards, is set up. A precedent has been set with an enquiry into alleged Garda collusion in the killing of RUC officers. Why not one for Irish citizens killed as a result of alleged collusion by British military and police officers?

The alternative offered is a Dail debate. But the Irish government and parliament is a factor. Those outside parliament with personal information are not in a position to contribute to such a debate. One might be forgiven for getting the impression that there is an attempt to limit enquiry.

[DELETED section:]

Your correspondent is correct to note that “in Ireland the reaction of both media and government is muted to say the least” (December 2nd). That is because a mindset that operated then persists today. The health service, the economy, education, is fair game for bouts of “apoplexy”, but attitudes to British policy touching on local culpability are generally taboo. The British-unionist bombings of Dublin and Monaghan in 1974 provided a useful service in this regard, according to the then British Ambassador, who observed at the time: “the predictable attempt by the IRA to pin the blame on the British (British agents, the SAS, etc) has made no headway at all” ... It is only now that the South has experienced violence that they are reacting in the way that the North has sought for so long.” He later told the Northern Ireland Office: “it would be... a psychological mistake for us to rub this point in . . . I think the Irish have taken the point”.

on that: Ireland under the British had a merchant fleet as well as a very big and flourishing fishing fleet, which faded away after Independence.)

I knew that O’Connell was a remnant of the Gaelic gentry, but somehow ‘smuggling on the Kerry coast’ was my received idea of the O’Connells at home. A visit to their manorial house in Derrynane surprised me. Seeing a photo of Art Ó Laoire’s house—he of the famous lament—that, too, opened my eyes. And I recall, from fifteen years ago, my friend Fergal Tobin, the publisher, telling me that he was intrigued by the role played in Irish history since the eighteenth century by the Catholic commercial bourgeoisie and landed gentry of South Leinster and East Munster. He believed that they had been a bearing force of much of our history since Penal times and were in large part the

social milieu that had come to power in Ireland since Independence. In the writing of Irish history, he felt, their role had been neglected. He would like to take time off from publishing to investigate them. We agreed, for a start, that without Edmund Rice, Nano Nagle and Theobald Mathew, who had sprung from that social milieu, it would be difficult to imagine subsequent Irish history.

That conversation came back to me forcibly a couple of years ago when I was attending a ’98 commemorative symposium in Gorey, Co. Wexford. We made an excursion to John Redmond’s house at Carnsore Point which stands in extensive grounds. The present mistress of the house showed us around it, explaining portraits of well-dressed ladies and gentlemen from olden times which hung on the walls. Not only who the persons in the portraits were,

but their relationships with each other and incidents in their lives. It was a glimpse of a network of well-to-do Catholic families of the Southeast who, from the 1700s onwards, had connections in England and France and who were themselves familiar with those countries.

I received my grounding in Irish history in Irish in O'Connell's Christian Brothers' School in Dublin. Essentially, it was a view of Irish history which showed armed Irishmen since Brian Boru resisting foreign incursion or occupation, sometimes winning, sometimes losing, and finally winning when the heroes of 1916 ushered in, by their executions, the victorious War of Independence. From the Flight of the Earls until that happy outcome, the Irish, deprived of their natural leaders, suffered oppression of all kinds, while still, repeatedly, rebelling. The Irish of those centuries were *na Gaeil* or successors of the *Gaeil*; Catholics with the occasional patriotic Protestant. They were poor peasants oppressed by alien landlords; even when they lived in towns, *cosmhuintir*, proletariat. That there were people in Ireland, apart from the landlords, who lived well was occasionally indicated; there were, for example, those unspeakable traitors, the 'Castle Catholics'. I remember that when Catholic Irish of such 'other kinds' were referred to, my history teachers described them as *galánta* in the pejorative sense of 'posh, stuck-up'—rather than in the word's other sense of 'elegant, stylish'.

Of course, later in a Dublin Jesuit school and at UCD, I continued to be instructed in Irish history. But what I was taught in those years—I find it difficult to remember what I was taught in those years—did not decisively affect the dramatic vision of my people's history I had acquired in those first years. In part, this was because it did not have an equivalent dramatic quality. But there was also the fact that something close to what I had imbibed in primary school was being promulgated all around me by doctrinaire Irish nationalism, and I gave ear to that. I gave willing ear to it, I now recognise, because that amplified public version of my childhood indoctrination accorded pretty well with my personal history.

My maternal grandfather, who became for me, emotionally, my essential ancestor, had grown up speaking Irish in a glen in the Sperrin Mountains. From that background, like so many of his race before and after him, he moved to an English-speaking city, Belfast, where, being Catholic, he was a second-class citizen. I was born there in his comfortable house. But he was never wealthy, and when my parents—my father was a Sligoman—brought me to Dublin, it was a struggle there until my father, first with a little shop, then with a wholesale busi-

ness, brought us, too, into comfortable circumstances. I was the first in my family on either side to attend a Jesuit school or—the decisive breakthrough, though helped by a scholarship—a university.

When I ventured out into Europe and the wider world, I drew on that experience as a child and youth to provide myself with a self-understanding. It was a personal myth which, projected back ancestrally, strengthened my already mythical view of Irish history. I see it spelt out in the preface to my first book, *Mainly In Wonder*, an account of travels in Europe and the Far East. I wrote there, introducing myself:

"By Irish standards I am a city man. But in the world I set out to see I was quickly made to understand that I was essentially a peasant and came of a nation of peasants."

Further on, it is "We of the Irish Catholic peasantry" and shortly after:

"When we began to rise in the nineteenth century our cultural heritage was almost nil. We had no house-styles, no furniture, no native costumes that did more than clothe, no really native dances, no theatre, no distinctive ways of preparing food, no churches, no elaborate etiquette. We came naked into the modern world."

In fairness, I do say in that preface that "*the Irish Catholic peasantry*" is the "*largest by far of the groups that make up Ireland*". But in view of the fact that I say nothing about those other "*groups*", I am in effect making the well-worn identification of the Irish Catholic peasantry with the Irish; or at least the Irish essentially.

The version of Irish history that I have spent my life correcting—correcting right up to this book by Gavan Duffy that I have been reading—is the nationalist version which was dominant for most of the last century. More precisely, it is the republican nationalist version. Obviously, it was a sitting duck for the ideological revisionists when they set about demolishing it. Their ideological inspiration was anti-nationalist and, in extreme cases, anti-national in the sense that they felt distaste for the idea of an Irish nation subsisting through the centuries into the present. But not only have they told some truths that were not in our history books; it was all too

easy for them to do that. Those historians who were Irish nationalists had missed the boat by not having done the necessary revision before them; simply in the interests of truth and of giving their nation a true view of its past. In that last respect, whatever about their republican nationalism, they were lacking in patriotism.

As you will have gathered, my personal correction of the history of modern Ireland that I received has been a casual, occasional and merely mental affair. Largely it has been a matter of noting elements missing from the republican nationalist story and of imagining how their inclusion would modify that story, change its pattern, alter its system of highlights. How that true history would look as a whole, I have no coherent idea. I only know three principles it would observe.

Centrally, it would tell without bias—using various collective narratives as histories do—the story of all those departed men and women who considered themselves members of the Irish nation. It would give prominence to, and treat with regard, those individuals and groups who enhanced or tried to enhance the human quality, or wealth or amenity, of Irish life, or of a substantial section of it. And it would provide the modern Irish story with the intelligibility that derives from context conveyed. The relevant context might be the British Empire or the USA, contemporary England, Scotland, Wales or Continental Europe, or colonised and semi-colonised Africa and Asia. I think that Brendan Clifford would be well capable of writing the history that is required.

**Desmond Fennell**

**Athol Books is publishing Desmond Fennell's *About Behaving Normally In Abnormal Circumstances* early in 2007**

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## The Title Deeds Of Assassination

In his 2005 biography, *Mick—The Real Michael Collins*, Peter Hart provides a relatively reasonable account of the role of assassination as conceived of by Collins during the War of Independence—when the IRA had to take on Britain's political police force in Ireland who were seeking to destroy not only the Army of Dáil Éireann, but the Dáil itself and the will of the people to support their Republic:

"Collins stressed the utility of force: the minimum necessary to achieve the objective in a politically acceptable or productive way... This raises the also very political question of the limits of violence. Who wasn't killed? The answer is: politicians. No Unionist, Irish Party or British politicians were assassinated in 1921-21 (1922-3 was another story). The only outright political assassination carried out in this period was that of Frank Brooke, the 69 year-old chairman of the Dublin and South-Eastern Railway Company and a well-known Unionist, on 30 July 1920... The only concrete reason put forward for his being on the Squad hit list was that he had suggested bringing in army engineers to run the trains when the drivers went on strike in 1920 ... The men who did the deed say only they had no idea why he was fingered, they just followed orders from the Intelligence Department... Collins may have prevented as many killings as he ordered. He would never admit mistakes, however: they were always someone else's fault or swept under the rug. As with many other deaths in this period, the killing of Frank Brooke remains a mystery." (pp220-223)

Hart testifies to the purposeful role of assassination as practised by Collins in his role as IRA Director of Intelligence. What he cannot come to terms with, however, is the fact that in his role as President of the Supreme Council of the IRB Collins was also heir to another tradition of assassination that was no less targeted—a return to political assassination, including the elimination of individuals within the IRB itself who were perceived to pose a threat to whatever direction the Brotherhood's Supreme Council had determined on. In his 2005 book, *The IRB*, Owen McGee also tells the story of the IRB's US sister organisation, Clan na Gael, and its internal factional 'trials' and punishments:

"A 'trial' of the Clan leadership took place in New York in September 1888, at which delegates from both wings of the Clan (the Irish National Brotherhood v. John Devoy's United Brotherhood) were present to speak, but only (Supreme Council Secretary) John O'Connor was allowed to speak on behalf of the IRB.

At Devoy's insistence, **all** Clan leaders since his own demotion from the Clan executive in August 1881 were put on 'trial' and, therefore, Alec Sullivan (INB) was forced by his old friends to take part... Alec Sullivan was censured, retrospectively, for his refusal to cooperate with the IRB during 1882, but he was found 'not guilty' of any offence... Philip Cronin, a Cork-born doctor in Chicago and a leader of the UB, was present at the 'trial'... All records regarding this 'trial' were supposed to be destroyed, but Cronin stated he would turn his findings into a UB circular, which he did... Cronin was also a very bitter rival of Alec Sullivan in Chicago municipal politics and he threatened to reveal to the **public**... that Sullivan had been a member of the Clan. To do so could serve no purpose whatsoever other than to destroy Sullivan's influence in American politics. Cronin may well not have intended acting upon this threat, but several Chicago Clansmen took it into their heads that Cronin must be one of the four British secret agents (that the already exposed agent) Le Caron had talked about in London, and, consequently, he was murdered on 4 May 1889. This had two major consequences... It was proven that prominent Irish-American members of the Chicago police force were responsible for the murder **and** were members of the Clan... The second major consequence of the Cronin murder was that because John Devoy (who lived in Chicago from 1886-92) was Cronin's right-hand man and best friend in the local UB, he was convinced every day for at least three years that he too might be assassinated at any moment. As secretary of the UB, Devoy began issuing circulars stating that a prominent UB official (Cronin) had been assassinated at the behest of the INB... One other consequence... was that Devoy started accusing Alec Sullivan **publicly** of desiring to kill him... Sullivan wrote to Davitt that he feared being killed by one of Devoy's admirers." (pp184-7)

Confused? To appreciate the IRB culture surrounding the Cronin murder in more readable semi-fictional form, see the 1992 novel *The Devil's Card* by journalist Mary Maher, which draws not only on previous historical research but—far more important—also on the private documents of her own heavily-involved Chicago-Irish family.

Such IRB culture would once again come to the fore in Ireland itself in the immediate post-Treaty environment. The IRA was split on this issue, with the anti-Treatyites in the majority. The IRB was also split—but with the pro-Treatyites

forming a decisive majority on the Supreme Council, if not among the general body of Brothers. Yet there would also be an initiative from among some of the IRB's anti-Treatyites to do the utmost to prevent Civil War, emanating from the Cork leadership of Seán O'Hegarty, Florrie O'Donoghue, and Tom Hales. Without at all calling into question the fact that the **free will** of the majority of Irish people had been for the Republic, they also recognised that what Liam Mellows had analysed as the **fear** of that same majority had nonetheless also to be taken into account as a formidable fact. O'Hegarty's own opposition to the Treaty did not prevent him from recognising that it was "*admitted by all sides that the majority of the people of Ireland are willing to accept the Treaty*", whether through fear or otherwise. (For a detailed presentation of his position, see the forthcoming Aubane Historical Society publication *The Life And Times Of Seán O'Hegarty* by Kevin Girvin.)

Peter Hart narrates—with numerous asides—how the year 1922 began to unfold:

"Three successive IRB Conferences had been secretly summoned to Parnell Square in January, March and April, with Collin, Harry Boland and Liam Lynch all seeking a peaceful solution to the army split, but good will was not enough... Collins assuring everyone of his republican intentions while Lynch and Boland urged him to be true to his uncompromising nature (as they saw it) and return to his roots. At the heated final meeting in April... he (Collins) cleverly adopted Florence O'Donoghue's suggestion that a committee be struck between the two sides to review the (post-Treaty) Constitution when it finally appeared. Because the IRB 'could not announce its existence' (not that it was fooling anyone), this committee called itself an IRA officers group. Its public statement, issued on 1 May, was a major political coup for Collins, as it called for army reunification and an agreed government accepting the Treaty's popular support in order to maximise national strength. This was the essence of Collin's position, now backed not only by Mulcahy and O'Duffy, but also by Seán O'Hegarty, Florence O'Donoghue, Tom Hales, Dan Breen and Humphrey Murphy, major figures in the 1st Southern Division, the backbone of the anti-Treaty IRA. Lynch was not convinced, but was outmanoeuvred (as usual). On 3 May, O'Hegarty... addressed the Dáil and more or less appealed to the opposition to accept their minority position and join a government of all the talents to prevent civil war. This had an immediate impact on party politics, and the next day a joint Dáil committee was formed to discuss the so-called army proposals, beginning the process leading to the Collins-de Valera pact." (*Mick*, pp385-6)

Tim Pat Coogan had similarly narrated: *"One last major effort at securing peace between the fighting men was made under the auspices of the IRB... This is the last time the IRB played a major role in the developing crisis"* (Michael Collins, pp318-9).

On this score Hart and Coogan are at one. But they are wrong in respect of that final conclusion. While it would be the last time that the IRB would play a major **positive** role, its reversion to a more traditional IRB role of assassination was central to events as they subsequently unfolded. The Free State, and the Civil War it would wage, were both founded and grounded in such assassinations.

This is an issue that both Peter Hart and his thesis supervisor for his *IRA And Its Enemies*, TCD's Professor David Fitzpatrick, each dodge in their own way. Their point of unity is that both Fitzpatrick and Hart each deny the legitimacy of the 1919 Republic, while subsequently proceeding to assert the legitimacy of the 1922 Free State. It would, however, be a mistake to treat their positions as identical. By distorting the context of a remark by Gerry Boland (whose own Republican perspective had remained thoroughly hostile to the continued existence of the IRB, notwithstanding his brother Harry's leading role on the Supreme Council, and who was in fact targeting the process of candidate selection **within** Sinn Féin that had been largely organised by Harry), Fitzpatrick says of the 1918 General Election, that this *"undermined Sinn Féin's claim to a democratic mandate"* (Harry Boland's *Irish Revolution*, p112). Hart ignores such nonsense when he, on the contrary, writes:

"The events of 1918... destroyed (British) government credibility for most Irish Catholics... As 1918 became 1919 the movement was moving on. The general election had been won, the Dáil was founded." (pp206-9)

Hart does not question the Republic's democratic mandate, but he does question its legitimacy on very different grounds: *"Whatever its moral or democratic legitimacy, the Dáil had no legal standing and was never recognised by any foreign government"* (*Irish Times*, 23rd June, 1998, quoted in the Aubane Historical Society pamphlet *Kilmichael: The False Surrender*, p.11).

Presumably recognition of the Irish Republic by the Government of Soviet Russia does not count for British Commonwealth man.

But Fitzpatrick and Hart reverse positions in the arguments that they each advance for the legitimacy of the Free State. Fitzpatrick writes of *"the popular mandate for a Free State which emerged in defiance of that Pact"* (p269), but Hart

more refreshingly qualifies such spin:

"Collins had stated repeatedly that the Pact's goal of 'stability' and the electorate's desire for 'peace' meant that the new government would finally have to impose law and order, and he was able to argue that his party had a mandate now to do so. However successful, this new spin on the pact and the election results conveniently ignored the majority backing for nationalist solidarity and opposition to civil war—but neither the British government nor his cabinet colleagues would allow any further tolerance of IRA activity" (p398).

For Commonwealth man the Free State did not require a democratic mandate, since its legitimacy derived from quite a different source:

"In legal fact, he (Collins) was not taking power in any revolutionary way: it was being granted by the (British) government he had sworn to overthrow". (p356)

In September 2005 I attended a History Conference in UCD on de Valera, where Hart was down to speak. Given his track record on Tom Barry, I expected that I would have to confront similar character assassination of Dev. I was pleasantly surprised to be proved wrong on that score. But when I took the floor to actually take Hart's side regarding some point he had made about Dev and, being open to the belief that Hart might actually be genuinely trying to re-assess some of his own past positions, I naively asked: Would he now be prepared to re-consider that Collins had in fact been responsible for the assassination of Sir Henry Wilson? More fool me. The only answer I got was an enigmatic smile, without a single word uttered. When *Mick* was published a month later I could now read:

"On the 22nd June, unconnected with any of these (other) events, two members of the now defunct London IRA shot and killed Sir Henry Wilson at his own door... Since he (Collins) showed no other signs of madness or bloodlust to give us an irrational explanation, we can acquit him of the charge. In any case, Collins's guilt was not at issue in June 1922. After an emergency cabinet meeting on the day of the assassination, Lloyd George sent Collins a telegram demanding he take action against the Four Courts (IRA executive), as he had evidence to prove their guilt (no such 'evidence' was every subsequently offered—MO'R)... Both Lloyd George in private and Churchill in public declared they would consider the Treaty broken if nothing else were done." (pp396-7)

As soon as Brother Eoin O'Duffy had secured the necessary British artillery from General Macready, Collins duly attacked the Four Courts on 28th June and the Civil War commenced. As Tom Geraghty has observed in his 2004 history, *The Dublin's Fire Brigade*:

"The seeds of fratricidal strife were well and truly sown when Churchill wrote to Michael Collins: 'If I refrain from congratulation it is only because I do not wish to embarrass you. The Archives of the Four Courts may be scattered but the title deeds of Ireland are safe.'" (p174)

Herein lies Hart's greatest weakness when writing of the origins of the Free State: Its legitimacy did not require a democratic mandate but the title deeds granted to it by Britain must not be seen to be sullied by any accusation of assassination, although artillery bombardment, having been prescribed by that same Britain as essential for meeting Treaty obligations, is deemed appropriate. Yet what more unconscionable action could Collins have engaged in than to initiate a Civil War in obedience to a Lloyd George/Churchill command that directly emanated from a British Government that was falsely accusing the Four Courts IRA of an assassination for which Collins himself had been personally responsible?

If the Wilson assassination provided the pretext for Collins starting one war in the South, it must also be viewed as an outcome of a war already being waged by him in the North. In *The Irish Counter-Revolution* John M. Regan has written:

"The key to Collins' involvement in a coercive Northern policy up to the outbreak of civil war in the South in June was not the destabilisation of the Northern regime but the neutralisation of the Northern IRA... The May offensive in Northern Ireland was exclusively financed, armed and sanctioned by treatyite GHQ through Chief-of-Staff Eoin O'Duffy (also IRB Treasurer—MO'R) with (IRB President) Collins' full knowledge. With access to considerable resources unavailable to the anti-treatyites, Collins had begun to develop a dependency culture between the Northern IRA and GHQ from early 1922. On 24 February Mulcahy, as Dáil Minister of Defence, instructed O'Duffy to pay sixty Belfast Volunteers £3 per week to protect Catholics during rioting. Collins, as Minister of Finance, sanctioned the payment a week later. In May GHQ, growing in self-confidence, took responsibility for sending four hundred rifles of British origin in to Northern Ireland, with the serial numbers chiselled off by officers under the command of Joe Sweeney of the pro-treaty 1st Northern Division in Donegal." (pp62-63)

In his *Eoin O'Duffy* biography Fearghal McGarry has also written:

"O'Duffy... not merely shared Collin's belligerent attitude but was a radicalising influence. O'Duffy had made it clear that failure to hit the north would undermine pro-treaty support along the border... He had assured his men that support for the treaty did not constitute

acceptance of partition. Indeed, his willingness to sanction violence reassured republicans like Tom Carragher: 'It seems that Collins, O'Duffy and the IRB intended to have a go at the North as soon as we had enough arms.' ... A GHQ-sanctioned offensive in west Ulster, which killed six policemen and Specials in March, merely provoked further retaliation against Belfast Catholics, including the notorious killing of five members of the McMahon household... At a meeting of northern divisional officers on 5 May, O'Duffy agreed to set a date for a northern offensive which GHQ would arm, finance and organise. The offensive, which began on 19 May, was directed by O'Duffy with the knowledge of Collins but not the Cabinet. It was an unmitigated disaster... The hitherto effective Belfast IRA lost the support of a Catholic population unwilling to endure further reprisals for no apparent purpose. The failed offensive left the IRA a broken force in the north. Its defeated Volunteers drifted south to the Curragh over the summer, where many sat out the Civil War as non-combatant members of the Free State army." (pp100-102)

Among the Belfast Free State Army officers was Jimmy McDermott, although he did not sit out the Civil War but was wounded in action outside Macroom, Co. Cork in November 1922. His grandson and namesake Jimmy McDermott has written a very informative history, *Northern Divisions The Old IRA And The Belfast Pogroms 1920-22*. McDermott sums up the immediate civilian consequences of the May offensive: "*Altogether twelve Catholics were murdered that weekend and two Protestants*" (p230). Among the civilian dead was Jimmy Snr.'s father, Frank McDermott.

The McDermott family have never had the slightest hesitation in regarding Sir Henry Wilson as a legitimate target in such a conflict:

"On 20 March Sir Henry Wilson submitted his report on future security to the northern government. He urged a further expansion of all sections of the Ulster Special Constabulary and... the establishment of a specifically military territorial army style section of the 'C' Specials. This in practice would mean attempt to subsume (the covert Unionist semi-legal grouping) the Imperial Guards into the 'C' force, in effect legitimising a sectarian paramilitary force. A historian searching for reasons why Michael Collins gave the order for Sir Henry Wilson to be assassinated would not have to look much further than this proposal." (p191)

But there was an immediate price to be paid in Belfast:

"On 23 June, following the news that Sir Henry Wilson had been shot, the Grosvenor Road and intervening streets as far as Albert Street were attacked by

loyalists. The home of (1916 President of the IRB Supreme Council) Denis McCullough's mother on the Grosvenor Road was burned, although McCullough himself was a at that time in the USA on a mission for Dáil Éireann... Leo Rea of Leeson Street was shot dead by loyalists in Merrion Street; another Catholic was shot dead in the York Street area by the military during 'disturbances'; in Unity Street Joseph Hurson, a young Catholic, was shot dead by a loyalist sniper firing from Hanover Street and his brother was also shot in the same incident. Two Protestants also died of violence on that day. Mary Semple died of wounds she had received in earlier 'disturbances' and William Kirkwood of Marlborough Place, a manager of Hughes and Dickson's Mill, was shot dead in Division Street in an obvious act of reprisal." (p259)

On the same day the B Specials also shot dead three unarmed Catholic youths in Cushendall.

David Fitzpatrick's narrative of the Civil War unfolds as follows:

"Harry Boland's Civil War began one day early, when he was held up by an armoured car (of Free State soldiers) on the eve of the attack on Rory O'Connor's (anti-Treaty) garrison in the Four Courts... 'We were ordered to put up our hands which we did not do'. The events which followed on June 28 1922 were (also) recorded in Harry's diary: 'Beggars' Bush (the Free State Army HQ) open attack on 4 Courts, with artillery, machine and rifle. Join up at Plaza Hotel and am sent south for reinforcements'. Before departing, he is said to have called at Vaughan's Hotel for his laundry, only to meet an old friend (Collins) on that same mission: 'Collins, as usual, was in tears'. The long-delayed assault on the occupied law courts, following an ultimatum issued under British pressure by the Provisional Government, shattered the dream of a Coalition ministry back by a unified Army and Brotherhood." (p306)

Some historical narrative! If, as we shall see in Part 6, the IRB assassin of Boland remains unnamed in Fitzpatrick's text, he does at least appear in the index for the page in question. But absolutely nowhere in Fitzpatrick's *magnum opus*—whether in text, footnote or index—does the name of Sir Henry Wilson ever appear—not even once! Yet, as Tim Pat Coogan had long ago narrated, Wilson was central to the "*British pressure*" that Fitzpatrick glides and slides so glibly over. As British Prime Minister Lloyd George wrote to Free State Prime Minister (or Chairman of the Provisional Government) Michael Collins:

"I am desired by his Majesty's Government to inform you that documents have been found upon the murderers of Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson which clearly connect the

assassins with the Irish Republicans Army and which further reveal the existence of a definite conspiracy against the peace and order of this country. The ambiguous position of the Irish Republican Army can no longer be ignored by the British Government. Still less can Mr. Rory O'Connor be permitted to remain with his followers and his arsenal in open rebellion in the heart of Dublin in possession of the courts of justice, organising and sending out from this centre enterprises of murder not only in the area of your Government but also in the Six Northern Counties and in Great Britain. His Majesty's Government cannot consent to a continuation of this state of things and they feel entitled to ask you formally to bring it to an end forthwith... I am to inform you that they regard the continued toleration of this rebellious defiance of the principles of the Treaty as incompatible with its faithful execution. They feel, now that you are supported by the declared will of the Irish people in favour of the Treaty, they have a right to expect that the necessary action will be taken by your Government without delay." (pp373-4)

Collins accordingly did as he was told. Yet, as we have already seen, it was he himself who had been behind the "*enterprises in the Six Northern Counties*" for which the British Government exclusively indicted O'Connor, while Collins's hero-worshipping biographer, Tim Pat Coogan, had no doubt that Collins had also been responsible for ordering the assassination of Wilson:

"The Wilson shooting was in fact discussed by Collins on at least one other occasion that day, 23 June. One of his generals, Joseph Sweeney, remarked that he looked 'very pleased. The last time I had seen him look so pleased was when a District Inspector was shot to his order in Wexford'. Sweeney asked 'Where do we stand on the shooting?' and Collins replied, 'it was two of ours that did it.'" (p376)

Not even Peter Hart would dream of supporting Lloyd George's charge that Rory O'Connor was behind the Wilson assassination, and presumably Fitzpatrick wouldn't do so either. But one must reasonably infer from Fitzpatrick's total silence regarding Wilson that he also finds Hart's exoneration of Collins as embarrassingly unconvincing. Hart's detailed apologia for Collins on that score is to be found in his 2003 book *The IRA At War 1916-1923*. This book is in fact a series of essays from different periods. Chapter 8—"*Michael Collins and the Assassination of Sir Henry Wilson*" (pp194-220)—was in fact first published as early as 1992 and is effectively undermined by the earlier Chapter 6—"*The IRA in Britain*" (pp141-177)—first published at the later date of 2000. That chapter does, in fact, assign a centrality of importance to the IRB:

"There were perhaps a thousand men enrolled in British IRA units in the crucial twelve months between July 1920 and July 1921... 'Operations' as such were still the preserve of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, the conspiratorial heart of the republican movement in Britain as in Ireland. The history of 'the Organisation'—as the IRB was known to its members—like that of the Volunteers, was a succession of ups and downs. Dubbed 'Fenians' in their Victorian heyday, the membership in Lancashire alone numbered in the thousands. By 1914 these men were long gone: England as a whole claimed only 117 paying IRB members, and Scotland 256 (as opposed to 1,660 in Ireland) ... A residue of middle-aged and elderly brethren reduced the active element even further, so that the departure to Dublin in 1916 of many dynamic young men who were also Volunteers (not least, Collins himself—MO'R) left most circles moribund. These same qualities paradoxically made the British IRB more valuable to the revolutionary cause in the years that followed. Its leadership in Ireland was still determined upon rebellion and sought weapons. These were available in Britain, and could be smuggled out by the Organisation's experienced old hands, along routes used since the 1860s. ... Michael Collins, once a London Irishman but now a reverse émigré building a revolutionary career in Dublin, knew these men and was perfectly positioned to put the pieces back together and keep the money, information and arms moving... The ever-growing demand for guns, ammunition, and explosives, and the infusion of young blood into the republican government, led the IRB to recruit new members from among the growing ranks of the Volunteers... The Organisation controlled them all from the start. Enthusiastic novices may have provided the initiative to start companies, but it was often established IRB men who ended up in charge. Uninitiated officers and activists were then almost always inducted into the Brotherhood. As many as half of the reliable Volunteers in London thereby became Organisation men. Insofar as London was concerned, IRB and IRA were interchangeable terms... In London (the key players) were Seán McGrath, Reginald Dunne, Denis Kelleher, and Sam Maguire, often depicted as Michael Collins's political godfather." (pp144-7)

When we come to Hart's later chapter (but earlier-dated essay) on the Wilson assassination, we find that he does indeed treat the Lloyd George charge against the anti-Treaty IRA Executive as not having any substance at all:

"This argument was used primarily as a lever to force the Provisional Government into taking action against the anti-Treaty 'Irregulars'. Once the Civil War had begun it was quietly dropped and did not figure in the murder trial." (p195)

Hart further adds that "*the diehard IRA executive denied the accusation immediately and its denial has stuck*" (p201). But on the same page he reports that "*the Special Branch's murder investigation concluded that the killers acted on their own*", and Hart then makes that British conclusion his own. Determined to acquit Collins of any culpability on that score he presents Dunne and O'Sullivan as loose cannon Lone Rangers:

"It was, in fact, a season of assassinations all across Europe. Just two days after Wilson's death, for example, Walter Rathenau, the German minister for foreign affairs, was shot to death in Berlin. His killers considered him a threat to German nationalism and declared 'We die for our ideals! Others will follow us!'—sentiments which could just as well have been uttered by Wilson's assassins." (p215)

"For two young Irish idealists to take matters into their own hands and shoot a hated foe was not a particularly unusual political act in the summer of 1922." (p220)

So, when it suits him, the IRB is now deemed to have no organisational coherence or meaning whatsoever. This Chapter—with such sub-headings as "Evidence", "Cross-Examination" and "Verdict"—sets up pro- and anti-Treaty witnesses against each other, disregarding the fact that contradictions between some aspects of evidence and others cannot be abstracted from the political motivation underlying a lot of that same conflicting evidence. But Hart runs up against a real problem when it comes to the evidence of Collins's Intelligence Officer, Commandant Joe Dolan, who is on the one hand accused of inaccurately ascribing some official job-titles for the dates in question, and on the other is criticised for being far too precise as to those same dates:

"The only public statements by a subordinate of Collins relating to the matter have come from Joe Dolan. In 1953 he stated that Collins, in his capacity as Director of Intelligence, gave the order to kill Wilson to Sam Maguire—described as 'O/C Britain'—who turned the matter over to Dunne. The operation was meant as a reprisal for Wilson's alleged encouragement of Protestant violence in Northern Ireland. In 1960, in a letter to Rex Taylor (another Collins biographer—MO'R), Dolan added that the order was given 'about a fortnight before Wilson was removed from the scene'. Dolan is gratifyingly precise in identifying the date and chain of command, although his letters do contain some factual errors. For example, Collins was no longer Director of Intelligence in June 1922, and Rory O'Connor, not Maguire, was 'O/C Britain'... 'Dunne was the O/C IRA, Maguire i/c IRB. He had been appointed Intelligence and Arms Officer' (of the IRA, said Seán McGrath)." (p205)

As we can see, the Hartian sneer was already a well-honed phenomenon by 1992. But let's look at some of these "facts". When precisely, before June 1922, is Collins supposed to have given up his position as Director of Intelligence? Hart does not say, nor does he ever repeat this claim in his 2005 biography. Could it be that he had muddled his dates? For it is in the biography that we also read of how—in the aftermath of the commencement of the Civil War—it was in fact only in **July** that Collins formally ceded his Director of Intelligence role to one of his subordinates.

"The army was now the keystone to state power. On 1 July, Collins announced that Mulcahy had assumed command of the army in Beggar's Bush barracks and that he—Collins—would take his place as Minister for Defence—in addition to being (government) chairman and Minister of Finance. On the 12th (was it not 'the Glorious'?—MO'R)... Collins announced the creation of the post of Commander-in-Chief for himself, leaving Mulcahy to occupy the dual role of Minister of Defence and army Chief of Staff. They, along with O'Duffy... would form a War Council to run the campaign. As usual Collins brought his posse of pals and IRB brothers with him... Joe McGrath became Director of Intelligence." (pp400-401)

It is in fact his attempt to pin down when exactly it was that Collins himself had originally **become** Director of Intelligence that now poses the real dating problem for Hart:

"Collins entered 1919 as Director of Organisation and Adjutant General, still patching together the Volunteer organisation... Some time after this, however, he also assumed the directorship of Intelligence (sometimes referred to as Information). The exact date of this is uncertain—perhaps as late as July 1919. His self-appointment reveals his fast-growing power: no one else in the GHQ or the Dáil government could have simply announced such a thing—Mulcahy (Chief-of-Staff since March 1918—MO'R) recalls general surprise among the staff, but no demur." (p203)

"Dick Mulcahy as Chief of Staff was entirely amenable to his (Collins's) plans and ideas and many of the other directors were part of his circle of friends." (p260)

Over in London, the IRA Intelligence Officer Sam Maguire was technically subordinate to his O/C Reggie Dunne, in the same way as Collins was nominally the subordinate of Chief-of-Staff Mulcahy. But the IRB chain of command in London was in fact even more all-embracing than elsewhere, as Hart acknowledged in another part of his Wilson Chapter:

"Dunne and O'Sullivan emerged as leaders among those early expatriate enthusiasts when they wrote to Michael Collins (in his capacity as adjutant-general of the Volunteers) in mid-1919 to suggest the formation of a Republican



'division' as a fifth column in Britain. The leaders in Dublin and London decided that it would be better to control these 'young wild chaps' than have them act on their own, so the first official IRA companies were established in London in October 1919. Dunne and O'Sullivan were eventually sworn into (the Maguire-led—MO'R) IRB (which still dominated the movement in Britain—Hart) in late 1920. Dunne was soon elevated to the command of the London IRA, a position he was to occupy until his death. O'Sullivan remained an ordinary Volunteer, albeit a highly dedicated one. He was one of the few in London willing to carry out IRA 'executions'." (p198)

For Hart to feign incredulity seven pages later at Dolan's suggestion that an IRB chain of command would run from Collins to Dunne via Maguire is itself incredible. But then Hart is equally numb as to the human factor that gives such added credence to Dolan's evidence. Dolan was only attempting to set the record straight. Far from **blaming** Collins for the Wilson assassination, he wanted Collins to receive full **credit** for it.

Hart throws around conflicting "witness statements" as if they are of equal value. But surely character judgement should also be employed. Joe Dolan would be the last person to hold Collins responsible for a killing of which he might be innocent. Not only was he fighting side-by-side with Collins as the latter met his death at Béal na Bláth, Dolan was also that self-same close brother-in-arms with whom Collins shared his bed on the last two nights of his life. (Meda Ryan, *The Day Michael Collins Was Shot*, 1989).

Oxford Professor Rory Foster prefers the professional "history" of Peter Hart to what he sneers at as "local historians". And yet it is only in Margaret Walsh's biography *Sam Maguire*—published "locally" in Ballineen, West Cork in 2003—that we find a proper exposition of Joe Dolan's account. Readers may recall that in Part 2 I wrote of the surprising presence of my Fine Gael-supporting neighbour Mrs. Brophy (née Golden) at the IRA reburial of Dunne and O'Sullivan in 1967, and how she later explained to my mother that it was in her own Golden family home in London that Reggie Dunne had spent the eve of the Wilson assassination. Dolan sheds more light on Seán Golden, London IRA Quartermaster and IRB stalwart. Both Maguire and Dunne, apart from acting on Collins's orders re Wilson, had also supported his "Stepping Stone" line on the Treaty, as had Golden. Margaret Walsh quotes at length from Joe Dolan's letter in the 1953 *Sunday Press* controversy (p153) in a manner that Hart avoided doing. Collins had initially examined the possibility of rescuing Dunne and O'Sullivan and sent Dolan across to London to plan same. Dolan's

account continued as follows in the *Sunday Press* of 27th September 1953:

"Sam Maguire put me in touch with Seán Golden, afterwards a Commandant in the National Army. Seán Golden was a Senior Intelligence Officer at that period in London. Seán Golden and myself traversed the route from the prison to the Courthouse to pick a likely spot for the rescue, which we did... I returned to Dublin and put in a favourable report to Michael Collins as to carrying out the job. The report was that six men picked from the Intelligence department squad active service unit, with the help of the London Volunteers, could carry out the jobs. The Civil War then broke out, all were engaged elsewhere, the London Volunteers were split, and two men died. It was intended that Dunne would take charge of a Battalion in the National Army and O'Sullivan be posted to Army Military Intelligence if successful in their escape. Sir Henry Wilson was executed by Collins's order, carried out by Collins's men, and rescuers would have been Collins's men." (p153)

Walsh also details how IRA/IRB dual member Florrie O'Donoghue had, in a "mind you, I've said nothing" manner, conceded both the "dual control" problem (that elsewhere he persistently denied had continued to pose a problem in Cork between IRA leader MacCurtain and IRB leader O'Hegarty) and the IRB chain of command that was behind the Wilson assassination. As an editor's footnote in the *Sunday Press* of 11th October 1953 no less obliquely summed up:

"Maj. O'Donoghue neither made nor implied any criticism of Dunne or O'Sullivan. Neither did he say they acted without orders. He simply said, 'they were not acting on the instructions of the Army Executive'." (pp155-6)

But what of Seán Golden, London Quartermaster of the pre-split IRA? With the commencement of the Civil War Golden had another role to play as a Collins man. Walsh reprints the charge made by Billy Ahern, who was to become London O/C of the Anti-Treatyite IRA, that Golden was—

"working with the yard (Scotland Yard—MO'R) after the attack on the (Four) Courts. He gave away all of the IRA in London, for they were arrested later." (p148)

Undoubtedly a hostile and embittered comment. And yet, in his 1999 book, *Defending Ireland—The Irish State And Its Enemies Since 1922*, Eunan O'Halpin has revealed from State papers:

"In October 1922 McGrath left army intelligence to become director-general of the CID. He was replaced on a temporary basis by Diarmuid O'Hegarty, the secretary to the provisional government (and member of the IRB Supreme Council—MO'R)... From the early days of the civil war (Free State)

army agents in Glasgow, Liverpool, and other cities in Britain reported on republican activities... Their reports on their former comrades reflect the combination of familiarity and animosity (see O'Hegarty to Seán Golden, one of the army's principal agents in Britain, 16 December 1922). The main problem for the Irish government was not to uncover republican activity in Britain but to find a way of dealing with it, since it occurred beyond their jurisdiction... Diarmuid O'Hegarty visited Scotland Yard in March 1923, and shortly afterwards British police arrested over one hundred suspects and shipped them to Ireland, where they were interned (see Colonel Carter of Scotland Yard to O'Hegarty, 17 April 1923)." (pp19-22)

And a year earlier, of course, Harry Boland had been—to borrow from CIA terminology—"terminated with extreme prejudice" at the hands of an IRB Centre who also doubled as a Free State Army Intelligence Officer.

**Manus O'Riordan**

(to be continued)

## Venezuela and the Bolivarian Revolution

Notes from a visit 27 November – 6<sup>th</sup> December 2006

*"the United States of North America destined by providence to plague the people of the Americas with hunger and misery in the name of freedom."*

Simon Bolivar, 1825

*"We will not rest until we break the chains that oppress our people, the chains of hunger, misery and colonialism. This country will be free, or we will die trying to free it."* Hugo Chavez, 1994

Report of  
Mark Langhammer on the  
Chavez-led Bolivarian  
Revolution.

December's Venezuelan presidential election saw the incumbent President, Hugo Chavez re-elected by a long distance. Chavez won 62.89% of the vote ahead of his main rival, Manuel Rosales. The poll represents a stunning blow to the US backed opposition . . .

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## Reflections On The Campaign For Workers' Control In Britain

When God was making Ireland He proclaimed a land that was green and fertile, populated by a cheerful, outgoing, carefree people, speaking a language of poetry. After much more in this vein, He was interrupted by the Angel Gabriel, who was taking notes, protesting at all this favouritism. "But", says God, "I haven't described their neighbours yet".

For a thousand years Ireland has had to exist with one eye over its shoulder. It has had no responsibility for England's reformations, Civil Wars, or foreign adventures, but has had to suffer the consequences of all of them. Cromwell's problems were not its problems until he made them so. It is still a good idea to keep an eye on the neighbours.

Ireland has survived campaigns of extermination and of incorporation to develop along very different lines to Britain.

While the English state preceded and produced the English nation, which then rewrote Britain in its own image, the Irish nation and state were together produced out of our necessary struggle against the neighbours.

England completely destroyed its own society as it industrialised. The rural society was smashed to bits and sent into the towns to work or it was made to work as virtual, and often as real slaves, digging coal or minerals or stone out of the countryside. What other societies produce for their own daily needs; food, clothing etc., were obtained for the English through conquests abroad.

The English state today is as clear as ever of its God Given, Historically Determined, Dialectically Necessary, sometime Religious, now Scientifically-proven mission to rule the world. And the English people of today are as easy to convince of the righteousness of that mission as ever they were.

But In 1914 English historians stopped writing objective factually-based histories (which confirmed what everyone knew, that England was the culmination of recorded history and intended by God etc. to rule the world as it was at any moment about to do) and started writing propaganda to suit the immediate aims of the moment. English historical writing, as Brendan Clifford has demonstrated in this magazine and elsewhere, never recovered from that. From that point, because its historical

education is woefully deficient, the English political elite has been strategically incoherent. The legacy is still there and still informs English politics. It is just that it is no longer understood very well. And is today put into practice with great incompetence.

Ireland emerged into the 20th century as a society of farmers, petty bourgeoisie and rural and urban workers, developed as a nation through the land agitations, industrial struggles and the political and military campaigns for national independence.

Such different histories also made for differences in the development of the trade union and socialist movements in each country. British socialism emerged from Liberalism in its Social Imperialist phase, the religious aspect of which was a kind of Darwinian Nonconformism. The only serious internationalists produced (by whatever series of accidents) within that tendency were Ernie Bevin and Jack Jones.

The Labour Party had at its core the famous Clause 4 of its constitution. This was a utopian clause that few really believed could be achieved, and many believed shouldn't be achieved. But it was a goal to strive for, and in the striving socialist measures could be put in place.

Outside (and sometimes inside) the Labour Party were Marxists who looked to a Soviet victory in the Cold War as the means of achieving socialism. And as soon as it was clear that this was not going to happen they retired from the fray or went over to the other side. And there were, and are, the Trotskyists who have no clear idea of what they want and so don't have to deliver.

The main socialist achievements in Britain were not achieved by a revolution or by any coherent demand or agitation in the working class. They, the Welfare State, The National Health Service, the Nationalisations, etc., were imposed by a dictatorship.

During the Second World War, while the Prime Minister was concerning himself with military matters, Britain was being run by one man, Ernest Bevin. Every aspect of the economy and of people's daily lives was controlled by Bevin. He used exhortation for the most part in the hope that socialism would catch on, but he relied ultimately on extensive coercive

legislation, and was not averse to such things as strike breaking and jailing.

It was in this period and by these means that Bevin laid the foundations for the reforms which were formally enacted by himself and Clement Attlee between 1945 and 1951.

Irish socialist development was bound up with the revolutions that brought the state into existence. It was given substance and direction by the revolutionary, James Connolly. His Irish Citizen Army was forged during the Dublin lockout of 1913 and was the driving force behind the nationalist rebellion in 1916, where he was the overall military commander.

In the period leading up to the rebellion he embraced German socialism and took Germany's side in the Great War after it was attacked by Britain. These two positions are reflected in the 1916 Proclamation—the founding document of the Irish Republic.

Arthur Henderson, the British Labour representative in the British Cabinet, doesn't seem to have had any problem approving Connolly's execution after the rebellion. He acted as a British Imperialist and socialism and internationalism didn't come into it.

After the General Election victory for Sinn Fein in 1918, The First Dail drew up a social and economic programme drafted mostly by Connolly's trade union successor, William O'Brien. This was a socialist programme in principle and in practice. It was also an achievable programme, much of which was implemented over the years and the rest of it is routinely referred to in the politics of the present day.

The first Minister of Labour was also a leader in the Irish Citizen Army, Countess Markievicz. Both Sinn Fein and its offshoot Fianna Fail have held to socialist principles to a greater or lesser degree down the years. Today each seems to be trying to out-socialist the other—which reflects a socialist culture in the country of some kind—i.e. there must be votes in it.

(The Irish Labour Party seems to have lost its way under the leadership of unstable social elements in the 70s, and hasn't been helped by being led by lapsed Soviet admirers in more recent times.)

The Irish working class movement, political and trade union, has been bound up with the State from the formation of the latter, as it was intimately involved with that formation. It is at ease with the State. It does not feel it to be unnatural to form pacts with the state—to be one of the Social Partners, to help form economic and social policy, to have wage agreements, to sit on State boards, to sit on the board of the Central Bank.

The British Labour Movement is not

and has never been so easy about its relationship with its state. Whatever eccentric, even revolutionary, things may at times have been said in the heat of propaganda, the British Labour movement has normally taken the common English view that the state is, at the end of the day, above the hurly burly, an arbiter, the voice of the nation (not quite reproducing the argot of the upper fifth remove here, but who can these days?). It is from this, for lack of a better word, 'patriotic' view of the state that a corporatism-by-name was so feared by both left and right. All alike feared the British state would be sullied and cease to be able to act impartially for the nation. That's one of those things which no one ever thinks through or says out loud, because it can't be spoken of or thought about. They just know it. It's what being English is about. Being English you just know such things.

Neither Bevin nor Jones was English in that unthinking patriotic kind of way. Being internationally-minded, they could actually see the English state and speak of and think about it. They could therefore engage strategically with it and propose ways of making use of it (which practically no one else since August 1914 has been able to do; Heath may be the only other exception).

These things need to be understood if sense is to be made of the rejection by the British working class and its leaders of the offer to give them an equal share in the running of the British economy thirty years ago. This Rejection led directly to Margaret Thatcher and to the Blairisation of the Labour Party.

Having been involved intimately in the agitation to bring about workers' control in British industry in the 70s, and knowing a fair bit about British labour history, it seems, on reflection, that defeat was always the most likely outcome. Perhaps it was necessary for Harold Wilson and Jack Jones to simply announce that the workers' control measures were going to happen and to get on with it. But hindsight is a wonderful thing and even then it may not have worked out.

In the coming months an account of those times and the agitation will appear in this journal along with interesting relevant documents giving the positions of the British Government, the unions, the employers, and politicians. We will start with the body that one would expect to be at the heart of the agitation—the Institute for Workers' Control.

"When I tell the truth, it is not for the sake of convincing those who do not know it, but for the sake of defending those that do."  
**William Blake**

## Institute For Workers' Control

The Institute for Workers' Control was founded in 1964 by Ken Coates. Coates had left the Communist Party after 1956 and joined the Labour Party. He was later expelled from the Labour Party and established a base for himself in the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation. Russell was Honorary President of the IWC until his death in 1970.

(Bertrand Russell had originally been an advocate of nuclear war on the Soviet Union, but became a peace advocate after the USSR acquired the bomb in 1949. Coates later returned to the Labour Party and became an MEP.)

The premises and resources of the foundation provided the base and the network of contacts for establishing the IWC. Coates, so far as I could gather, held no office in the IWC. But he was its undisputed leader. His principal assistants were Michael Barrat-Brown and Tony Topham, neither of whom held office either. That kind of control, once established, was invulnerable, and therefore the most secure kind.

Coates wrote much of the IWC's literature and edited anthologies on workers' control. One didn't think of the IWC without thinking of Ken Coates. He was rarely absent from meetings and rallies but seldom took part officially. My memory of him is of a kind of satesman-cum-prophet who was deferred to at crucial moments.

I remember two large conferences in particular where the business of the day was over and the IWC Chairman, Bill Jones, called on Coates to sum up in "*a few words*". Coates wandered about the back of the hall shaking his head and making noises to the effect that any intervention by him would be superfluous—an intrusion even. Jones would then seek encouragement from the floor of the meeting for a Coates speech. This would rapidly build up into widespread chanting for Coates to speak. After five minutes or so of this, Coates would make his way through the noisy scene to the rostrum to deliver a fiery and polished speech which got the audience into a state of great excitement.

I found myself somewhat embarrassed by this kind of thing, but thought it couldn't do any harm to get the troops worked up a bit. Unlike speakers like Tony Benn, Jack Jones or Brian Nicholson—or even to some degree Neil Kinnock or Michael Meacher—I could never remember a single word that Coates said. But the theatre was most memorable indeed.

The aim of the IWC was:

"...to assist in the formation of Workers' Control groups dedicated to the development of democratic consciousness, to the winning of support for Workers' Control in all the existing organisations of labour, to the challenging of undemocratic actions wherever they may occur, and to the extension of democratic control over industry and the economy itself, by assisting the unification of Workers' Control groups into a national force in the socialist movement. These aims are based on the conviction expressed in the declaration (of the 6th National Conference on Workers' Control) that 'democratic controls can only be defended if they are systematically extended throughout the unions, the political movement of Labour, and national and local governments, as well as into education and every form of industry and work'."

When I first came into contact with the IWC (ten years after its formation) I could discover only one such local group. If others existed they were not obvious, nor did they become obvious later. That one group was the South East London Workers' Control Group, organised by John Jennings, a tireless and practical organiser for industrial democracy during my time in the IWC.

Otherwise there seemed to be no effort put into organising a definite structure of local or industry groups which could form a concrete base for activism in the IWC.

The Institute seemed to operate on the basis of contacts everywhere. These contacts would organise parties of their constituents or associates to be delegated to attend Conferences, where they would be urged to spread the word. But should a concrete demand or campaign be in the offing, there was no established organisation to go straight into action at a local level.

One example should illustrate this. Every Conference had a delegation from the Kent Area of the National Union of Mineworkers. The IWC had two main contacts in Kent—Jack Dunn, the Area Secretary, and Terry Harrison, President of the largest pit, Betteshanger. These two men would always arrive with a group of Kent miners. But this group rarely consisted of the same individuals. The trip was financed in Kent by the NUM's Educational Trip for Members. This in itself was very useful but never led, nor was it encouraged by the Institute to lead, to the formation of any permanent body in

the Kent coalfield which agitated for workers' control.

In June 1974 members of the IWC in North London, led principally by Nina Fishman and Steve Boddington, decided to set up the North London Workers' Control Group. Boddington, like John Jennings, was one of the editors of the IWC's bulletin, "Workers' Control". He had for a long time been the Communist Party's leading economist, writing textbooks under the name of John Eaton. In 1974 he was in the Labour Party and widely known throughout the labour movement.

It appeared to me that he had his own group of followers or admirers in the IWC and was prepared to use this circle to develop our local group and even other local groups. He was also cultivating Nina Fishman and other members of the British and Irish Communist Organisation, and was showing off these young activists for workers' control to his associates in the IWC.

Nina Fishman, an American, had been responsible over the previous two or three years for changing BICO from being a largely Leninist organisation to absorbing the British empirical approach to politics more than any other group on the left. She had replaced ideas of Communist party building with a position of aggressive reform with workers' control at its centre, and with an eye very much to the radical reformism of the Bevin/Attlee Labour Party. She got the B&ICO, as a first logical step, to affiliate to the IWC. Nina also had a lot of contacts in the unions - especially the dockers and the miners, and was involved in the organisation of the successful 1972 miners' strike.

I always had assumed that a whole other discussion took place at the centre of the IWC involving people like Coates, Topham, Boddington, Barrat-Brown, Fleet, Newton, etc., to which the rest of us - even those on the IWC National Council - were noy privy. I also assumed that there was political or personal factionalising in this group and that the North London Group and the B&ICO were considered by Boddington as troops on his side. This is the way of the world and bothered me not at all so long as the main business of organising for workers' control was in hand by these leaders.

But the B&ICO in particular did not behave like anybody's troops. Not only did its (very few) activists in the IWC not line up with Boddington on all occasions but were as likely as not to engage publicly in fairly violent disputes about workers' control among themselves. Quite an unmanageable lot!

After a year or so Boddington largely cut his ties with both the B&ICO and the NLWCG (most of whom had nothing to do with the B&ICO).

This rift was driven home to me personally at an IWC Conference in Sheffield in 1976 when, along with the main activist in the North London Group, Joe Keenan, we were refused admission by Boddington to the Conference because we couldn't afford the entrance fee of two pounds. Both of us were unemployed at the time and had hitch-hiked from London.

Ken Fleet, the IWC Secretary, eventually managed to get us in, but could not prevail on anyone to put us up for the weekend—at least not without paying another fee of nine pounds. We spent the weekend sleeping in a field—joined in solidarity by another London Group member, Madawc Williams.

But to return to the story! The first Conference of the North London Group was held on the 1st June, 1974. It was decided that the initial function of the group would be educational, that it would meet once a week in a school and take the form of an Adult Education class.

Under this guise leading figures in industrial relations could be invited along and the subject of workers' control debated with them.

These "classes" took place between October 1974 and June 1975 and were addressed by, among others: Jack Dunn, General Secretary of the Kent NUM; Jim Mortimer, head of the conciliation service, ACAS; Stuart Holland, later a Labour MP; Bert Ramelson, Industrial Organiser of the Communist Party; the West German Labour Attache; and the industrialist, Adrian Cadbury.

The inaugural Conference was very well attended and the immediate purpose spelled out:

"There won't be any textbooks, just hard experience to learn from. The point of the class is to bring people together who are interested in finding out just what the pros and cons of industrial democracy are and how important it is for all of our futures that the workers should be able to take over running industry. The class will hear peoples' ideas from many sources—and have a chance to question and discuss these ideas freely."

## TAX continued

elderly and disabled home-owners trading down should be given the same status as first-time buyers.

Labour favours reforms for first-time buyers and those on low or modest incomes.

The party is examining how a Euro 100,000 stamp duty allowance might work along similar lines to a tax credit but is cautious about the possible impact of any measure on house prices.

The PDs who sparked the present debate with Michael McDowell's claim that the State no longer needs the Euro 2.7 billion revenue from Stamp Duty. They say they are willing to look at all options, including abolition.

The party is, however, most likely to endorse a new tiered system of stamp duty.

The Green Party is looking at limited reforms providing exemptions for first-time buyers and for families who move to accommodation suitable for providing care for a relative who might otherwise need State-provided care.

Sinn Fein is against changes in the existing regime as it believes any reductions will only drive up prices. It points out that only 2pc, or Euro 70m, of stamp duty revenue comes from first-time buyers.

### GOVERNMENT HAS NO PLANS TO TACKLE PROPERTY SPECULATORS

Tánaiste Michael McDowell told the Dáil on 26.10.2006, that the Government had no plans to tackle property speculators.

But he suggested Labour leader Pat Rabbitte, who had raised the issue, could propose increases to capital gains tax if he wished.

Capital gains tax is charged on profits from the sale of assets.

These classes were indeed very educational and proved a source of knowledge and inspiration for those of us who got involved in the workers' control agitation around the work of the Bullock Committee a year or so later.

But the hope that the attendance of people from outside North London and the fact of the new organisation itself would inspire the spread of local groups, was not to be fulfilled. Example was not enough. There had to be a positive will at the centre to organise, and that was absent. (The North London Group did later try to take on the role of a new centre and do the job itself. This proved largely impossible.)

Conor Lynch

TO BE CONTINUED

"We have promised no such legislation," Mr McDowell said. "[Mr Rabbitte] will have the opportunity, on the occasion of the Finance Bill next year, to table his amendments relating to increases in capital gains tax."

Any such amendments would be comfortably defeated by the Government, which is against increasing the tax.

Earlier this year, referring to the role property speculators played in increasing house prices, Mr Noel Ahern, Junior Minister Responsible for Housing had said:

"There is something wrong if the prices keep going up. Some form of taxation would help, as output alone does not seem to keep prices down.

"There are people buying houses and apartments off the plans and never taking the keys but selling on the contract. I personally would like to see those people taxed out of existence."

### THE FUTURE?

And the possibility of genuine reform and a progressive property tax in the one EU state which alone exempts property from its duties as distinct from its inalienable rights; which in the last decade has invested Euro 8 billion alone in property abroad?

### Bertie Ahern: "It Has To Be Indirect Taxation Now"

"I agreed with local charges but you'll not get rates back again. The game is over on that one. It has to be indirect taxation now," he says." (Bertie Ahern, Taoiseach and Peacemaker, p.24, 1998).

*"The tragedy is that he was disappointed and defeated as much by those he helped as those he opposed. His words 'if the Irish have a weakness next to drink, it is moral cowardice' ring as true today as they did at the end of the last century."*

MICHAEL D. HIGGINS, T.D. in a tribute to Michael Davitt (1846-1906), founder of the Land League.

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## TAX continued

This year the Government will collect at least Euro 7.4bn in taxes on the property sector—17% of all tax collected.

The report by Davy economist Rossa White entitled *"Irish property: Government finances exposed to a correction"* argues that the reduction or abolition of Stamp Duty is risky. (11.10.2006).

"One of the incumbent Government parties (Progressive Democrats) recently mooted that the reduction or abolition of stamp duty is a possible measure for the forthcoming Budget in December. We wonder if this party is aware of where all the bonus tax revenue is coming from.

"In our view, the total abolition of stamp duty would be a misguided policy. Stamp duty receipts from property rocketed from Euro 0.3bn in 1997 to Euro 2bn last year. Since 2003, receipts from this source have tripled. Three years ago, property-related stamp duty receipts made up 3.4% of total tax revenue; this year they will account for 6.1% of the total.

"Had the policy been enacted this year, the Department of Finance would have foregone Euro 2.7bn in revenue. Stamp duty on residential property alone amounts to about half that total," he argues.

Mr White believes that each 1% in the volume of property is worth over Euro 100m in revenue.

"For example, a 10% increase on average in both price and volume (of houses, lands and commercial property) would be worth Euro 1.85bn extra in tax receipts in 2007 compared with 2006.

"If price and volume both dropped 10%, receipts would decline Euro 1.7bn year-on-year," he contends.

"Based on the tax profile for January-September, we think the property bonus amounts to about Euro 1.25bn year-to-date. It could be Euro 2bn for the full year," he said.

However, Mr White says that the huge growth in revenue from a cyclical sector such as construction has been used in recent years partly to finance a binge in public sector employment.

"This is superficially fine while tax revenue continues to gush; the structural problem only becomes noticeable when property-related receipts dry up," he said.

*When Charlie McCreevy hiked government spending by 17 per cent in 2001, we shrugged our shoulders. When he established SSIs, the most lavish and inflationary exercise in electoral bribery in recent fiscal memory, we patted him on the back. When he gave tax reliefs to property investors at a time when construction was already booming, we winked. Now prudence and responsibility is all the rage.* (Irish Times, 7.12.2006).

## COLEMAN'S REACTION TO COWEN'S BUDGET:

"The arguments forwarded yesterday by Brian Cowen to justify the absence of any change in stamp duty thresholds hold no water.

"His objection to such a change—that stamp duty cuts would be incorporated in price rises and benefit the seller—is nonsense. Of course, such cuts would lead to house price increases, but buyers would still benefit.

"Rather than paying stamp duty to the Government with no reform, the price increment arising from reform is retained in housing equity and cashed in on when the house is sold.

"And unlike stamp duty, that price increment is easily and more cheaply funded by mortgage finance.

"Instead of reforming this tax, the Government will increase mortgage interest relief for first-time buyers. Apart from ignoring second-timers who had to trade up for family or job change reasons, this approach also ignores a hard reality of property markets—seasoned hunters that they are, estate agents can spot a first-time buyer five miles away, and are adept at using ghost bidding to eliminate any benefits that the Government seeks to endow.

"But most of all, the failure to countenance reform of stamp duty leaves one of the most inequitable and dangerous taxes in the world on our statute books.

"That failure also puts it up to the PDs to pursue the issue at the next election, or face the jeers of Labour and Fine Gael. And here may be the most significant impact of the Budget.

"Whether one is for or against reform of stamp duty, a lengthy election debate on the issue could prolong uncertainty in the property market, a market that drives one-quarter of our economy and funds one-quarter of Government revenue.

"If that scenario comes to pass, there could be a lot more redemption to come this time next December." (The Irish Times, Marc Coleman, 7.12.2006).

## NEWSPAPER LINK TO AUCTIONEERS 'UNHEALTHY'!

A very astute, and overdue comment in relation to the media relationship with the property manipulators was made recently by the leader of the Labour Party. The printed media were in the forefront of the Stamp Duty 'reform' campaign. No doubt, they figure that abolition of aspects of the charge would help rekindle the barmy days, when the news section of the "Irish Independent" made up 28 pages and the property sections made up 48 pages or more. "The Irish Times" was a massive beneficiary in the same way.

In fact, *The Irish Times* marked an even deeper involvement in the property market with the confirmation in October, 2006, of the Euro 50 million purchase of Ireland's largest property website, MyHome.ie

The Euro 50m sale, 80% of which was an upfront cash payment, will net windfall gains for each of the main shareholders. When AIB took a stake in the company in 2001, it was valued at around 10mn.

Auctioneers Sherry FitzGerald will be the biggest beneficiary of the sale, netting up to Euro 11.75m from the sale of its 23.5% stake. Douglas Newman Good and the Gunne Group will each receive up to Euro 9.4m.

AIB, which now holds an 18.7% stake, will get up to Euro 9.3m.

Advertisers spent a total of Euro 269m in the 18 newspapers represented by National Newspapers of Ireland in the first nine months of 2006.

Irish newspapers have remained silent on manipulative practices in the auctioneering business because of an *"unhealthy relationship"* between them and the industry's *"big five"*, Labour leader Pat Rabbitte argued last night.

Speaking at a public debate on homelessness at Trinity College Dublin, Mr. Rabbitte said it was an *"absolute disgrace"* that the Government had permitted a *"runaway housing market"*.

"We saw how the market... is being further manipulated by sheer greed on a Prime Time programme recently," he said.

"You haven't read very much about that in the newspapers, and I believe that the reason for that is that there is an unhealthy relationship between the big five in the auctioneering business and the main newspapers in this country.

"They've made a fortune from it in the last decade or more, and they keep quiet, and it's not something to be proud of." (Irish Times, 14.12.2006).

Will we go a step further? Despite the headlines, endless column inches, attacks on the Government, etc. the Media establishment themselves have a vested interest in retaining the 'speculator's paradise' that exists at the moment.

Since returning to Ireland in 1979, the present writer has never yet seen one positive, progressive or democratic measure arising from any campaign emanating from the Dublin media—such is the usefulness of the press to Irish society.

## THE OPPOSITION PARTIES AND STAMP DUTY

The main parties have now outlined their broad position on stamp duty. Fianna Fail is opposed to cuts in the Budget but will examine reforms aimed at first-time buyers in its election manifesto.

Fine Gael wants the threshold for first-time buyers, above which stamp duty must be paid, to be raised from Euro 317,000 raised to Euro 450,000. The party says

continued on page 28

# TAX continued

house prices had already risen above this level eight months before that rate was set. Average house prices have risen to the point where an ever larger number of buyers will be pushed into higher brackets of stamp duty.

"Another issue is whether owner-occupiers deserve to pay the same rate as applied to property investors.

"After differentiating the rates in 2001, the Government brought rates applying to investors back down to rates paid by owner-occupiers.

"Ostensibly done to prop up the rental market, the move denied owner-occupiers one of the few things working in their favour in a market where investors held most of the cards. In the United Kingdom, a rate of 1 per cent applies to all property purchases. In the Republic, three rates apply—3 per cent, 6 per cent and 9 per cent.

"Reforming the tax so that higher rates would only apply to that portion of the house price above the threshold would stabilise the relationship between prices and revenues, not to mention make the tax more equitable.

"Finally, all eyes are on what impact any reform will have on the market. All other things being equal, an increase in the threshold will tend to increase the price paid to the seller, probably by less than but close to the amount of reduction in stamp duty.

"In net terms, the Government would be the loser and the house seller the gainer.

"While remaining a passive and neutral conduit in that transfer at the time of purchase, the house buyer would nonetheless gain in two respects. Firstly, the amount previously surrendered in stamp duty—but now paid to the buyer in the form of a higher price—would at least be retained in the form of housing equity. Secondly, whereas stamp duty forces many to eat into their personal savings, the higher price resulting from its abolition or reduction can be financed using mortgage finance, at a far lower opportunity cost and over a longer time span. (Marc Coleman, Economics Editor, Irish Times, 4.12.2006).

### REACTIONARY ARGUMENT

*"Even if, as is likely, a reduction in stamp duty leads to price increases, this can only benefit both buyers and sellers. Sure, instead of paying stamp duty, buyers will end up paying a higher price for the house. But whereas the stamp duty goes to the Government, buyers will at least retain any price increment arising from its reform in the form of housing equity. And whereas banks will lend up to 100 per cent of a house price, they are less willing to lend buyers the amount they need to cover their stamp duty liability."* (Marc Coleman, Economics Editor, Irish Times, 5.12.2006).

"The fact is, the Government needs

the revenue it gets from stamp duty. An unwillingness to countenance meaningful reform has left the public sector with an insatiable appetite for spending increases." (my emphasis, throughout, ibid.)

### STAMP DUTY

*The floor space of an exempt property, must not exceed 125 square metres (1,346 square feet). All new properties that meet this requirement, are exempt.*

- New Properties larger than 125 sq. metres:
- The duty is payable on the greater of
  - (a) the site cost or
  - (b) 25% of the total cost (site cost + building costs)

For example: If such a property is worth Euro 1,000,000 and the site value is Euro 350,000, stamp duty is payable on Euro 350,000 at the rate applicable to that figure, i.e. 4.5% (Euro 15,750) for first-time buyers, or 6% (Euro 21,000) for others.

Some first-time buyers might be taken in by this 'blather'! Not many. Essentially, what Coleman is really advocating is that democratic governments have no right to tax property in any shape or form.

He doesn't want Stamp Duty, he wants to water down VAT but you will never read his advocacy of a genuine tax on property.

### "REFORM OF STAMP DUTY RISKY"

"Reform of stamp duty in tomorrow's Budget (December 6, 2006) would be dangerous, a leading economist has warned.

"With the predicted and indeed welcome 'soft landing' in the residential property sector, interference with stamp duty at this point could have a detrimental effect on market forces by falsely stimulating the market in the short term, leading to a harder landing in the medium term," said Goodbody Stockbrokers chief economist Dermot O'Leary.

"Increasing mortgage interest relief for first-time buyers would not have this impact and would deliver tax relief to

<i>Residential Property Consideration</i>	<i>First Time Buyer</i>	<i>Other Owner Occupier</i>	<i>Investors: New and Second hand Properties</i>
Up to Euro 127,000	Exempt	Exempt	Exempt
Euro 127,001– Euro 190,500	Exempt	3.0%	3.0%
Euro 190,501– Euro 254,000	Exempt	4.0%	4.0%
Euro 254,001– Euro 317,500	Exempt	5.0%	5.0%
Euro 317,501– Euro 381,000	3.0%	6.0%	6.0%
Euro 381,001 – Euro 635,000	6.0%	7.5%	7.5%
Over Euro 635,001	9.0%	9.0%	9.0%

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"For first-time buyers, the lowest rate of duty, 3 per cent, applies to any house valued at between Euro 317,501 and Euro 381,000. Above the latter threshold, the rate escalates to 6 per cent. Moreover, that 6 per cent applies to the full value of the house, rather than just the portion above the threshold. Houses above Euro 635,000 incur a 9 per cent rate.

"The rates themselves are far above those in any other country. Average house prices here have now reached Euro 400,000, over 10 times the average industrial wage. The first paradox here is that an average house is now beyond the purchasing power of an average income earner. But even if it were not, that average purchaser would fork out some Euro 24,000 in stamp duty to the Government simply for having to buy a house, several times what they pay in income tax each year.

"To date, most speculation about reform has focused on the possibility of increasing the exemption applied to first-time buyers. Last Thursday, (30.11.2006), the Labour Party argued that relief should also extend to those trading up to purchase modest homes.

"...the call for reform now spreads from the right to the left." (Marc Coleman, Economics Editor, The Irish Times 5.12.06).

those in the market for property who are most in need of a helping hand."

"Mr O'Leary also cautioned against cuts in income tax. The predicted cut in the top rate of tax by 1 percentage point to 41 per cent was "not needed" when the economy is in an expansionary mode, he said. Further tax-reducing measures may be necessary in the years ahead to compete with the threat from newer members of the EU, but the timing needs to be managed, according to Mr O'Leary.

"Tax receipts have tripled in the past 10 years, from 15 billion to 45 billion, and there have been big changes in the revenue mix.

"VAT receipts are now the biggest revenue earners for the Exchequer, with income tax receipts now accounting for 27 per cent of the total. Unsurprisingly, the property market is now a significant revenue gatherer for the Government, accounting for 17 per cent of total revenues. Therefore as the property market slows over the coming years, revenue from this source will wane."

"Housing construction will peak at 92,000 this year, dropping to 88,000 next year and 77,000 in 2008, said Mr O'Leary." (The Irish Times, 05.12.06)

### STATE 'OVER-RELIANT' ON STAMP DUTY

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## TAX continued

"Almost uniquely amongst developed countries, Ireland has no property tax which home owners must pay every year.

"In most other countries such property taxes are used to fund local government, as domestic rates used to do in this country before they were abolished in 1978.

"Since then we have had a mish-mash of refuse charges, the residential property tax and various ad hoc charges.

"With no proper local property tax, stamp duty has come, willy-nilly, to fill the role of a surrogate.

"None of this was thought out and, not entirely surprisingly, we have ended up with the worst of all worlds." (Dan White, Evening Herald, 21.9.2006).

### PROGRESSIVE PROPERTY TAX

THE nub of this whole debate on property centres on the absence of a progressive property tax. In any state resembling a modern democracy, tax on property is a central principle, you can only tax wages and salaries to a certain limit—then the duties as against the rights of property are called upon. This applies, not just in democratic states, it damn near applies in all types of non-democratic states.

Jack Lynch's decision to abolish domestic rates following the 1977 Fianna Fail election victory was singularly the most reckless and irresponsible financial decision ever taken by an Irish political leader.

With his current demand for the removal of Stamp Duty, which is a bizarre form of Property Tax, McDowell is emulating the father figure of the Progressive Democrats, Jack Lynch.

*"Hegel remarks somewhere that all great, world-historical facts and personages occur, as it were, twice. He has forgotten to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce."*

(Karl Marx, 1852).

Indeed, it was this 'progressive' wing of the Lynch administration, which advocated the removal of domestic rates, foremost amongst them Seamus Brennan and Martin O'Donoghue.

**AHERN:—**

### "Abolishing Rates Was Totally Wrong"

"In retrospect, Ahern believes that the 1977 Manifesto was economic make-believe. Other economic commentators are not as kind in their analysis, claiming the manifesto led to a huge national debt that dominated economic and political life for the following decade and took a further decade to get under control.

"The car tax thing was a nonsense and abolishing rates was totally wrong. All

we needed was a waiver scheme. I remember at the time there were a lot of old people—Garda widows and retired teachers—who had huge houses but no money and they were being screwed for rates. All we needed to do was bring in a good waiver scheme for the people who hadn't got the bread. Instead, we abolished rates and here we are, 20 years on, and Dublin Corporation have to do everything on a shoe-string because they can't have a local charge." (Bertie Ahern: *Taoiseach & Peacemaker* by Whelan and Masterson (Blackwater Press, 1998).

Professor Diarmaid Ferriter, the historian who teaches at Dublin City University, presents a programme series for RTE called *"What If . . . ?"*. It's about as useful as the Horoscope column in *The Sun* newspaper. The one *"What If . . . ?"* in politics has to be: What if Jack Lynch hadn't abolished Domestic Rates? Simple, people could afford to buy a reasonable house today and Ireland wouldn't be a haven for property speculators, pouring billions into property for naked greed without a single social or community consideration—*"Many of them are young, first time buyers who, if the truth were told, can afford neither the property nor the stamp duty"* (Irish Independent, 19.9.2006).

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"IF Justice Minister, Michael McDowell, is really worried about the burden of stamp duty on first-time buyers, why does he not simply suggest it be a tax paid by the builder/speculator?"

"Of course, I'm being facetious.

"As a well-known economist recently explained, stamp duty is actually a tax on the transaction and it doesn't matter a damn who is writing the cheque. Like any tax on a transaction it is, in reality, a tax on the seller's profit.

"If you took Euro 10,000 off the stamp duty on a Euro 400,000 house, the law of supply and demand would cause the house price to drift towards Euro 410,000 with the builder/speculator pocketing the Euro 10,000 that might otherwise have gone to building roads and hospitals."

(Tim O'Halloran, *Dublin 11*, Letter to Irish Examiner, 21.9.2006).

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### THE PDS, THE MEDIA, THE AUCTIONEERS

#### AND THE PROPERTY SPECULATORS

Amongst the brashiest exponents of the 'reform' of Stamp Duty is Marc Coleman, Economics Editor of the *Irish Times*, his is the voice of Property Ireland Inc. and well worth reading.

"Reforming stamp duty, if it happens, will require all the skills of a bomb-disposal expert. The risk of an explosion in the property market, not to mention the election, is considerable.

"The source of the danger comes

from the rapid growth of the tax itself. Stamp duty now accounts for 9 per cent of total tax revenue and rising, up from 3 per cent in 1998, when revenues began escalating at the start of the housing boom.

"Stamp duty's odd rate structure significantly magnifies the relationship between the rate of house price growth on the one hand and the rate of revenue growth on the other. In the first 10 months of this year, house prices rose by 10 per cent on average. By contrast, stamp duty revenues rose by 39 per cent over the same period, which strongly suggests that even a modest fall in house prices could significantly dent revenues from this source.

"Despite this, both the Minister for Finance and his department have been reluctant reformers. A cash cow for the exchequer, stamp duty could rake in up to Euro 4 billion in revenue next year. Coincidentally, this is also the amount by which the Government intends to increase State spending next year.

"The first question is who should pay stamp duty and why. The unspoken truth is that stamp duty is tolerated by our political classes as an alternative to property tax. Not having any initial property to begin with, a policy of exempting first-time buyers seems immediately justified. In a strongly rising market, owner-occupiers trading up have not only property but equity from what they have sold.

"But stamp duty taxes them not on the basis of that equity gain, but rather on the price of the property they are purchasing. If the duty exceeds the equity, then the incidence of stamp duty in that particular case will violate a core principle of good taxation by exceeding 100 per cent of the taxable value or gain.

"Another problem with levying stamp duty on owner-occupiers is the way it penalises growing families and mobile workers. Requiring owner-occupiers to pay a tax simply because their family has grown and they need a bigger residence seems perverse. Similarly, for those who have to sell their old home and buy a new one in another part of the country in order to take up employment there, stamp duty discriminates against those who lose their jobs. It also contradicts the Government's policy of encouraging labour mobility.

"For those owner-occupiers wishing to trade down, stamp duty acts as a disincentive to sell. A five-bedroom house where all the birds have flown the nest may stay occupied by one or two elderly relatives, while large families desperately seek accommodation.

"Even assuming the tax is a valid one, it is hard to see that stamp duty—an alternative to property tax—should apply to houses with average prices. In this respect, stamp duty thresholds have lost all credibility.

"Even after the 2005 budget, first-time buyers were still subject to a rate of 3 per cent on the purchase of a house worth Euro 317,501 or more. But average

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"TANAISTE Michael McDowell put himself on a collision course with his Fianna Fail partners last night when he insisted the Government could do without the Euro 2.6bn in stamp duty it will rake in this year." (Irish Independent, 19.9.2006).

## Cowen Calls The Shots!

MINISTER for Finance, Brian Cowen rejected demands by his Tanaiste, Mr. McDowell, leader of the P.D.s for house stamp duty 'reform' in his 2007 Budget, though extra mortgage interest relief is to be offered to first-time buyers.

Mr. Cowen argued that stamp duty changes now would fuel house prices just as there are signals that they are tapering off.

Politically, this was the most positive aspect of the 2007 Budget. Agin a horde of Auctioneers, Accountants and Advertisers, Cowen stood his ground—on this occasion there was no way the 'tail was going to wag the dog', however, this was only the battle : the war will continue until the 2007 General Election.

One auctioneer source stated that McDowell should have given a little thought to the issue before he opened his 'gob', but the 'brilliant barrister' couldn't resist the opportunity of a cheap bit of politicking at the expense of those who strive to gain a foothold on the housing ladder. In one sweep, he was going to shape the entire Budget and bring Fianna Fail to heel, not-to-mention, setting the Election agenda for the Opposition. As Des O'Malley would say: "The leadership must have gone to Michael's head."

The media claimed that his September 18th, 2006 remarks after being elected PD leader, led to a downturn in the market : wrong. The market was already sagging, especially the upper-end : that's the Dublin 4 end.

The property predators backed McDowell in the hope that a 'reform' of Stamp Duty might give the market a final spurt.

There are enough housing units in this state at the moment, sufficient even, to house London's homeless, never mind catering for our own housing needs. But the housing market in Ireland is not about social need, it is unambiguously about profit.

### MORTGAGE RELIEF

Under Mr. Cowen's plan, presented on December 6th, 2006, a single person would be able to claim mortgage interest relief of up to Euro 8,000 at the 20 per cent tax rate, while couples would enjoy a Euro 16,000 threshold—double the existing figures.

The Progressive Democrats emphasised that the party leader, Michael McDowell, had never sought changes in stamp duty during the lifetime of this administration.

Focus Ireland, the voluntary group which works for the elimination of homelessness, has urged the Government to spend Euro 2 billion on 10,000 local authority houses and to increase the cap on rent supplement.

State spending on rent supplements have increased dramatically in recent years, rising from Euro 151 million in 2000 to almost Euro 370 million in 2005, while the numbers in receipt of the payment have jumped from 42,700 to over 60,000.

The supplement was capped in 2002 amid Government fears that private sector landlords were increasing rents in the belief

that the State would pay the bill because of a shortage of accommodation.

Last month Mr. Seamus Brennan, Minister for Social Affairs, said a further review of the cap, which has been examined twice by officials, would take place before the end of this year.

### "BRILLIANT BARRISTER"

"TANAISTE Michael McDowell put himself on a collision course with his Fianna Fail partners last night when he insisted the Government could do without the Euro 2.6bn in stamp duty it will rake in this year.

"That's the point we want to get across. The Government doesn't need this massive flow of stamp duty from house purchases." (Irish Independent, 19.9.2006).

### STAMP DUTY: THE ORIGINS

STAMP Duty on property transactions was introduced in the 1970s in order to tax the wealthy purchasers of estates and grand mansions around Ireland.

In the intervening years, Governments fiddled with it, but, alarmingly, this tax was never brought into line with inflation or the consumer price index, thus making every ordinary second-hand-home sale liable.

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"The tax is a major bugbear and would make a clever and very popular option in the election manifesto of any party. Above all, its abolition or reduction would encourage people to trade up or down more frequently.

"But it will also increase property prices in the second-hand market further. An increase of more than 20pc so far this year in this sector is the recorded average in Dublin and removing the stamp duty could encourage greedy vendors to increase the selling price, at least in the short term." (Irish Independent, 19.9.2006).

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