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The North Convolutates

Northern Ireland continues to be a problem. That is its destiny. It was designed by its Creator to be a problem and it does not presume to thwart the will of the problem-setter.

The purpose for which Northern Ireland was conceived was to keep Protestants and Catholics together as coherent communities in conflict with each other, within the British state but excluded from its political life, disputing in various ways (from academic to military) over an issue which is incapable of being resolved.

There is disagreement about whether there is a strong case for seeing the Universe as a product of intelligent design which may presume the existence of a Designer. But there is no reasonable ground for doubting that Northern Ireland was constructed by the intelligence of Designer. It was created by an Act of the Imperial Parliament at a moment when the Empire ruled the world and the wisdom of two and a half centuries of representative government was concentrated in Whitehall. When Britain did what it did in those circumstances, it was not without malice aforethought. What has been happening in Northern Ireland ever since is in line with what a realistic estimate of probabilities would have expected.

The Catholic third of the population remained a coherent Nationalist community sustaining an Anti-Partitionism as its politics, because there was nothing else for it to become within the actual political context to which Northern Ireland was consigned. The Protestant two-thirds remained a coherent Unionist community because it was required to return a Unionist majority at every election—and it had twice as many elections as the rest of the British state—in order to maintain the 'connection with Britain'.

The Protestants ran a sub-government dealing with minor issues while the major issues of state were dealt with by Whitehall under the direction of Governments which Northern Ireland played no part in electing. The major thing done by that local Protestant sub-government was the policing of the Catholic community.

The local sub-government was scrapped by Whitehall in response to an all-out Catholic assault on it in 1972—to which St. Jack Lynch contributed. For the next thirty years there was 'direct rule' by Whitehall. That is to say, the North was governed by the Government of the state. This was decreed by Whitehall to be an abnormal emergency measure, and the North continued to be excluded from the democratic political system of the state.

After 1998 local sub-government was restored, but on essentially altered terms. The pretence that Northern Ireland was some kind of democracy was abandoned. It was

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Lilliput Europe?

Twenty years ago the Wall came down, leaving Western Europe in a secure and comfortable position in the world. What it needed to do in order to maintain this position was nothing. It was in the position known in chess as *zugzwang*—a strong position that could not be improved by moving and would be spoiled by the obligation to move. But where did the obligation to move come from? In chess it comes from the clock. There was no clock running for the EU. Masterful inactivity was a possible course of action. But that proved to be too bold for a Europe disorientated by the disappearance of the Wall. It would have needed a De Gaulle or a Bismarck to do such a daring thing as staying put and refusing hubris. So the EU put itself under compulsion to move. It is now picking up the pieces of itself. The first sign of returning health is the appointment of a Belgian nonentity to the new Presidency.

The *Irish Times* (Nov. 21) carried a schizophrenic editorial on this subject. It comments that the reality of the new Presidency:

"is far from the caricature that opponents of the Lisbon Treaty threatened us with. We were, they claimed, creating a monster—an imperial figure who would strut the globe throwing Europe's weight around, someone who would be recognised in a line-up with Obama,

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Fianna Fail In The North

Just months after Brian Cowan made it clear that only over his dead body would Fianna Fáil organise in The North, Fianna Fáil has organised in The North.

On Saturday November 28th a third FF 'Forum' was launched in Co. Fermanagh with FF Ministers, Dermot Ahern and Eamon O Cuiv in attendance.

On Tuesday December 1st the *Irish News* reported that former Sinn Fein,

currently Independent, MLA for Fermanagh and South Tyrone, Gerry McHugh has joined Fianna Fáil. He is quoted as saying:

"I do not claim to be a Fianna Fáil MLA but I am an MLA who is a member of Fianna Fáil".

The *Irish News* reports "It is expected that councillors from the SDLP and Sinn Fein will declare for Fianna Fáil in coming months".

Forum spokesman Pdraig Murphy said

at the Enniskillen launch: "People are encouraging the party to participate in the forthcoming 2011 elections and we are confident we can deliver on this".

So The Republican Party is organised, with public representatives at every level in what passes for devolved government in The North.

So, turn a blind eye Biffo? Or Bye-Bye Biffo?

Joe Keenan

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Labour Comment, edited by **Pat Maloney**:

Property Tax: Anything But Reform?

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formally recognised that there were two communal electorates with little or no overlap between them. The new arrangement provided for the representatives to control pieces of the new sub-government as of right, with Ministers being appointed directly by the communal parties, not by the First Minister, and not being subject to a Cabinet.

The Unionist Party, led by David Trimble (who was advised by Professor the Lord Bew) did not allow the new system to start for a number of years after 1998. When, under extreme pressure, he finally nominated Ministers to it, it was always on a short lease. He participated under a post-dated letter of resignation, to become operative if certain conditions—which it was virtually certain would not be met—were not met. His purpose throughout was to get the system suspended and have Sinn Fein blamed for it. The Taoiseach (Bertie Ahern) collaborated in this exercise. "*Save Dave*" was the order of the day.

It was asserted, without a shred of evidence and in defiance of probability, that the peaceful raid on Castlereagh high security Barracks at mid-day, without masks but with the security cameras accidentally switched off, was done by the Provos. And likewise with the robbery

of £26 million from the Northern Bank in central Belfast, in which the getaway-van was traced on CCTV cameras for fifteen miles out of Belfast before disappearing from sight of the universal cameras and without leaving a trace.

Trimble, playing his clever game of subverting the Good Friday Agreement while purporting to participate in it, steadily lost ground to Paisley, his close ally of the Drumcree confrontation. It was only when Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party outstripped the UUP that the Belfast Agreement became functional.

When Paisley decided to operate the Agreement with Sinn Fein he did so with a good grace. But that was not in the script, so the subversion of Paisley began.

The *ersatz* party systems in Northern Ireland have nothing to do with conflict over policies to be implemented by the Government, or even the sub-government. And there is not one system, but two. There is no Unionist/Nationalist conflict as there is no middle ground, no floating vote, between the two. The party-conflict is within each community. It is thus twice removed from the rational object of party-politics, which is the governing of the State.

Despite the lack of a rational object the

ersatz parties must follow the example of the real parties in Britain and try to destroy each other. But, in Britain, because it is subject to the rational object, the destructive conflict is more apparent than real.

While the UUP was the major Protestant party the story was that it could not operate the Good Friday Agreement wholeheartedly because it had to guard itself against the DUP. Then the DUP became the major party and, against expectations, undertook to operate the GFA with a good will. If the *apologia* of the UUP had been in earnest, it would have welcomed this new departure by the DUP and helped to consolidate it. Instead of doing that, it reversed roles with the DUP and accused it of selling-out to the Fenians. That is to say, it adopted what was called the 'extremist' position when played by the DUP, and set about destabilising the DUP/SF accommodation.

The most sensitive measure involved in the GFA was the transfer of policing to Stormont. Under the old system there was a simple Protestant policing of Catholics (with a token presence of Catholics, many of them from outside the North). Under the new system there was to be some kind of supra-communal or trans-communal system. Sinn Fein was reluctant to play a part in the Policing Boards until the RUC was remade. That was then a strong Unionist point against it. Then Sinn Fein began to participate, and that became a reason against it.

Paisley was a big human presence on the Protestant side. He was not submerged in the pettiness of intra-communal *ersatz* politics. His purpose, when he decided to operate the Agreement, was to implicate Sinn Fein in it, in conjunction with a strong Unionist presence. He was therefore amenable to devolving policing authority, and binding Sinn Fein into it.

So Paisley was branded a 'Lundy' by the 'moderates' of the UUP.

It is conceivable that even though Republican Ireland—i.e. that part of Ireland which is a Republic—has recently embraced its Protestant heritage, with official celebration of the Williamite conquest, the Southern reader may not be familiar with the important historical figure of Lundy. Lundy is burned in effigy on the bonfires of the Eleventh Night. He proposed the Opening of the Gates (of Derry) to the besieging Army of James. And Paisley was for establishing a devolved Police Authority in which Sinn Fein, as the major representative of the Fenians, would play a part.

The anti-Paisley campaign launched by the UUP, appealing to the most primitive element of Ulster Protestant culture, operated on an element of the DUP which had gone along with Paisley in the first instance. It was given extensive coverage by BBC, NI—which, unlike the

Greaves Summer School

I notice that in the latest edition of your *Review*, your correspondent; Malachi Lawless ascribes the organisation of the Greaves School to the Communist Party of Ireland. This is surprising as a number of your regular contributors have attended the School on occasion and indeed, some have participated as speakers.

On the contrary, the School has been organised for over twenty years by a committee, the members of which to the best of my knowledge, have all been unaffiliated politically and I would be grateful if you would acknowledge this fact in the next edition of the *Review*.

Connolly Books has organised a bookstall at the School almost since its inception and it is our hope that this relationship will be maintained as it is the leading radical bookshop in Ireland and its stock has been consistently popular with attendees at the School.

I hope that you will continue to publicise the work of the School and I will forward you the programme for next year upon its completion. We have also established a website at www.greavesschool.com and we intend to have video of this year's contributions available there soon. **Frank Keoghan**, Director, Greaves School. (10.11.09)

BBC in general, is a Whitehall Government apparatus (and was so even in the days when, according to Lord Professor Bew of Queen's and Professor Keogh of Cork, there was a 'Northern Ireland state'), and its influence is usually mischievous.

The Unionist 'moderates', being overtaken by the Unionist 'extremists', set about recovering ground by attacking the 'extremists' for selling out to Sinn Fein. But in the official nomenclature the UUP remained 'moderate', even when attempting to destabilise the DUP/SF arrangement, and the DUP remains 'extremist', even when making a deal with Sinn Fein. And the game was to destabilise the deal made between the 'extremists' who were acting moderately.

An evening paper, *The Belfast Telegraph*, is now owned by the Irish Independent Group. For many years it was little more than a sheet for property advertising. It has now been remade into a newspaper and become a morning daily. And of course it engages in 'investigative journalism'. Its major investigation was to discover 'political corruption' in the Paisley family—basically the payment of a rent slightly above average by Ian Paisley junior for office premises with which there was some personal connection. It hammered away at this piece of trivia, feeding into the UUP/BBC stirring up of fundamentalist Unionism against Paisley.

Paisley senior decided not to bother any more. He retired. Paisley junior, reared in the liberal atmosphere of the Paisley family, took a back seat. DUP leadership passed to Peter Robinson and Jeffrey Donaldson.

That Paisley's domestic circle was liberal in secular affairs was well known—or should have been. Religious certainty is not incompatible with secular broad-mindedness—a fact made evident thirty years ago when the *Irish Times* tried to browbeat Paisley with the homosexuality of some members of his movement. And, conversely, religious uncertainty within Unionism is not necessarily conducive to secular liberalism.

Paisley's accommodation with Sinn Fein has been subverted. Discontent within Paisley's rank and file has been made effective. There has been significant loss of electoral support. But, so far, the defections from the DUP have not gone to the 'moderate' fundamentalists of the UUP, who began the stirring. UUP fundamentalism is too subtle—or still smells too much of the fur-coat brigade of olden times—to be a suitable vehicle for the DUP discontent it stirred up. That discontent has gone into the forging of a third Unionist movement, the *Traditional Unionist Voice*, which split the Unionist vote in the European Election and enabled Sinn Fein to top the poll. If that is repeated at the next Assembly Election, Martin

McGuinness could become the First Minister.

Forty years ago it was evident to us, on the basis of obvious social realities, that there were two possible courses of development in the North. We suggested that the Protestant community should be recognised by the Republic as a distinct national community as a basis for *rapprochement*. That proposal was instantly rejected by the Taoiseach, Jack Lynch. When we argued that a common ground of politics for Protestants and Catholics should be established within the democratic politics of the British State, that was rejected by Fianna Fail and by the Fine Gael and Labour Parties.

The alternative was the intensification of the conflict of the two communities. After the events of August 1969 that conflict could no longer tick over in routine manner.

Intensified communal conflict—the wearing down of the Protestant community through escalating attrition—was the course decided on. And Dublin Governments have been active participants in that process, tut-tutting along the way over some of the 'extreme' expressions of a conflict which it supported in its extreme fundamentals.

It is possible, of course, that the will of the Protestant community will in the end be worn down by the pressure put on it. If that happens, then it happens. But it has not happened yet. Unionism has fragmented into three parties. It did so before, in the 1970s. The significant thing is that none of the three are committed to the GFA.

Parties in the North are not parties in the normal sense. They do not relate to society as parties whose object is to govern states do. (Sinn Fein is the only Northern party which has that object.) The political will of the community is formed independently of them.

But if Sinn Fein does become the major party at the next Assembly Election, that will be an interesting conjuncture.

The DUP is now dragging its heels on the issue of Transfer of Policing and Justice Powers to the Assembly in the expectation of a Tory Government next Summer. It dragged its heels two years ago, expecting good things when the Presbyterian Scot replaced the slippery Anglo-Catholic in Downing Street. But the good things did not come: on the contrary, Brown condemned DUP behaviour whilst not criticising Sinn Fein—a novel development in British conduct of NI affairs.

We may, of course, be entirely mistaken in what we see, even though wishful thinking plays no part in it. We therefore give an alternative view, that of Lord Professor Bew, the rigorous Marxist-Leninist who served with the Stickies, became an adviser to David Trimble, and now writes for the *Tory Spectator*:

"The DUP visibly fears the prospect of a Cameron predominance in British politics to the point of actually demonstrating against him on his visit to Ballymena. The party privately hopes that somehow New Labour will survive and leave the tramlines of local politics—the protected fractious community psychotherapy process at Stormont—undisturbed. Increasingly the DUP makes it clear that they do not want to see Sinn Fein having to face any possible inconvenience or challenge arising from a Conservative victory and, therefore, from an alleged London partiality for any local faction in the province. But the status quo in Northern Ireland means a cocooned political class in Stormont—underwritten ad infinitum by the British taxpayer, the great unsung hero of the Troubles, and playing no role in shaping, or being shaped by, the wider UK debate on public policy.

"This already feels like a somewhat nostalgic vision. But there are strong local interests involved in maintaining it.

It is, however, now bound to be challenged, because Northern Ireland is, after all, part of the United Kingdom.

"Any incoming Cameron government requires the stability of the Agreement and its devolved institutions, but it needs to be able to move on from it in certain respects. The prospects are reasonable. Since the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, Irish nationalism has been addicted to the idea that it could progress by doing deals with London which could then be imposed on local unionists. David Cameron has emotionally distanced himself from that part of the Thatcher legacy. Nationalists, as a result, will be compelled to return to the position famously endorsed by Eamon de Valera in the Irish Senate debate of 1939, that of seeking an accommodation with unionists rather than decisive British intervention against them.

"The removal of the spectre of an imposed Anglo-Irish Joint Authority, which is effectively what Cameron has done, means that the local parties have no choice but to work within the existing devolved compromise. But it also means that there will be no excuse for a Little Ulsterist failure to engage in the wider public debates of the Westminster parliament..." (*Spectator*, Sept. 12.)

So Lord Bew has noticed that the North "is after all part of the UK", and he aspires to be a Little Ulsterist no longer. For his services to Little Ulster (a.k.a. the Northern Ireland state) he was made a British legislator. But how does he think people in the North who are not raised to the expiring peerage of the state can engage in the politics of the state which they are, after all, part of?

He might notice that there are in the Lower House three parties which aspire to govern the state and two parties which aspire to take Scotland and Wales out of the state. And there is Six County miscellany, whose members are sharply divided amongst themselves on matters which have nothing to do with the governing of the state. Some of them would like to take their region out of the state while others want to keep it within the state. But whether they want to stay or to leave, they are excluded from the parties whose business is to govern the state. They are essentially spectators within the arena through which the state is governed. And, when there was a promising movement in the North to get the Six Counties included in the political life of the state, Lord Bew was vehemently opposed to it.

As to the "existing devolved compromise", it was forced on the UUP by Whitehall. Lord Bew was still earning his peerage then, so he supported it. He was a member of an exclusive Unionist Think-Tank, the Cadogan Group, which made a pretence of denying that it was Unionist. There were disagreements within the Group about the Agreement. The issue seemed to be over whether it was a

permanent and final settlement of the Northern Ireland Problem, or was a transitional arrangement which improved the position of the Nationalist community for further development of the Problem. Dennis Kennedy, a former EU official who was able to read a document in the old-fashioned way, saw that it was essentially transitional and he opposed it. Bew, living in the shadow of his coming event, and trained in bizarre modes of reading by Althusserian Marxism, saw the Agreement as providing for a final settlement of the Problem. But, at the same time, he became adviser to Trimble in the delaying tactic to prevent the implementation of the Agreement.

Lord Bew was on the People's Democracy March forty years ago that was ambushed by Unionists at Burntollet and helped to destabilise the old Northern Ireland. He later said on Radio Eireann that he wished he had stayed in bed. And he must now wish that he had made a straight reading of the Agreement eleven years ago—though if he had, there would have been no peerage.

The Agreement was implemented piecemeal and with a bad grace while Trimble's co-operation was needed—as is being done now by the post-Paisley DUP. It was therefore implemented in a way that was advantageous to the Nationalist community, and especially to Sinn Fein. The advantage that might have come to the Unionist community by taking the lead in implementing the Agreement as consolidating Partition—which Trimble, as a debating point, said it did—was warded off.

Why was the assertion that the Agreement reinforced Partition never more than a debating point? Why was it not acted upon as a real potential to be realised in fact? Apparently because of a widely-felt need in the Unionist community to be on hostile relations with the Nationalist community, and a disturbed awareness that Sinn Fein was eager for friendly relations. That need was given acute expression, not only in Trimble's politics, but in his personality. (Dublin politicians taking part in joint conferences under the Agreement remarked that he always seemed to bring a chill into the room with him.)

So that is how the Agreement was implemented—except for Policing. Lord Bew says: "*The government is well aware that this is the last juicy plum it can offer to Sinn Fein. All the other goodies... have long since been delivered...*"

It's true enough. Trimble/Bew reduced the Agreement, which they purported to support, to a supply of goodies for Sinn Fein. Or to put it less pettishly: Sinn Fein was the only party political enough to take advantage of the ambiguities of the Agreement.

Lord Bew now wants the Agreement to be set aside: "*The government's obsession with delivery of policing and justice, while understandable, obscures the fact that the problems of the Adams leadership are wider and deeper. But the obsession remains...*"

The "obsession" is of course a measure provided for by the Agreement, ratified by referendum, election, etc. etc.

The reasoning is that Sinn Fein is in trouble because "*conventional wisdom in Dublin*" is that the economic crisis weakens the case for unity—as if Dublin had in recent memory been pressing for unity; and that "*demographic realities in the North are not those envisaged... by Sinn Fein in the 1990s*", i.e. Catholic breeding has slowed down; and that the Agreement can therefore be aborted.

"Sinn Fein's response has been predictable. Mr. Adams's rhetoric has become noticeably more militant, and he continues, as always, as if the pro-consent clauses of the Good Friday Agreement—which link Northern Ireland to the rest of the UK—do not actually exist. More worrying is the strategy of tension on the streets..."

There is no obligation under the Agreement for Nationalists to become Unionists. What it provides for is an improved official position for the Nationalist community in the conflict with the Unionist community. The Agreement presumes a continuation of the conflict of communities, and structures it into the devolved system. The Provos failed in a valiant effort to gain Irish unity without Protestant consent but gained a Constitutional arrangement in which to pursue that aim by other means.

Probably only Paisley had the stature to implicate the Unionists in working with Sinn Fein. Now that his tactic of implicating republicans in the running of Northern Ireland was set aside, nothing else is realistically possible under the term of the Agreement, any more than under the terms of the 1920 Act, than the aggravating conflict of a Unionist community which has long been excluded from the democratic life of the British state to which it professes attachment, and an Anti-Partition community which always knows it must lose the election but in recent decades has found increasing satisfaction in improving its position within the conflict to which it was consigned by Britain.

This situation leads naturally to tension in the streets, which is not a "strategy", but an effect. There would possibly be less tension if Unionism had adopted the Agreement in the first instance as an accommodation with the Provos under which the Provos undertook to nurture the Republican spirit into compliance. What Unionism did (with Lord Bew as part of it) was try to diminish Provo standing in the

Catholic community, and thereby maximise Republican dissent from the Agreement.

The title of Lord Bew's article is *Terrorism Is Back In Northern Ireland*. Of course it is. Did he expect something else to result from the attempt to discredit Adams and McGuinness, and to devalue the Agreement by withholding the "goodies".

During the years when there was a vigorous Catholic/Protestant movement demanding that the British Labour Party should function in the Northern Ireland region of the state of which it was one of the governing parties, Lord Bew was utterly opposed to it. Under the Unionist trauma of 1985 the demand for inclusion in the party politics of the State was extended to include the Tory Party. That movement then campaigned within the branches of the Tory and Labour Parties in Britain, and engaged in intensive lobbying of Party Conferences. Pressure within the Tory Party became so great that the Secretary of State had to take part in the argument, apply bribes and threats to Party members, and introduce token individual membership, before the movement could be quelled. Lord Bew was opposed to that movement too.

But now he sees potential for something in the merger of the UUP faction of Unionism with the Tory Party as a tactic in its dispute with the DUP. It is hard to see what Tory leader David Cameron hopes to gain from this connection with Sir Reg Empey's Unionists. The UUP, apparently at the end of its tether, hopes to revive as an appendage to a Tory Government which will enable it to outflank the Robinson DUP on its 'extremist' flank by setting aside the Agreement.

This Tory alliance with a minor factional Unionist Party has no relevance for the Nationalist community, part of which now looks to Fianna Fail. And it needs to be said in this respect that, while in British affairs the *party system* is the dominant thing (and that one party alone is not half of the system) that is not really the case with 26 County politics. Fianna Fail has pretty well sustained the system by itself ever since the Free State party went astray into the authoritarianism of the late 1920s and into Fascism in the mid 1930s. The appearance of the Tory Party in the North as the instrument of a Unionist faction would not be an equivalent to the appearance of Fianna Fail.

PS: *"the British taxpayer, the great unsung hero of the Troubles"*! Are the taxpayers not the electorate then? And in a democracy is not the electorate responsible for what the state does? Perhaps not what one Government does after one election, but the Northern Ireland mess has now continued for close on a century, in accordance with the will of the British electorate. So let the British taxpayers pay for the damage they have done as electors. ■

Lilliput Europe

continued

Medvedev and Hu Jintao".

And then it demonstrates that this monster figure was exactly what it wanted, and expected: Its big headlines were: *EU Fails To Think Big With Two Such Low-Profile Appointments* (21 Nov.); and *Low-Profile EU Leaders Reflect Feeble Global Role* (24 Nov.).

The blurb on the latter is: *"The best that may come from the new appointments is more effective management of the union's business"*—with the implication that mere Union business is trivial. The article is by Chris Patten, the last *Gauleiter* of Hong Kong, which was governed as a British Crown Colony for a century and a half after its conquest in the Opium War but was made into a kind of democracy shortly before being returned to China in the hope that it would exert a disintegrative influence—a democratic influence, as we prefer to say—on the Chinese State.

So Europe is now in the hands of a Belgian nonentity—and a throwback to the past into the bargain, a Christian Democrat. Belgium is no longer the gross slave Empire for which we went to war in 1914 in *"Our War"*. And it has forgotten the atrocious condition it left the Congo in forty years ago. Nor has it engaged in the guilt-tripping about its past in which the Germans indulge (while calling down bombers on Afghan villagers and supporting Jewish ethnic cleansing in Palestine). It is a small, prosperous, well-conducted country, shot through with an insoluble national problem of its own which it just about manages to contain.

It is said that Sarkozy decided Blair would not do when at a ceremonial event the father of a soldier killed in Afghanistan refused to shake his hand because it was bloody. The Irish thought that Blair's bloody hand was fine as the symbol of the new EU. Hopefully the Irish support for Blair will help to disillusion those who think Ireland still is what it used to be.

It is suggested that Cowen supported Blair because Blair (seconded by Clinton) won the last election for Fianna Fail. But gratitude towards a has-been, brought to grief by Imperial hubris, has no place in international politics. And, anyway, what did Eoghan Harris get made a Senator for?

When Blair was vetoed Cowen proposed John Bruton for the job. Bruton holds the British view of Irish independence. If he had got the job, Britain would have held it at second hand.

If Europe had not *"failed to think big"*, what would there be for Great Power Europe to do that the USA is not doing? It would either continue to be a carbon copy of the USA or it would conceive a world interest for itself in conflict with that of

the USA. It is hard to find in the views of those who want Europe to be a Giant anything but a repetition of US concerns.

The first item in Chris Patten's things for Europe to do in order to have *"a more effective presence in the world"* is *"to prevent the militarisation of nuclear energy in Iran precisely because of our concern as Europeans, not because we are allies of the US"*. And the same goes for the other items. Europe should do these things in its own interest, which happens to coincide with the US interest.

Ireland seems to be fully committed to the US/EU policy of preventing Iran from acquiring an effective military capability. And indeed the anti-Iran campaign is being conducted under cover of a mischievous Irish foreign policy initiative: the *Nuclear Anti-Proliferation Treaty* proposed by Frank Aiken.

The only effective defence against nuclear weapons is nuclear weapons. It was *kindergarten* politics to suppose that states with nuclear weapons would give them up. The implication of Aiken's initiative was to freeze the world situation under the dominance of the post-1945 Great Powers, who were also the Vetoist Powers on the UN Security Council, who were officially exempt from such international law as the UN dispensed.

It used to be known that a state which was strong otherwise, but which did not have adequate defences to discourage hostile states, was a standing temptation to warfare. Iran is now in that position. The hostility to it does not arise from the possibility of its developing nuclear weapons. The converse is the case. If it acquires nuclear weapons, the hostility to it will be rendered impotent.

If Ireland was in earnest about the Aiken initiative, it would not be going along with the EU chorus against the possibility of Iran acquiring nuclear arms, but would be insisting that the issue was the Israeli development of nuclear weapons, on which the EU, like the US, stays silent.

The supposed Iranian threat to exterminate the Jews is an entirely wilful distortion of a comment that a Jewish State should not have been imposed on the Middle East against the opposition of the population of Palestine and of all the states of the region, and an observation on the methods by which that Euro-American state has conducted itself.

Israel has not stabilised its position within the region on which it was imposed. It cannot do so because it is an expansionist state, and has been from the start. It was never its intention to settle down within the region allocated to it in 1947. In fact it could not have done so and been a Jewish State. Within the territory allocated by the UN the Jews were a bare majority, if a majority at all. The Muslim/Christian minority was much, much bigger than the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland.

The Jews were something like 50% plus 1 or 2. Northern Ireland might be sustainable on the basis of a Protestant 50% + 1, but that is because it is not a state at all, and never was. But the Zionist project—the Jewish nationalist project—was to establish a state formed on Jewish values. And, although it was set in motion as a British colonial project, was authorised at the UN by a US/Soviet collaboration, and was armed against the Arabs by Czechoslovakia (with Soviet approval), its position was in no way comparable to that of Northern Ireland. The 'Protestant state' of Northern Ireland was not a State, and it was Protestant merely by being British.

The Jewish nationalist project was altogether different. It was an immigrant project to establish a new State amidst a hostile population and shape that State to the Mosaic law. And that required a drastic reduction of the native population, which was undertaken immediately following the UN Resolution. Hundreds of thousands of Arabs were cleared out. And then the territory of the state was expanded in 1948 far beyond that allocated by the UN in 1947. In 1967 that expanded Israel launched a surprise war on Egypt and Syria and gained still more territory when Jordan supported Egypt. That 1967 Conquest is what is now called the Occupied Territory. The 1948 conquest is generally taken to be a legitimate part of the Jewish State, though it was never ratified by the UN.

Jews all over the world have a Right of Return to Israel, even though it seems that the ancestors of many of them never came from Palestine at all, not even 2,000 years ago. But when Palestinians assert a Right of Return to property lost in 1967 that is declared to be covert Anti-Semitism because it is well known that, if an Arab Right of Return was conceded, the Jewish population would still not be sufficient to sustain the Jewish State.

And anyway, the dynamic of the Israeli political system is such that even the 1967 borders are unacceptable. The driving vision was never Tel Aviv. Indeed Tel Aviv used often to be referred to with contempt. It was Jerusalem and the Land of Judah, the latter being in the territory allocated for a Palestinian State by the 1947 UN Resolution.

The first generation of Israeli leaders reassured European opinion with public-relations language of liberal-secular verbiage, but the internal development of Israeli politics was towards a frank assertion of the Mosaic project. There was a moment of nervousness a generation ago when Begin's Likud party emerged from an election as the major Zionist party. When European opinion swallowed that, Israeli leaders realised that there was no longer any need for caution. Europe would pretend that anything it didn't like to hear

hadn't been said. Now Avigdor Lieberman's party, which advocates ethnic cleansing for the realisation of Greater Israel (the land that God gave to Moses) has emerged as the third largest party in the 2009 election and Lieberman has been made Foreign Minister. And Europe still looks at its Zionist offspring with its blind eye.

According to the Turkish Prime Minister, the Israeli Foreign Minister considered a nuclear strike on Gaza. Europe pretends not to notice. And the Jewish lobby remains silent. What Government was better placed than the Turkish to know what Israel was contemplating. It was Israel's only real ally in the region. (Egypt is only an enemy, chastened by three defeats in war: 1957, 1967, 1972.)

It seems that the Turkish Government, gradually freeing itself from the military/legal authoritarianism of the Ataturk system, is beginning to establish democratic hegemony in the state. Militaristic determination of foreign policy—of which the tight alliance with Israel was an expression—is eroding. The Turkish democracy seems to have been shocked by the unprovoked Israel assault on Gaza—non-nuclear though it was—and the Government now feels confident to take account of democratic sentiment.

And Israel must feel that the Turkish alliance is not yet quite lost, since it has not issued an outraged denial of the views attributed to Lieberman, and denounced the report as another example of the blood libel.

President Ahmadinejad has been accused of anti-Semitism for his remarks about the Jewish State. But the Iranian President did no more than observe what Israel proved to be, and express the opinion that a different arrangement should have been made by Europe for the Jews which it tried to exterminate.

And now Israel has alienated its only real friend in the region (as distinct from defeated enemies) and the Prime Minister of Turkey has made a state visit to Teheran.

So back to the EU and its Lilliputian President.

The Germany of 1871-1914, which was made war upon in "Our War", was conservative in its foreign policy. It was content with its own borders in Europe (while France and Russia both had expansionist aims) and it helped the Ottoman Empire to defend itself against the destructive ambitions of Britain, France and Russia. Some American observers, during the years of American neutrality, were of the opinion that it was German assistance to Turkey that led Britain to make war on Germany when the European War provided the opportunity. And, when the US eventually made war on Germany (to save Britain and France to which it had made immense war loans), it did not make war on Turkey. But, after the second World War that

Britain started in the 20th century, the US could not resist adding the Anglo-French mission in the world to its own. It took on the French project in Vietnam and tended to the British Balkanisation of the Middle East. It would, of course, be ungrateful of Europe to refuse to second the USA in a project which the US inherited from Europe, but it would be good for Europe and for the world if it did so.

Of course the *Irish Times* would not be pleased. On 25th November it carried a major article by somebody or other advocating war on Iran (*It's Time To See Iran's Nuclear Plan For What It Is*). It asks, "what do Iran's neighbours think?". And it quotes a professor in the United Arab Emirates University: "It's a whole new ball game. Iran is forcing everyone in the region now into an arms race". That is the voice of the Arab masses—or at least of the Arab playgrounds.

It also quotes the opinion of a former Saudi diplomat who held a position in the Emirates. There are at least masses of Arabs in Saudi—well-behaved Wahhabis. This Saudi says: "I favour getting the job done now instead of living the rest of my life with a nuclear hegemony in the region". So, stop Iran with yet another pre-emptive war and the Middle East will be nuclear-free, and there will be no reason for an arms race.

The *Irish Times* writer is hopeful:

"There has to be a reasonable possibility that Israel will adopt the "Sadat option"—that is, launch an attack on certain Iranian nuclear structures. In 1973 the then president of Egypt... did as much against Israel not in the expectation that it would succeed, but to force the international community in general, and Israel in particular, to consider the policies they had been adopting and to change the strategic landscape on the issue. This policy succeeded." (Richard Whelan, IT, 25.11.09.)

But in 1973 the success was for the attacked, not the attacker. Sadat crossed the Suez Canal in a surprise attack on the Israeli occupation of Egyptian territory, but once on the other side the attack quickly lost momentum, and there was an Israeli crossing deeper into Egypt. The Nasser spirit atrophied. Egypt became a kept man of the USA, made a resentful peace with Israel, and got some of its desert back. Its only resistance was a refusal of a pressing offer of the Gaza refugees and the Gaza strip. And Israel, with the defeat of Egypt under its belt, set about Balkanising the Occupied Territory of 1967, and resumed the work of Joshua in earnest. There was then relatively free movement around the Territory, which is now broken up for Palestinians so that there can be ease of communication between the numerous colonies of fundamentalist Jews, some of which do not recognise the state of Israel as legitimate because it was not

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"Don't piss on my back and tell me it's raining..."
(the Outlaw Josey Wales, quoted p159, *Follow The Money*)

McWilliams And The Crisis

Unlike Fintan O Toole's book on the current financial/economic this book has substance to it. The substance lies in McWilliams's thesis that the EMU [European Monetary Union] has been a disaster for Ireland. It traps us into being a client state of Germany. The problem with that is the we have the same currency as Germany but, unlike Germany, a weak economy. The implications of that are immediately apparent in Newry and Belfast, with southerners flooding North to the weaker [cheaper] prices in shops where prices are anywhere up to 50% lower...and that's only the start of the rot.

The question is, who is this guy, David McWilliams? The man who met the garlic sucking Finance Minister, Brian Lenihan late at night in his Killiney Avenue Hacienda in September 2008—Mr. Cool Dude Populariser of economic theology—an outsider by his own description, while an insider in the world of banking and finance—but with radical political instincts—a living cornucopia of bright ideas and imaginative connections—currently the presenter of an RTE wacky TV Panel show—definitely the man of the people talking about and to—his generation of 30-40-year old perennial teenagers, or not.?

Yes, he is all of that but with some substance, a kind of a George Galloway in a way. The question is: will he succumb entirely to the cult of celebrity or manage to fly its poisonous traps and with one jump, be free? On the evidence of his latest book, he is way ahead of the posse of sirens and various hurlers on the ditch. Ideas do matter.

McWilliams says the Euro would only make sense for Ireland if we had, not just financial union, but political union also. He uses the example of Massachusetts which had a similar bust as us: because it was part of the United States, money flowed in to refloat the situation. Likewise, Boston didn't have to do like us, put the country in hock for generations or get loans from the ECB [European Central Bank] to try to get credit going again. The culture of respectability has us in denial as

set up by the Messiah, but which are nevertheless protected and supplied with the means of subsistence by the Israeli state.

If Israel applies the 'Sadat Option' against Iran, and the consequences for Israel are similar to what they were for Sadat, we must agree that the Middle East situation would be greatly improved.

to the extent of the country's crisis: we are afraid to be seen to offend our European betters—who after all, at the time of Delors and the Social Cohesion Fund of the 1990s, DID actually transfer billions to Albert Reynolds' Government.

Because we don't have European political union—and are unlikely to have anytime soon, given the size and variety of cultures in the EU—Ireland is in a possibly perilous situation unless it exercises its political sovereignty and returns to being able to devalue its own currency when financial/monetary crisis hits us hard. We are now embarking willingly on an exercise of saddling two whole generations with a legacy of Debt, McWilliams says. The cynicism, he says, lies in the Government's unspoken policy of emigration of our younger generation—yet again, as if ...ah sure, well, isn't that the Irish way ...*ochone ...ochone* ...

Surprisingly McWilliams says, no! that is not good enough. He says the situation is so desperate for the younger generation Irish today that a 1916 type *putsch* is what is required to save the soul of the nation once again. For him, the present Government is doing no less than Redmond did in 1914, sending tens of thousands to so-called adventures on foreign Flanders fields under the guise of spin and a false deal with foreign empires—or just plain, 'get out, go shift, we don't want you here in this "smart economy" '.

To illustrate all this, McWilliams develops a whole cast of characters out of his first book, *The Pope's Children*—a startling sociological Henry Fielding type-romp through the madness of the Celtic Tiger. Then came his other even more interesting book, *The Generation Game*, where he blows apart the lie of Partnership reaching into the property marketplace, or protecting against its ravages. He shows, again convincingly, in *The Generation Game* that the young are being shafted by the middle-aged and older generations by being unable to get into the property market (as first-time buyers), because of the Government-facilitated, unregulated mania of the property investors.

In pointing this out, he was the hard man who spelt out the very collapse we now have before it happened—and was ignored and marginalised and even advised, along with some others, by the then Taoiseach Bertie Ahern to "*go away and commit suicide*" for talking the economy down. His books now read as a refreshing take on the hubris of those years—and as he now reminds us forcibly

In *Follow The Money*, the culture has not gone away you know.

"According to {AP}, the outfit that looks after all things advertising in Ireland, we spent a mindboggling 742,919,762 million euros on property advertising from 2001 to 2007, fuelled by such cheerleaders as the property section of the Irish Times' endless hyperbole—Fintan O Toole's comfortable bedfellow" (*Follow The Money*).

That is the interesting thing about McWilliams: he has the ability to bring new thinking to the tired old dead mantras of the usual self-righteous suspects in the media, like O'Toole. Surprisingly, he, like the men of 1916, has the ability to shock people into real thought. McWilliams, like for example Pearse, talks about it being necessary to listen to and act upon the ghosts we have inherited—in McWilliams case, his personal history, but no less representative for that—the ghost of the shameful unemployment experienced by his Dun Laoghaire father in the 1970s. McWilliams is a Blackrock boy: you would think a west Brit, but not at all, despite the outward veneer. Perhaps, like another famous Blackrock intellectual, turned activist, circumstances maketh the man.

He combines thorough cosmopolitanism with rooted nationalism, but with a very 21st century mixture. As in his other books, McWilliams is ultimately a latter-day Fenian, an advocate of Irish National sovereign freedom within the EU, espousing the Cause of a 21st century Irish nationalism which embraces the Diaspora and "*brand*" Ireland. The core of his answer to the present crisis is a call to action by political forces in the country outside of the insiders—and in this he includes the Partners of cosy consensus—to get out of that cosy club of the EURO and assert our sovereignty with return to the PUNT.

Of course he recognises the unlikelihood of this happening in the current political climate. But then you could say the same about a *Putsch* happening in 1916, even up a month beforehand. McWilliams points out how devaluing of the punt in 1993 was forced on us by circumstances at the time. But he says, it worked then and it would work now, despite our having to opt out of the Euro now, and despite all the implications that would have initially for savers and creditors.

Because it is unlikely doesn't mean it wont happen. If NAMA fails, what then? NAMA's so-called solution is an Irish solution that could only work for the very insiders who got us in to the problem in the first place. They designed it; they are implementing it; they are the only ones who stand to gain from it if; and it is an "IF" of Las Vegas proportions if the gamble comes off. Already we see in the AIB [Allied Irish Banks] the ritual manipulation of the Government by the AIB insider

culture, with their insistence—aided by Dick Spring, one-time Labour politician—of the appointment of the new CEO, Colm O Doherty, head of Capital Markets, i.e. 'funny money bets'.

McWilliams makes a convincing case as to why NAMA, the FF/Green Government's choice of solution to the present crisis, not only will not work, but cannot work—except for the interests of the very people who created the problem in the first place. Like Partnership, it is allowed to be the only show in town—until another crisis hits. Basically he sees NAMA as a con job of criminal proportions on the taxpayers of Ireland.

Unlike Fintan O'Toole, who rants and rails from the sidelines like some fundamentalist Baptist preacher, McWilliams offers a hardheaded political alternative to NAMA—and he emphasises it will only be a political decision that will be able to go down this road. He plots a credible way forward for the country by reverting to the Punt and devaluation. He shows how the transition can happen, moneywise. He says crisis times call for radical measures.

Interestingly enough, he quotes the example of the men and women of 1916 and says that the same thinking is now needed to do the kind of serious patriotic action which is now again called for. Somehow I can't see the same analogy coming from Fintan O Toole.

McWilliams says: *"The Euro made the crazy Irish boom possible and now that we are in the bust our membership of the Euro is making any recovery virtually impossible"*.

He says that, as soon as the French and German economies recover, the ECB will ratchet up interest rates and we—with our huge mortgages and credit card bills—will suffer more than any other EU country. He says that, far from protecting Ireland, the EURO is prolonging our misery. In this context he makes yet again a convincing case as to how Ireland is going to end up, if allowed to sail along the NAMA route—the VIETNAMESE of the EU German /French empire, a debtor nation saddled with a weak economy and a strong currency.

The debilitating political legacy of Partnership has left us in a crisis, with no political Party or Trade Union offering a seriously credible choice or platform, if there were a general election tomorrow. There is an absence of political ideas in the shrinking body politic. We effectively are operating in a political EU-led climate of paralysing consensus, whereby there is a tacit understanding that Government is now by decree and all that is left to be decided is how to manage the outcome.

McWilliams is regarded as a pariah by this consensus. I find him a clear-headed

thinker. He gives us the historical precedents worldwide for devaluing as a standard way out of such a crisis as we are undergoing. Nobody else has set up a NAMA-type set-up to deal with a similar situation. Even the very name, National Assets Management Agency, is a con. In essence there are no assets in NAMA, only liabilities. The "assets" are worth near to nothing. An elaborate con job is spun out about long-term value to fool the taxpayers that they might even get a return on the "Assets".

McWilliams sets out how to deal with the creditors in the event of defaulting on Euro debts. Again, I find his account credible. He speaks as a financial practitioner with patriotic instincts, a rare animal amongst media types and a rattling good read.

McWilliams says we need a properly functioning Europe: that we have a back to front Europe with a single currency and no single Government.

"The implications of all this for Ireland is that we are being held hostage to an unusual ideology, which is what we might call the "myth of the euro". The big lie underpinning the euro is that its advocates think that just by having the single

currency, Europe acts as a single political union. They want us to live in a make-believe world where we think that having the same currency means that we have the same Government. But it doesn't. Maybe we will someday, but at the moment we are far from that. So the currency is missing its most important element, the full political union. That is why it doesn't work fully and it is why the euro exacerbates the upswing and the downturn. When we think about the present downturn and what will happen when Germany and France...already in recovery mode... decide to raise European interest rates? What happens to all those Irish people on the brink of default, who have lost their jobs in the past few months? Are we supposed to tolerate rising interest rates in the middle of the deepest recession this country has ever experienced? This is the conundrum we find ourselves in. The euro, in the boom, meant too much money flowed into the country. In the bust, when we should be printing money to get the system going again, the euro prevents us from doing this" (Follow The Money, p252).

Malachi Lawless

Next Month: John Martin replies.

How Safe is the Swine Flu Vaccine?

Edward Longwill, Security Policy Analyst at the University of Ulster, reveals the vaccine's links to military biological weapons research.

During the Cold War both the US and Soviet Union ran secret bio-weapons research programmes. The main US programme, codenamed *Operation Whitecoat*, ran from 1954-73 and used volunteers who agreed to allow scientists to infect them with harmful organisms. The US Army's Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID) then experimented with different vaccines to cure or immunise volunteers.

Swine Flu capable of infecting humans is not new. In 1976 a mysterious outbreak occurred at Fort Dix US Army base killing one soldier and infecting others. The strain did not spread outside the base and it is still unknown how the first soldier became infected. However a different strain started circulating amongst the public.

The US Government authorised a mass vaccination programme. Using knowledge gained from *Operation Whitecoat*, millions of US citizens received a vaccine yet many suffered severe and permanent side-effects and others even died. Unfortunately by the time the US Government suspended the vaccination programme approximately 20% of the population had received the vaccine. Remarkably the vaccine killed more people than the actual Swine Flu.

Any vaccine contains two main components; an organic material and chemical preservatives. The organic material is technically dead and this prevents it from growing yet allows your body to identify it as harmful and this creates immunity. The chemical preservatives prevent bacteria or fungi from growing in or contaminating the liquid solution which holds the organic material.

The next vaccination programme ran by the US military sought to protect soldiers sent to Iraq for the Persian Gulf War (1990-91) from biological weapons. After the War many soldiers developed de-habilitating illnesses and many required hospitalisation or constant medication. Gulf War Syndrome (GWS) became a generic term for veterans who suffered such illnesses.

Both the British and US Governments rejected the existence of GWS yet campaigns by veterans' groups eventually led to a US Department of Veterans' Affairs-funded study, Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veteran's Illnesses (2008), which found that exposure to toxic chemicals caused one in four of sufferers' illnesses.

The only thing that all sufferers had in common was that they took an anthrax vaccine. Research suggested that *squalene*, the preservative chemical in the vaccine, had been responsible for toxic poisoning and a decision made in a US Federal Court led to the discontinuation of its use from 2004-08. However the US Government reversed this decision and *squalene* is now used in many vaccines.

Since 1998 one of the most controversial debates within the scientific community is the argument over the MMR vaccine and its alleged links to autism. Research both supporting the theory and rejecting the theory exists and much of the research on both sides of the argument has been discredited.

However the 'autism epidemic' in the US provides the main contention to support the theory. From 1991 onwards the level of autism in children increased dramatically. Some scientists claim this has a relationship to the increased number of vaccines given to babies and children. One preservative, *thiomersal*, a mercury-based chemical, was feared to have caused developmental problems in children.

Many countries banned the use of *thiomersal* in vaccines. Yet the chemical, like *squalene*, has been re-authorised for use. What is interesting about *thiomersal* is that, prior to western countries becoming concerned over its safety, in the Soviet Union a research programme overseen by the Soviet military in 1977 found the chemical caused harm to an individual's brain.

This de-classified study has been either ignored or else discredited by scientists who refute the claim that the chemical affects brain development. Most individuals are completely oblivious to the controversies surrounding the use of *squalene* and *thiomersal*. On the contrary, many members of the public are literally in a panic to get vaccinated.

The anticipated increase in the level of Swine Flu cases this Winter will no doubt cause a rush of panic stricken citizens seeking vaccination. For the European market new drugs or vaccines must pass a European Medicines Agency (EMA) examination. The EMA passed two main vaccines for the Irish market, 'Pandemrix' and 'Novartis'. Both vaccines contain *squalene* and *thiomersal*.

The EMA also approved 'Daronix' which contains *thiomersal* and a fourth vaccine called 'Celvapan' which contains neither *thiomersal* nor *squalene*. In fact it has become public that the German military will issue its troops Celvapan specifically because it does not contain *thiomersal* or *squalene*. Those who might consider Celvapan the best choice for a vaccine should know that it is produced by Baxter. This company was at the centre

of a serious scandal when it released many batches of Celvapan which contained live Swine Flu virus rather than dead de-activated organic material.

Fortunately, scientists in Austria and the Czech Republic tested these batches prior to distribution to vaccination centres and avoided infecting hundreds of people. The Czech Government cancelled all orders from Baxter because it believes the company can not guarantee the safety of its product and it is possible that the Austrian Government may file criminal charges against it for negligence.

Although the EMA approved the aforementioned vaccines, its own trials found that Pandemrix and Celvapan caused 'adverse reactions' in one out of every hundred test subjects. What is most alarming about the proposed mass vaccination programme this Winter is that pregnant women are in the top priority group to receive an injection and many health professionals have warned that citizens will need two or even three doses.

What will happen if you contract Swine Flu because you have not been vaccinated?

We already know from current studies. Professor Peter Collignon, an infectious disease expert at Australian National University, recently stated that only one in every one thousand infections resulted in death. For most individuals Swine Flu is simply a very bad dose of the flu which requires rest, hydration and good nutrition for your body to beat it.

Three-quarters of those who have died did so because they already had a serious underlying health condition. In fact, Johannes Lower, President of the Paul Ehrlich Research Institute warned that the vaccine could cause more harm than the actual Swine Flu. Dr. Wolfgang Wodarg, Chairman of the German Government's Health Committee gave a similar assessment.

Swine Flu can kill but so, some argue, can vaccines. The recent death of Natalie Morton in Britain reopened the debate on 'Gardasil', the HPV cervical cancer vaccine which has been linked to the deaths of many girls. It has been withdrawn by the Spanish Government and will soon become the subject of lawsuits from the families of those who have died, or from individuals who have become paralysed.

In a disturbing development, Kathleen Sebelius, US Secretary of Health and Human Services, gave the US Government and vaccine makers a legal waiver that will prevent them being held liable for death or disability as a result of Swine Flu vaccinations. In the Republic of Ireland, the Department of Health will protect vaccine makers, yet will leave itself open to litigation. The legal position of those who receive a vaccine in Northern Ireland is more ambiguous.

On 19th October vaccines for the Irish

people were distributed. In the first week of October, it emerged in the *Irish Times* that 70 GPs would refuse to administer the injection and 200 others wanted clarification if they would be held legally responsible in future compensation claims if the vaccines caused harm.

Interestingly, in Britain an NHS survey conducted last August found that half of doctors and one-third of nurses do not intend to take a Swine Flu vaccine themselves because of safety concerns. Do these medical professionals know something we don't?

On 16th November the Vaccine Damage Steering Group, formed by the Dept. of Health in 2007, published a report recommending that individuals who suffer minor or moderate long-term damage from the Swine Flu vaccine should receive €15,000-€75,000 in compensation while those who suffer severe damage or even death should get as much as €200,000.

One condition of acceptance of compensation is to legally accept that the state is not liable to be held responsible for vaccine damage. However the Dept. of Health has not yet indicated if it will accept and implement the report's recommendations. This would leave those who suffer long-term vaccine related health complaints without a clear legal path to secure compensation.

Hopefully the Irish people who have taken the vaccine will not develop health complaints. However those who develop long-term medical problems, or whose children develop neurological conditions should form support groups. If they find that the one thing they have in common is that they took the Swine Flu vaccine in the Winter of 2009, then they should take legal action to secure compensation from the Irish Government. ■

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Blood boiling, a memory of wars past,
media runs septic with propaganda,
the post-mortem poppy their agenda,
at losses by Afghan I.E.D. aghast
but no mention of those whom they have
killed,

millions murdered and not sub-judice,
little England's permanent odyssey,
remembering their dead, two minutes
stilled.

Heard the other day that computer games
are violent and murderous in the home,
with joystick you soon become Al Capone.
Still have legs and arms, with no guilt or
shame.

Will you find the army a bigger thrill
when imperial wars wills you to kill.

Wilson John Haire.
11th November, 2009

Shorts

from
the Long Fellow

THE NEW PURITANS

Icarus was so intoxicated by his success that he soared too high and too close to the sun. The wax that held together his wings melted and he fell to the ground....

David McWilliams has been brought down to earth and finds that he has to live in the world. But how could the golden boy be brought so low that he felt it necessary to make a confession on the *Gerry Ryan Show* and further penance on a comedy programme on RTE television?

He apologised to Brian Lenihan for being indiscreet regarding a private conversation on the conduct of the State's economic policy. But the other sin was a little obscure and yet more serious. Apparently he had a sexual thought about Miriam O'Callaghan.

Being sexy is one of, if not *the* most, desirable attributes and yet it is a sin for a man to acknowledge a woman's sexiness even in the mildest of terms.

It is deemed that on the one hand McWilliams should not have written:

"Miriam winks with a faint pout and the casual lick of those hyper glossed lips. You're mine now, boy, she signals. This is my web you've just walked into: clothes on or off."

But on the other, Lise Hand in an amusing article about McWilliams's book launch (*Irish Independent*, 5/11/09) showed that it is perfectly acceptable for women to have similar thoughts about men.

And so the rules of the new puritanism go . . .

OLD CURRENCY?

After taking up almost a quarter of the 40-minute Gerry Ryan interview with his confession, McWilliams was allowed to talk about economics. He believes that our economic woes are compounded by our membership of the Euro. As he sees it, the Euro would be viable if there were political union. In the United States the Federal Government can channel funds to areas most affected by a recession, but this is not done in the EU. Instead Ireland has been given access to loans which it will take years to repay.

Proof of the absence of integration within the EU was that interest rates on loans to the Irish State were 3 percentage points higher than for Germany. The difference is now about 1.5 percentage points.

Our problems have been compounded by our nearest neighbour whose currency has depreciated by 30% compared to the

Euro in recent years, making Irish businesses uncompetitive.

McWilliams's solution is for us to leave the Euro and devalue.

BRITAIN OR EUROPE

The *Long Fellow* does not agree with McWilliams, but it is useful to debate our relationship with Britain and the rest of Europe. Although we joined the EEC at the same time as Britain, it was seen as a means of reducing our economic dependence on the latter. Haughey's decision to break the link with sterling—leading ultimately to joining the Euro zone—was part of this process. McWilliams's proposal would be tantamount to a return to the British sphere of influence.

McWilliams claims that leaving the Euro would be a "sovereign" decision. But, in order to protect our independent currency from speculative attack, we would need to institute capital controls. Borrowing from abroad would be even more expensive than it is now because of the risk of further devaluation. Our existing foreign debt denominated in Euros would also balloon.

But none of this is to imply that the *status quo* is satisfactory. Our nearest neighbour has unfettered access to the EU market and yet has allowed her currency to devalue in order to give her a competitive advantage. The Republic of Ireland is the only State which shares a land border with the UK. Therefore our retail as well as our manufacturing industry have been adversely affected by the UK's refusal to join the Euro.

The conflict in Northern Ireland has inhibited the Irish State from raising this issue within the EU. It shouldn't. In the final analysis the Irish State's first obligation is to her own citizens in the 26 Counties.

THE IRISH TIMES

Rumours abound that *The Irish Times* has not been immune from the inclement economic climate. This is not the first time the newspaper group has been in financial turmoil, but in the past its problems related to the newspaper itself. This time, it appears that the newspaper's parlous financial position has been exacerbated by the group's ancillary activities.

The €50 million investment in *MyHome.ie* has been a disaster and its free-sheet *Metro*, which the group jointly owns with the *Daily Mail Group* and the Swedish-owned *Metro international*, has been loss making since its launch in 2005. In an attempt to salvage something from the mess the Swedish company has pulled out and *Metro* will be merged with its rival *Herald Am* which is owned by *Independent Newspapers*. Could this be a precursor to a merger of the main titles of the two troubled organisations: *The Irish Times* and the *Irish Independent*!?

If *The Irish Times* is let go by the interests which it represents, it will not be missed in Ireland. There has been a dramatic deterioration in the standard of writing since the Gageby era. Also, its distortions of Irish history have become even more egregious. This year it managed to 'commemorate' the ninetieth anniversary of the First Dáil without discussing the contents of the Democratic Programme. This was no accident. *The Democratic Programme* traces the origins of the First Dáil to the 1916 Rising, which was validated by the 1918 Election, whereas *The Irish Times* wished to present the First Dáil as a thing in itself with no causal connection with what went on before; or the War of Independence, which occurred afterwards.

But the most odious aspect of *The Irish Times* is its hypocrisy. It demands openness and transparency of others, but refuses to apply such standards to itself. *The Phoenix* magazine recently (25.9.09) described the *modus operandi* of the newspaper. This year, on its 150th anniversary, the newspaper's Editor, Geraldine Kennedy, conducted a wide-ranging interview with Major McDowell, the dominant influence on the newspaper in the last forty years. The interview took place over 3 nights! But when the interview had been completed McDowell decided that he did not want it published.

McDowell has since died, but the veto over publication has been maintained by his daughter Karen Erwin. And so the interview notes lie gathering dust in Kennedy's office.

The Phoenix speculated on what questions were unsuitable for publication. Could it have been the British media mogul Cecil King's matter-of-fact description of McDowell as being in MI5? Or perhaps the British Prime Minister's suspicion that McDowell's contact with Downing Street in 1969 related more to intelligence activity than newspaper business? The *Phoenix* magazine is to be congratulated for bringing these issues to public attention, but it is a pity it did not acknowledge the source for this information!

The *Long Fellow* is particularly interested in this story because McDowell refused to be interviewed by the distinguished Dublin City University academic, Mark O'Brien, for the latter's book on the newspaper. The grounds for the refusal were that McDowell had granted an exclusive interview for an official history of the newspaper. But the 150th anniversary has come and almost gone and there has been no sign of such a book emerging.

This is not the first time that an authorised history of the newspaper has been aborted. In the early 1980s Tony Gray was commissioned to write a history of the newspaper, but this project was abandoned. And after Gray was paid off, he was legally obliged to destroy the

manuscript. The official explanation was that Douglas Gageby objected to Gray's description of the Trust, but the Long Fellow has never believed this excuse—given only after Gageby's death—because Gageby had minimal involvement in the setting up of the Trust.

THE POPPY

At this time of the year the Agitprop department of *The Irish Times* is at full throttle. It gives enthusiastic support to the Royal British Legion, which has been inching towards obtaining official State recognition of Poppy Day (or should that be *Poppy Fortnight* judging by British television).

The tactic of the Royal British Legion is to tag on to the Irish State's commemoration of Irish soldiers who died in UN peacekeeping operations. Unfortunately, this has been facilitated by the latter commemoration being also in November, in memory of the nine Irish UN soldiers who died in the Congo 49 years ago.

And so on the front page of *The Irish Times* (9.11.09) there was a picture of Major Mike Kearney (Rtd) Combined Regiments Liverpool; John Moore of the Royal Naval Association, with poppy prominently displayed; and Eamonn Byrne representing the UK at the Irish UN Veterans' Association in Dublin. Apparently, *The Irish Times* could find no Irish army soldiers that were photogenic enough for an Irish Army event!

On the inside pages a photograph of the ceremony showed a prominent display of Poppies in the foreground. The report says:

"Among the wreaths laid were five poppy wreaths presented by bodies including the Royal British Legion, the Irish Guards Association and the Royal Air Force Association."

This campaign for official State commemoration of soldiers who died in the service of the British State has no support outside official circles. On the *Politics.ie* site a blogger attempted to drum up interest in the subject by initiating a thread entitled: "*Where can I buy a poppy?*". The response from one bemused poster was: "have you tried Afghanistan?!"

In Britain the commemorations have reached fever pitch with the Poppy symbol emblazoned on Premier league football jerseys. While some of the Irish in Britain have succumbed to this display of British militarism, it is good to report that others, such as the boy band *Westlife*, comedian Dara O'Briain, and Eddie Jordan, have resisted.

VINCENT BROWNE ON THE POPPY

Pat Walsh of the *Irish Political Review*, participated on Vincent Browne's political programme on TV3 to discuss the Poppy Day commemorations. Pat made the point that, while the Irish descendants of those

who died in the British Army were perfectly entitled to remember their ancestors, it was not appropriate for the Irish State to participate in this British State occasion. Ireland had no quarrel with Germany or Turkey during the First World War. Quite the contrary! James Connolly was an admirer of the German social system. The Irish people who died were duped by the British State. The war had nothing to do with the rights of small nations.

It was interesting that Sean Murphy of the Royal British Legion didn't dispute any of this. His sole response was that the heroism of the Irish should be recognised. But, of course, heroism is never grounds for commemoration. No one advocates that the heroism of the German soldiers in the battle of Stalingrad should be celebrated, even though such heroism has been well documented, not least by the Soviets.

Eunan O'Hailpín disputed Pat's version of history, but it was difficult to know on what grounds. He was briefly put under pressure by Browne, who questioned whether Germany even intended invading Britain, never mind Ireland. O'Hailpín blustered that the reason why Germany didn't invade Britain during the First World War was that it didn't get that far. But the invasion of Britain was never part of the war aims of Germany, whereas the destruction of the "*evil Hun*" was a main theme of British War propaganda. [A transcript of the Vincent Browne Show discussion will be found in the forthcoming issue of *Irish Foreign Affairs*. Ed.]

RTE

The Irish Times and *Independent News and Media* are not the only sections of the media in financial trouble. RTE's difficulties have focussed attention on the remuneration packages of its star performers.

On Pat Kenny's *Frontline* current affairs programme SIPTU leader Jack O'Connor mentioned, *en passant*, Kenny's "*trophy house*" in Dalkey, which caused the normally suave (some would say "*wooden*"), but the Long Fellow isn't that unkind) presenter to lose his cool. O'Connor gracefully apologised, but the thought was planted in people's minds. And the following week it was given full expression.

Sam Smyth in the *Irish Independent* (11.11.09) gave a very good account of what happened. Alan O'Brien of Bluebell, Dublin 12 was part of the studio audience. Before the show began Kenny gave a pep talk to the audience encouraging them to "*let their emotions go and not hold back*". O'Brien enthusiastically took this advice. However, the target of his ire was not quite what Kenny had in mind.

O'Brien lashed out at Kenny's salary (€900k plus in 2008 and 2007) and made the point that he was unaccountable, unlike Minister Mary Hanafin who was sitting beside the embarrassed presenter.

Smyth perceptively commented:

"Winding up a studio audience to cut loose at politicians allows the broadcasters to humiliate public figures while shrugging their shoulders and saying they can't gag public comment... And if Pat Kenny was embarrassed at Mr O'Brien's harangue, he can sympathise with minister Noel Dempsey who was set up to be confronted by a victim of paedophile abuse on *Questions and Answers*."

The reaction of the media radicals was predictable. They like all rebellions and any rebellion except the rebellion that is happening in front of their eyes. Vincent Browne in the *Sunday Business Post* suggested that the target should have been Cathal Goan, the Director General, who authorised Kenny's salary.

Fintan O'Toole in *The Irish Times* (14.11.09) decided to miss the point entirely by criticising O'Brien for not directing his anger at the Government. He then grudgingly conceded:

"Alan O'Brien's rant was unfair in singling out Pat Kenny, but there was a core of truth in his central complaint about people on very high salaries 'pontificating' about the need for other people's wages and benefits to be cut."

So why was O'Brien "*unfair*" then?

O'Toole was given a platform to 'pontificate' to the Irish people and its elected representatives by Pat Kenny when the latter was the *Late Late Show* host. He is now a regular participant in Kenny's new current affairs show, but in all that time Kenny's exorbitant salary seems to have escaped O'Toole's notice. Of course, it is inconceivable that the "*Bishop of Tara Street*" could be compromised, still less corrupt...almost?

O'Toole seems to be worried about where all this anger will be directed and concludes rather pompously that it "*has to be a force for positive change, anger has to be allied to argument, analysis and action*".

All very civilised, Fintan! But you have made a career out of denigrating institutions in Irish society. Did you really expect the enraged to follow obediently the prescriptions of *The Irish Times*?

MAD AS HELL!

By far the best TV reviewer in the country is Emmanuel Kehoe of the *Sunday Business Post*. Commenting on the O'Brien incident, he suggested that the atmosphere in the country was similar to that of the United States in the 1970s as reflected in Sidney Lumet's film *Network*. The main character in this 1976 film—a kind of secular television evangelist—played by Peter Finch—gives the following sermon:

"I don't have to tell you things are bad. Everybody knows things are bad. It's a depression. Everybody's out of work or scared of losing their job. The dollar buys a nickel's worth; banks are going bust;

shopkeepers keep a gun under the counter; punks are running wild in the street; and there's nobody anywhere who seems to know what to do and there's no end to it.

"We know the air is unfit to breathe and our food is unfit to eat... We all know things are bad—worse than bad—they're crazy.

"It's like everything everywhere is going crazy, so we don't go out any more. We sit in the house, and slowly the world we're living in is getting smaller, and all we say is, 'please, at least leave us alone in our living rooms...'

"Well I'm not going to leave you alone.

"I want you to get mad!

"I don't want you to protest. I don't want you to riot. I don't want you to write to your Congressman, because I wouldn't know what to tell you to write. I don't know what to do about the depression and the inflation and the crime in the street. All I know is that first, you've got to get mad.

"You've gotta say, 'I'm a human being, goddammit! My life has value!'

"So, I want you to get up right now and go to the window, open it, and stick your head out and yell, 'I'm as mad as hell, and I'm not going to take this any more!'

A little over the top perhaps? ...An expression of impotent and apolitical anger!... But...no more gratuitous and far less tedious than our own home grown dreary pontificators!

ALLEZ LES BLEUS!

By the time this column is read the storm that is swirling around the Ireland-France match will have dissipated.

There is no doubt that an injustice was done. But cheating is so prevalent in the modern football game that the normal understanding of that word has become blurred. At least one of the Irish players is particularly skilful at winning penalties and free kicks.

It is untrue to say that the Irish team has always been at the wrong end of refereeing decisions. People forget that there were one or two dodgy penalty decisions that went our way in the qualifying rounds.

It should also be noted that the French have been quite contrite about what happened. Senior players and politicians such as Finance Minister Christine Lagarde (*Liberation*, 20.11.09) have advocated a rematch. Ordinary French people have written in to Irish newspapers to express their shame at what happened. The Long Fellow thinks that the French are a very fair minded people and Thierry Henry is very far from being the worst cheat in world football.

The result was particularly disappointing because the Irish team played so well. We should be proud of our boys in green. But what's done is done and let us look forward to the European Championship. The Long Fellow may be in a minority, but he wishes the French team well in the finals.

Allez les Bleus!

BRIAN LENIHAN'S LATEST ACCOLADE

About a year ago the Long Fellow noted that *The Financial Times*, the mouthpiece of British Finance Capitalism, had voted Brian Lenihan the second worst Finance Minister. It urged Lenihan to try harder so as to achieve the top spot.

Lenihan's efforts have now achieved their reward and he has been awarded the

much sought after worst Finance Minister accolade.

The newspaper explained that the reason for the award was Lenihan's Bank Guarantee Scheme, which bought time for the Irish banking system.

These days *The Financial Times* doesn't even attempt to hide its Little Englander mentality anymore!

A Minister With Balls

The *Sunday Business Post* reported on 5th November that Batt O'Keeffe, the Minister for Education has refused to meet the Church of Ireland Bishop of Cork, the Rev. Paul Colton, despite being asked to do so by the Minister for Finance. "I can tell you I will not be meeting the man" O'Keeffe is quoted as saying. This is quite understandable as the Bishop had effectively called the Minister a liar

Bishop Paul Colton of Cork appears to have taken the lead in making the case for the maintenance of the Church of Ireland privileges in Secondary education. In a recent address he said: "*Are we seriously to believe that the founding fathers and framers of our Constitution envisaged a situation where this Republic would become a hostile place for the children of the Protestant minority?*" (Speech at Midleton College, Co Cork. Irish Times, 24 October).

It was reassuring to see the Bishop give credit to the founders of the State/Constitution as being fair-minded towards Protestants. The people involved were of course the creators and activists of the IRA and we hope he will maintain a consistent attitude towards them whenever he has to deal with this topic again.

He then went on to criticise the Minister and the Department of Education for not accepting the unConstitutional position of the existing grant! A strange position for a Bishop to advocate. The *Long Fellow* in last month's *Irish Political Review* summarised the point at issue over Protestant education:

"All O'Keeffe has done is withdraw in last year's budget a €2.8 million grant for Protestant fee paying schools employing caretakers and secretaries. This grant was not available to Catholic fee paying schools.

"Protestant fee paying schools also receive the same capitation grant as non fee-paying schools. This is greater than the grant for fee paying Catholic schools. The amount of extra grants that Protestant fee paying schools obtain by being part of the free education scheme is €6.5 million. **This preferential treatment will remain in place.**

"The justification for this is that poorer Protestants are not able to avail of non fee-paying schools in their neighbour-

hood because there are fewer such schools with a Protestant ethos. But does this logic apply in urban centres such as Dublin?

"Also, it would be interesting to compare the incomes of, say, the poorest 10% of parents of children in a fee paying Protestant school with the corresponding parents in fee paying Catholic schools. Unfortunately, such information may not be easy for the State to come by. Once the State hands over the extra €6.5 million, it is disbursed by a committee consisting of "representatives from the Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist churches, and the Society of Friends".

"If ever there is a radical reforming Minister for Education who has a policy of expanding the non-fee paying sector, he will find it prohibitively expensive if the link in funding of non fee-paying schools and fee-paying Protestant schools is not broken."

As there may be a problem with the position of less well off Protestant families living in rural areas, the Minister asked for proposals from the C of I to deal with this problem—and the Minister says they have not put any proposal to him. The Bishop says they have—maintain the current position. The Bishop and his friends have to do better than this. They must learn to negotiate rather than dictate.

However, the Bishop cannot resist some weasel words. In a letter of 28th October to the *Irish Times* he said:

"The arrival of new minorities is not a reason to dismantle the rights of a long-established minority. New minority religious (or non-religious) communities deserve to have their rights addressed separately. The Protestant churches, as one minority, have a centuries-long involvement in providing education on this island."

Note that other minorities are to be "*addressed separately*" i.e., not necessarily the same as the Church of Ireland. In other words not all minorities must have their privileges. And why? A few more weasel words. Because the Protestant Churches have a tradition of providing education in Ireland for centuries.

True indeed. This, I assume includes the period across the three centuries that the Penal Laws operated. If not, then the

Bishop is offering us more weasel words. Let's have some plain speaking. Such education was provided by Protestants for Protestants with the generous help of the then state for an Established Church. And there was quite a lot provided via, *inter alia*, Trinity College Dublin, Parish Schools, Diocesan Free Schools, Royal Free Schools, Charter Schools, the Hibernian Military and Marine Schools, the Kildare Street Society Schools and other endowed schools. But were there any subsidies or even a trickle down to the Hedge Schools? Did *they* have any privileges from the state? I think not. Perhaps the Bishop would elaborate on this provision of education in Ireland if I have got it wrong.

And when the state intervened directly in the mid 19th century did the Church of Ireland object to any of the curriculum items such as what appeared in the main Reading Book for the State National schools in 1838:

"I thank the goodness and the grace
That on my birth has smiled
And made me in these Christian days
A happy English child"

And:

"On the east of Ireland is England
where the Queen lives; many people who
live in Ireland were born in England, and
we speak the same language, and are
called one nation".

It was not education—it was political propaganda.

The Bishop has become a fan of Senator Harris and now uses his language: "*In the history of this state, traditionally, Protestants have kept their heads down. They're not keeping their heads down on this one*", (ibid.)

The problem with introducing that type of language is that it gets people thinking about the time the Bishop of Cork and his colleagues were cock of the walk. The Senator may be determined to be an amnesiac in this regard as in many others (if not fully self-lobotomised), but I can assure the Bishop those conditions are still rare in society and I would not base an education policy, or any policy, on Senator Harris. He is not a reliable guru.

The Bishop has made a choice between Eoghan Harris and Batt O'Keeffe. What a silly man!

Jack Lane

Read:

An affair with the Bishop of Cork

by the Aubane Historical Society

€8, £5 from:

<https://www.atholbooks-sales.org>

Report: Clair Wills Lecture On Elizabeth Bowen: Visions and Revisions, held at School of English, University College, Cork; 6-7 November 2009

Bowen: An English Lesson

"Not since Montefort stood had there ceased to be vigilant measures against the nightcomer; all being part of the hostile watch kept by now eyeless towers and time-stunted castles along these rivers. For as land knows, everywhere is a frontier; and the outposted few (and few are the living) never must be off guard. But tonight the ceremony became a mockery: when Antonia had done bolting and barring she remained, arms extended like another crossbar, laughing at the door. For the harsh-grained oak had gone into dissolution: it shut out nothing." *A World Of Love* by Elizabeth Bowen. Jonathan Cape. 1955. 1st Edition. p116.

On a rainy cold November night, some thirty odd academics and students/others entered the lecture room of West Wing 5 to hear the plenary lecture by Clair Wills, Professor of Irish Literature at Queen Mary College, University of London, and author of *That Neutral Island: A History of Ireland during the Second World War* which won the PEN Hessel-Tiltman Prize for History 2007. She has since published a rather weak account of the Easter Rising with the title *Dublin 1916; The Siege of the GPO* and one look at her sources was enough to convince me of her errancy in scholarship. She would want to be very careful of not ending up like Roy Foster, who started out as a historian and then jumped to literature with his awful two-volume biography of W.B. Yeats, and then those other couple of social jaunts through modern Ireland. Wills is from a background in literature and now thinks she could equally write history. This idea stems from the rather farcical interdisciplinary approach thought up by academics who couldn't tell one subject from the other and has led to such chaos in the universities.

Dr. Eibhear Walshe, Senior lecturer in the Department of Modern English in UCC, introduced Professor Wills who entered the room with a rush of confidence and élan. She hadn't brought a timepiece and asked Eibhear for a watch—he hadn't one either but he gave her his mobile phone with the advice not to answer any calls. Ms Wills, beautifully clad, with an elocuted English accent, had that formidability that somehow comes with her background—as would become evident with her fearless take on Elizabeth Bowen and the Irish.

Though her lecture was to be on *Elizabeth Bowen and the Vanishing Irish*, with particular reference to Bowen's novel *A World Of Love* published in 1955 by Jonathan Cape, London, Wills soon made clear that she was going to cover a much wider area than Bowen's own post-war book. The period of 1952-1955 was a discrete period for Bowen, Wills attested, as the writer did a great deal of travelling but still had her main home in Bowen's Court. Wills then introduced Bowen's 1951 broadcast on *The Cult of Nostalgia*, which was also published in *The Listener*. In it, she saw the past as the repository of all

that was good. Wills then read out Bowen's own words, but it seems to me that it was post-war England that Bowen found tough to live in. After all she made that famous statement: "*I've been coming gradually unstuck from England for a long time. I have adored England since 1940 because of the stylishness Mr. Churchill gave it, but I have always felt, 'when Mr. Churchill goes, I go'...*". As Glendinning recorded in her Bowen biography: "*Patrician hysteria over Attlee's victory had its unattractive side*".

A World Of Love is regarded by many as the start of what one Bowen biographer called the "*bend back*" i.e. a reaching back into the author's own life when the future looks so bleak and taking consolation from a better *civilised past*. This golden era saw Bowen at the height of her powers as a novelist, her life in London with the *litterati* of the Bloomsbury group, and of course there was her husband Alan Cameron who oversaw the running of her Big House in County Cork—Bowen's Court where the guest list reads like a *Who's Who* of the great and clever writers of that era. But Bowen was living way beyond her means and it all came to a head really after Cameron's death in 1952.

Wills made much of Bowen's "*poor journalism*", as she termed it, which was so unlike her fiction, but Bowen, I contend, made her living out of being a writer. She wrote for all the main magazines of the day both literary and popular. She wrote about holidays, housekeeping and other more mundane subjects. She needed the money and her house, and indeed guests, drained it away from her. During the Second World War, Bowen was at her best and she made a case for the war being a kind of "*conception of her civilization*", as Hermione Lee, another of her biographers wrote (*Elizabeth Bowen: An Estimation*, Vision, Barnes & Noble, London 1981). Post-war, again according to Lee, her next three novels were about "*displacement, alienation and the search for consolation*". *A World Of Love* was begun in Ireland after the death of Alan Cameron, and the house in the novel called "Montefort" is rather a small shabby 'Big House', reflecting as Victoria Glendinning suggests, her "*own predicament at Bowen's Court*". While Bowen travelled to Rome,

and America, she knew that still the bills were piling up and eventually she sold Bowen's Court in 1959, acting very quickly, and off she went again, this time to New York.

Wills's take on all this was quite extraordinary. She seemed to suggest that by writing her fiction that Bowen was somehow using the past as a barricade to her present. There is that familiar academic trope that Bowen was now, post-Bowen's Court, living a cut-off life, a sort of half-life. Nothing could be further from the truth, though Wills didn't state this. Bowen was *living it up* with her new friends, the very monied Vernons. Lady Ursula Vernon was formerly Lady Ursula Grosvenor, the daughter of the mighty Duke of Westminster. Bowen now got used to horse racing and loved going with her new friends to see their horses running at the Curragh and Ascot. She also had made friends with Jean and Barry Black who had bought Creagh Castle, outside Doneraile and loved going on expensive holidays to France and Italy with them in their chauffeured Jaguar. She was, as she expressed jubilantly in a letter of thanks to the Blacks, now living the high life and could definitely get used to it. Even her novel *A World Of Love* is imbued with all the let-downs of the shabby Montefort, where there is no money for anything. This suggests that Bowen was not in retreat—she simply throughout her life was too tough minded for that.

Wills is unusual in that, as an English critic, she thinks that this novel *A World Of Love* is all about Ireland and its social and political progress—or perhaps changes is the more correct word for what Wills thinks. I think that, while Montefort is a "small" Big House, it is in isolation from the rest of the community. The postman no longer calls and all credit has long been cut off at the local grocers. The finding in the attic of an enigmatically unaddressed bundle of letters from Guy, a dead soldier from World War 1, and the reaction of the young heroine Jane to the find, is what passes for plot in this novel. It is Bowen's most plotless novel and Rose Macaulay, who reviewed the book for *The Times*, stated unequivocally that, "*while fascinating*", "*it will not be to everyone's taste*". The spectral dead in the spirit of Guy is central to the narrative and there is a sense too that that the writer is finally laying ghosts of the past to rest. The novel ends at Shannon Airport with a man getting off the plane. Jane looks at him.

"Their eyes meet.

They no sooner looked but they loved."

On such a note of optimism this is where Bowen puts her full stop.

As already indicated, Wills was rather scathing about Bowen's journalism. Allan Hepburn edited a collection of her essays, articles and reviews. In a long introduc-

tion, Hepburn acknowledges that his book really only covers the 1940s-1950 and sees it as more "*a work in progress*". Wills was inclined to see it as the complete thing.

Many of the articles dug up by Hepburn were for The British Council in post-War Europe. Bowen was again on watch and careful in her assessments. She thought that culture was going to be very valuable against a new Soviet Cold-War world and not only for "*commercial reasons*". In one letter, she stated that "*the lessening of any cultural ties that we can maintain with Hungary would be, I am convinced, not only a blunder but a betrayal*". She thought that the Russians in 1946 during the Paris Peace talks (which she was reporting for the *Cork Examiner*) were full of "*bullying tactics ... stalling and arguing over frontiers and reparations*".

As her lover was, as Wills stated, the Canadian diplomat Charles Ritchie, Bowen came to know how geopolitics worked. She was always for England and then America, especially during the Vietnam War when she couldn't bear any criticism of the latter's role.

The Ireland that Wills gave us was one in which Bowen was horrified by the 'cheque book people' who started buying up land and houses. But these were her friends, such as the Vernons who bought up stables in Bruree, Co. Limerick, and then also bought a very lovely seaside house in Kinsale where Elizabeth always stayed. Bowen did write a rather patronising article *How they live in Ireland: Conquest by Cheque-Book*, but her fears were for the thick Irish who could be done out again by the rich. She coined a term, "*the passenger residents*", describing them as "*a new wave of settlers whose object was to bypass responsibility. Eire, at this juncture, vitally does not want her apparent backwardness patronised and exploited*". Indeed!

Wills went on to talk of the Irish 'poor' and the problem of emigration. She—and this was for me the most ignorant part of her lecture—went on to talk of "*Social Darwinism*" and made much of Darwin's cousin, Francis Galton, the father of '*Eugenics*'. Galton (1822-1911) was born in Birmingham, left the study of medicine and went off to Africa where he did studies on heredity and intelligence which led him to the field he called *Eugenics*. Several of his studies are referred to by Charles Darwin and Galton was knighted in 1909 for his work.

Wills linked up the work of this man with that of *Catholic social ideas*. I categorically refute this rubbish. While the eugenic movement in Britain and the USA wanted selective breeding and the "*weeding out of the unfit*" by sterilisation, doesn't everyone here remember that big

families were celebrated and certainly the Irish Catholic Church can't be tainted either then or now for such barbarous policies. H.G. Wells, Margaret Sanger, Marie Stopes, Julian Huxley—and all of the Bloomsbury Group—were the high priests and priestesses of this movement and hugely influenced British imperial politics and policies towards so-called "*native breeds*". Contraception was immoral and was an alien practice to the Irish but there was a more relaxed response to natural methods.

Wills then brought up the name of Dr. Bishop Lucey and there was an immediate tittering reaction from most of the college audience. With much condescension, Dr. Eibhear Walshe said that "*everyone here is well acquainted with Bishop Lucey*" in the most dismissive way possible. And for me, this said a lot more about our academic community than it ever could about the good Bishop Lucey who spent his final years working as a humble mission priest in Africa.

It was when Wills began discussing the 'Commission on Emigration and other Population Problems 1948-1954 Reports' that Bishop Lucey's name came up. But Wills was all over the place here and it was quite hard to know if she was reporting on the findings of the Commission or commenting on what was left out.

Certainly she made an argument that the young girls in rural Ireland wanted to emigrate rather than face a harsh life without cinemas, hairdressers and modern perms. In the days after the conference, I spoke with women who did emigrate to England and when I put Wills argument to them about their wilful ways, they were outraged. Leaving home and parents was a hard and harsh choice and they only wanted work. Many of them recalled emotionally their journey from their home to a new country without the support of family and neighbours. And it was no picnic they contended. Unlike today's emigrants into Ireland, there were no State supports and many were glad of the Catholic Church's presence which remained the one constant in a very different world.

The Irish were not wanted and there was no pretence that they were. Many settled down and put down roots in England but for the most part it was amongst fellow Irish.

Wills also mentioned a 'rather obscure' Irish playwright, M.J. Molloy, but when I looked him up in the *Field Day Anthology* (Vol. 3), I found he his best-known play is called *The Wood of the Whispering* (1953). There is mention of a mistaken comparison with Synge which is wrong as Molloy's world is "*integral to itself*" and his "*West of Ireland*" is "*menaced by a threat of an extension that seems to stimulate its most grotesque and melancholic features*".

Wills seeks to make this the dominant discourse—between rather feckless women and men who strove to keep their land at the price of remaining unmarried and childless. These women, she went on to contend, were seduced by glossy magazines and urban excitement and were ready for a consumerist nirvana. At this stage, I began thinking 'surely someone will stop her', but no, the academics kept quiet.

Shannon Airport, Wills thought, fed dreams of freedom and she used Bowen's unique take on it—but for the latter there was coming *and* going. For the others, there was ever only the going and that was mainly on the ship—the Inisfallen.

Because Wills brought up the Emigration Commission Report, I got it from a friend and read it. It is one of the best things I have ever read and covered so much more of Irish life than Wills gave it credit for. There are a number of contributors and there is a Minority Report from Most Rev. Dr. C. Lucey. And what I found truly astonishing is that here he was back then already asking for the policy of decentralisation which under the Government of Bertie Ahern actually finally happened.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

When Wills finished there was the usual Irish clapping and she then asked for some questions. After a silence, Dr. Eibhear Walshe asked her if she thought that William Trevor took after Bowen in his writings, especially about the late 50s. He had not even finished speaking when Clair Wills said "*Do you mean like The Story of Lucy Gault?*" and poor Walshe nodded. Then Wills disdainfully said "*oh no I hate William Trevor's writings and they are nothing like Bowen*". She then made a finger in her mouth gesture of vomiting which was a first for me at a literary conference. I happen to totally agree with her but perhaps a bit more subtlety was called for. That finished off Walshe and then everyone became more quiet and cautious.

Then Dr. Tina O'Toole stood up and said she was from the Dept. of English in the University of Limerick and she was studying Bowen's last novel *Eva Trout* and did Wills think this was a modernist department for Elizabeth Bowen? Wills completely disapproved of this thesis and replied "*No*". Someone at the front said Bowen was always caught for money and her journalism shouldn't be judged like her fiction. She nodded at this and then a man remarked that Shannon Airport was a new construction—old sheds had been used to build the Cork dog track and of course up to then, sea-planes had landed at Foynes. Wills then said if there were no more questions, it was a wrap. Some people literally bounded from the room and I felt Wills had crushed the pitiful UCC lot.

Julianne Herlihy. ©

Bob Doyle, Union Struggles And Communist Party Contradictions

{The following reflections on his father's life were given by Robert Doyle in London's Imperial War Museum on 14th March last, at a memorial meeting organised by the International Brigade Memorial Trust in honour of his recently deceased father, the last surviving Irish International Brigade fighter, Bob Doyle. Click on the link to www.indymedia.ie/article/91124 for a text, photographic and video record for the memorial meeting for Bob held one month previously, on 14th February, in Dublin's Liberty Hall.}

Sometimes people are formed by an ideology. For example, the ex-criminal who attributes his new and reformed way of life to finding Jesus and being born again. My father, whom we often called Big Bob to distinguish him from me, was not like that. The way he lived was an instinctive expression of his nature as a person.

He was an active member of the Trade Union movement and the Communist Party because he thought that they were the best vehicles through which to express his natural instincts. He was loyal to these institutions, and to an outsider might seem a typical Trade Unionist or Communist, but a few insiders knew of his frequent fights inside these organisations. The arguments usually arose when ideology or doctrinaire attitudes were in conflict with his more instinctive and emotional response to situations and issues.

For example, as a member and official of the print union, SOGAT, he was obliged by the Communist Party of Great Britain to defend the restrictive practices that were common in the press at that time. At one time he even found himself on trial at the Old Bailey, and facing a stiff prison sentence because of his activities during one particular strike. Fortunately the jury found him not guilty. But, while actively fighting for the Union and Communist Party policies, he at the same time had grave doubts about the wisdom of these policies, and struggled within the organisations against the rigid thinking of his comrades.

I remember being with him in the warehouse of one of the national newspapers in Fleet Street. We could see hundreds of men doing virtually nothing. Their job was trivial. Tying bundles of newspapers and labelling them with their destinations.

Big Bob pointed out to me a machine standing in the corner of the warehouse. He explained that this machine could do the work of all the workers in the warehouse, but that the Union would not allow it to be switched on. He thought that this was indefensible, not because of any principle or ideology. He just thought that the workers were wasting their lives. Also he realised that the workers might well be strong Trade Unionists, and consequently enjoy the best working conditions and wages of any group of workers. But this

privileged position in fact made them selfish and reactionary. It was very noticeable that among the hundreds of workers in the warehouse, not one was black or female.

Big Bob was in favour of rationalisation of labour practices; to bring in policies of early retirement, education and re-training. He was in favour of a national wages policy—as long as it was fair. But this ran up against the fixed mindset of the Union members and Party officials.

Of course the crunch finally came. Rupert Murdoch opened his Wapping factory and with the help of Margaret Thatcher's anti-Union legislation and turning of a blind eye to, or perhaps even encouraging police tactics, smashed the Union. Had Big Bob's ideas been accepted this situation might have been averted. Had his way of thinking been accepted generally, the whole situation of the Unions and the working class in the UK might have been different. Maybe even the economic mess that we are in today might have been different.

Nonetheless, Big Bob was loyally down on the Wapping picket line fighting for, and defending what he knew to be indefensible.

That was where he and I parted company. I was not prepared to stick my neck out fighting for this privileged and reactionary group of workers who you can bet would have voted almost to the last man for Thatcher in the previous election. I thought that they were getting what they deserved.

I came to know about his differences with the Union and the Party because he often would ask me to help him write his speeches and articles. These were some of the best times that I had with him. Our office was the pub or the Working Man's Club, and over a pint, we would write his speeches. We had many laughs over the things that he would like to have said to Union and Party officials; and his brilliant and wicked sense of humour made these sessions very entertaining for me. The atmosphere and our creativity no doubt being nourished with the aid of a little of his home grown.

I wonder now what it was that made Big Bob so special. I always assumed that he was special to me because he was my

father. But I see now, from the worldwide reaction to his death, and from the many messages that the family have received, that he was special to many other people, and not just for his political ideas. I think that Big Bob was profoundly humanitarian. His own childhood experiences perhaps had given him a deep empathy to the suffering of others. He would cry watching the news from Vietnam, or a documentary about the holocaust. He genuinely felt a brotherhood with the rest of humanity. This in turn made him very egalitarian. He felt no better or worse than anyone else and spoke to everyone with the same voice or register, striking up conversations wherever he was and with whoever happened to be near him. He was genuinely interested in other people and what they thought.

To my brother and I as children he never spoke down to us, and assumed that we could understand whatever he said. When he read bedtime stories to us they would be books like Maxim Gorky's trilogy, or Makarenkov's *The Road To Life*. Sometimes the books included very adult sexual material; it made no difference to Big Bob, he read it all.

From this well of empathy and the belief that all humans are fundamentally equal in value, came the desire to make a more just world, and he had the determination and courage to fight for what he believed was right. I think that it was these qualities, his love of humanity, his humour and enjoyment of companionship, and his courage to which all who knew him responded, and I feel privileged that he was my father.

Robert Doyle

Do Irish Workers Know Anything About Their Newest Employer?

Irish workers may not know that they are about to play host to yet another foreign employer with a questionable reputation. The employer, a multinational building supply company named James Hardie, has announced that it is about to transfer its headquarters from The Netherlands to the Republic Of Ireland.

This announcement came towards the close of a much publicized sentencing session in the Supreme Court of New South Wales, where ten of Hardies' most senior Directors were fined between \$A350, 000 and \$A35,000 each and were barred from holding corporate directorships anywhere in the world for periods ranging from five to fifteen years. Needless to say the longest periods of disqualification coincided with the heaviest fines imposed, so there is little chance that any of the convicted Directors will turn up as a leader of the James Hardie company in

Ireland, or maybe this writer is being optimistic.

The issue for which the members of the James Hardie Board of Directors received their convictions and sentences was their false statements regarding the financial adequacy of a trust fund they set up in 2001 allegedly to ensure adequate compensation payments for the many victims of the deadly products which Hardies had been processing and selling in Australia and overseas for almost one hundred years.

The simple truth is that, when they decided to move their company headquarters from Australia to the Netherlands, they were in fact attempting to avoid their responsibilities by claiming that the amount of money they placed in the fund, would cover the huge sums of money needed to meet the medical and compensatory expenses of the thousands of victims, past, present and future, who faced inevitable death from asbestosis and mesothelioma, the incurable cancers caused by inhaling asbestos dust and fibres.

The Court had no doubt that when the company set up their original Trust Fund it was deliberately attempting to avoid its responsibilities to its large work force and its customers who were already suffering and dying from the deadly effects of asbestos or were likely to contract the disease.

Firstly the Union most concerned with protecting the workers who used, mined and manufactured and otherwise handled asbestos—the Construction, Mining and Forestry Employees Union (CFMEU)—alerted the whole labor movement, including individual workers, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU). Eventually it convinced the corporate regulator, the Australian Securities and Investment Corporation (ASIC), of the total inadequacy of Hardie's Trust Fund. Eventually those combined groups forced the company to face the Industrial Court where it was required to renegotiate the terms of the original Trust Fund and increase the fund from a few millions to several billions of dollars.

Then ASIC moved in and took the company to court for its blatant attempt to deliberately defraud the victims of asbestos by providing a wholly inadequate sum of money to meet the cost of compensating and caring for the victims of asbestos. What is equally reprehensible is the fact that no penalty was ever imposed on the company for having knowingly induced workers to mine, transport and participate in the manufacture of asbestos products, and others to use these products, such as builders, plumbers and engineers in ships and even brake shoe manufacturers and motor mechanics. Other victims included

women who washed their partner's overalls after they had been working with asbestos.

The records show that Hardies were fully aware of the health hazard to users of the deadly products they were producing, but the company has not been prosecuted for producing and marketing such a deadly product.

Asbestos was used in external cladding for buildings and sometimes for internal lining and ceilings. Asbestos was also used for corrugated roofing, for water pipes, for brake shoe linings, for motor vehicles. The hessian sacks used to transport the raw asbestos from the mines to the factories in urban centres, were recycled and sold as underfelt for carpets, without firstly having the residual asbestos dust and fibres removed. Asbestos was also used to insulate water pipes in buildings and in naval and commercial ships, resulting in the untimely death of ships' engineers, plumbers and other workers.

Asbestos is a cheap fireproof material widely used in building and engineering, but it is deadly for those workers who inhale the dust or the fibres. In Canada, where it is also mined, it is illegal to use the material for any purpose whatever, but that country produces, sells and exports large quantities of the deadly material to so-called Third World countries. The question now arises for the Irish is, whether or not Hardies plans to produce and sell their dirty product in Ireland, or if it chooses to do as Canada does. export the stuff to other unwary countries.

Patrick O'Beirne.

OFF THE WALL

Celebrations, once the East Berlin Wall, demolished, the wrecking ball—

Gorbachev,
cut the throat of Russia, then the payoff.
(The West licks its lips as Yeltsin takes
all)

No disquiet as Israel blocks the view
with US funds pushing the concrete
through
the land of Palestine under curfew.
Benign apartheid, Britain's Ulster coup,
no democracy, a breezeblock divide.
Along the Texas border a high fence,
too many Mexicans who work for cents.
Hear the UK talk carbon dioxide
while blasting mud walls in Afghanistan,
building base-walls against the Taliban.

Wilson John Haire.

24th November, 2009

Arms Crisis Misconceptions

UNPUBLISHED LETTER

The July/August 2009 issue of *History Ireland* featured the events of August 1969 and their aftermath seen through the usual Lynchite prism.

The following letter was sent to the Editor, correcting some points of the presentation:

"Your editorial summary of the events of August 1969 in the July/August issue says that on August 13th, "The British government announced that troops were being sent to Derry" to stand between the combatants and to restore law and order. In fact, troops were not to be deployed in Derry until the evening of the 14th. (British troops were of course permanently stationed in this part of the United Kingdom.) The sequence, as you set it out, makes nonsense of Jack Lynch's solemn televised address of 13th August promising that his Government would not stand by while nationalist lives and property were at risk.

"That speech of Jack Lynch's was authorised by his Cabinet and signified a shift in Irish policy: it was a recognition that the Catholics of Northern Ireland needed defence against the Northern majority. Lynch's promise reassured the minority, whilst further enraging Protestants. So much so that, even after the Stormont regime accepted the loss of control of security which requesting the deployment of the British Army entailed, the military was unable to restore order and provide protection for the minority.

"It was in these circumstances that the Irish Cabinet agreed to measures which enabled the minority to mount its own defence, up to and including the deployment of the Irish Army north of the Border. It also instructed the Army to prepare to arm the Northern minority. This has been confirmed by archive research and is incontrovertible.

"Captain Kelly is named in your magazine as the "agent" of Ministers Blaney, Boland and Haughey. He was no such thing. He was one of the Intelligence Officers deployed by the Irish Government in August 1969 to monitor and assist Catholic defence. Later he became the officer charged with liaising between the Government and the Northern Defence Committees. This position was confirmed by his direct superior, Army Director of Intelligence Michael Hefferon, during the Arms Conspiracy Trials of September/October 1970. The then Minister for Defence James Gibbons was also forced to concede that Captain Kelly's position was a special one.

"It was in the course of his liaison duties that Capt. Kelly became involved in the Arms Importation scheme carried

out under the Government's Directive to the Army of 6th February [1970]—a scheme which became the subject of later criminal action. But this was no maverick operation. Captain Kelly reported on the progress of the scheme to his superior officer, Colonel Hefferon, who in turn kept Minister Gibbons *au fait* with the progress of the enterprise. And Captain Kelly reported directly to Minister Gibbons. All of this emerged at the Conspiracy Trials and has been confirmed by the release of Secret papers under the thirty year rule. I have made many of these documents available in two books, the latest of which is called *Arms Conspiracy Trial*.

"Professor Dermot Keogh raises some red herrings. One is to suggest that Captain Kelly's arms importation was conducted outside normal Army purchasing channels. What else does he expect with a covert operation? A second is to ask whether Taoiseach Lynch 'knew' what was going on. He could hardly fail to have known. After all it was Lynch who set out the new Government policy of guaranteeing Catholic defence with his speech of 13th August 1969 and it was a position he adhered to until his *volteface* of May 1970. Angela Clifford"

Editor Tommy Graham acknowledged receipt of this letter, said it was too late for the September/October issue, and promised publication in the November/December issue of his magazine: it did not appear.

LYNCH APOLOGIST

Niamh Puirseil, who lectures in the School of History and Archives, University College, Dublin, contributed *New Light On The Arms Crisis* to the July/August issue of *History Ireland*. Her article is based on a misleading re-hash of a report for the Labour leader produced around October 1969 by John Devine, PRO to the Labour Party. She sees in it an early warning about the attempted arms importation prosecuted in the Arms Trials a year later. To make the connection with these trials, the idea is attributed to Devine that Captain Kelly was the agent of Blaney, Boland and Haughey. A caption Puirseil provides to an illustration reads:

"Above: Copies of *Voice of the North*—according to Devine, its 'committee of management involves some of those named on the Monaghan committee; Blaney, Boland and Haughey's agent {Capt. Kelly} and others, also known to me..." (p37).

In this caption Puirseil has inserted Captain Kelly's name in square brackets into a quotation from Devine's report. But

Devine himself does not mention Captain Kelly or even refer to him indirectly. He refers to an 'agent' alright, but does not suggest that he is an Intelligence Officer: the role of the 'agent' is to conduct the Intelligence Officers around the North (see paragraph 4 below).

Not only does Devine NOT mention Captain Kelly, he DOES name two other officers who are conducting investigations in the North. Niamh Puirseil sees no need to inform the reader of this fact: which sits inconveniently with the Arms Trial blinkers she has donned. Incidentally, the same two Army personnel were to be named in the November 1969 *United Irishman* 'exposé' of Fianna Fail's alleged takeover bid in the North.

JOHN DEVINE'S REPORT

Here is Devine's report:

"To: Party Leader

Subject: *Aspects of Six County Situation*

Introduction:

In our continuing review of the Six County situation some information has come to hand which might be worth examining. Much of the information which follows has been checked out by me, and found to be fairly accurate. What is contained, unchecked, is passed on because it comes from what are described as "usually reliable" sources.

Situation Report:

1. In the post-Cameron situation North and South much attention has been given in the media to the influence of Left wing elements in the Civil Rights agitation in the North. While our attention has been diverted in that direction, certain other forces have been at work, and are working.
2. It is now clear that Jack Lynch's first major statement on the Northern troubles, since August 12, was made but a few hours after he was visited by Neil Blaney. Blaney threatened that if the Taoiseach did not make a statement, and immediately, he (Blaney) would certainly make one.
3. In the first (and current) issue of the magazine "This Week", it is reported that Irish Army intelligence officers and British Army intelligence officers have exchanged visits into each other's territory. Whatever about the British, the Irish certainly have been visiting the North regularly since October 5 last (1968).
4. Since the recent major outbreaks of trouble an "agent" of Messrs. Haughey, Blaney and Boland, has been conducting these military intelligence personnel (Captains Doolan [word unclear] and Duggan) on trips behind the barricades. Contacts are being built up and ammunition and money has been distributed. Generally contacts are among the Republican element in the North, who have more or less broken with the Dublin HQ of the IRA, principally because this

“agent” can deliver what the IRA cannot. The IRA is highly worried and indignant at the influence which these Fianna Fail people are having among Northern Republicans, the possibility of retaliation is likely from the Dublin end. Fianna Fail have now established a chain of links from Belfast to Derry, including places like Dungannon, Newry, Armagh, Coalisland, Omagh and in other places where their sphere of contacts up to now has been negligible. Their aid is being accepted.

5. The “agent” (for the want of a better word) has now spread his net to broaden the scope of his activities. He has set up, in Monaghan town, with the approval of the Government Ministers already mentioned, and with the aid of their finance, what is known as the Monaghan Civil Rights Office of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association. This office is located in what was the Monaghan HQ of the Fianna Fail Party. It is understood that the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association has no control over the activities of this office and the link with the NICRA is only established in that the committee members are also members of NICRA. The link with Fianna Fail is only established by: (1) the building in which it is located and (2) that NICRA has no overriding control or responsibility and (3) because I know it was set up with the aid and connivance of Blaney, Haughey and Boland. This fact is also known by others, including Sinn Fein and the IRA. It is doubtful if many, (or any) of the people who are associating with this Monaghan organisation are very aware that it is a front organisation for Fianna Fail.

6. There is no doubt either that it was this office which, on September 23, announced that Paddy Devlin, Paddy Kennedy and Paddy O'Hanlon, were not going to resume their seats in the Stormont Parliament.

7. This office is staffed by two men, Mr. Nicholas Coffey, said to be a member of Dundalk Labour Party, and Mr. Brian Patterson, a former member of the Queen's University, Belfast, Republican Club.

7. [sic] The Monaghan Civil Rights Committee comprises: Mr. Bernard Rushe (said to be a member of the Labour Party in Monaghan); Mr. Denis Haughey (a Coalisland Republican); Councillor Michael McLaughlin (a member of Dungannon UDC [Urban District Council], said to be a “Currie” Nationalist); Margaret Collins (Newry Civil Rights); Paddy O'Hanlon, MP; Kevin Mallon (a disenchanted Republican from Coalisland).

8. One of the by-products of this Committee was the booklet “Terror in Northern Ireland” which was distributed by Paddy Devlin in London, though, according to the newspapers, he attributed

Kerryman Seeks Dail Statement On Free State War Crimes

The following letter appeared in the *Irish Times*, 31st October 2009

Miriam Lord was extremely flippant in her remarks (Miriam Lord's Week, October 24th) about deputy Martin Ferris in relation to his questions in the Dáil about the atrocities that were carried out by Free State forces in Ireland in 1922-1923.

Although these atrocities were carried out more than 86 years ago, I and many others would like to know what the official State version of events during the Civil War are, and I would like this information made available in Dáil Éireann.

Are the murders in Ballyseedy, Countess Bridge and Cahersiveen, Co Kerry, regarded as war crimes? What do the official records state on the reprisal executions that were carried out by this State? What do the Army records state about the unofficial executions that were carried out by Free State forces? Are the men who fought on the republican side regarded as criminals by the State? I think that it is time to revisit this terrible time in Irish history and make our peace with the past.

Cathal (Charlie Din) O'Connor, Knocknagoshel, Co Kerry.

its authorship to another group entirely. He was either mistaken or misinformed. The booklet was printed in Cavan and its author was a Dublin journalist, known to me.

9. Led by Currie, and with the apparent involvement of Devlin, Kennedy and O'Hanlon, one basis for activity would appear to be either to gain control of NICRA, at its annual meeting either in December or January, or to set up a new Civil Rights organisation. Certainly People's Democracy will wreck NICRA before much longer. At this stage it is difficult to tie in Currie with the Fianna Fail front, especially on the Blaney, Haughey and Boland side.

10. Because of the in-fighting in NICRA, between the PD people and the people concerned just with civil rights, a confused stage has been reached within that organisation. Inaction has not only contributed to a loss of momentum but has, apparently, killed the germs of regeneration. In fact it's an organisation ripe for new leadership.

11. Inexplicably NICRA won't disown the Monaghan Civil Rights Office, though I believe Frank Gogarty did in an interview with the *United Irishman*.

12. Meanwhile the activities of the Monaghan Civil Rights Office continue to proliferate. Last Saturday it organised a meeting outside the GPO at which a wide range of Northern political thought (and non-thought) was represented - right across the Board from Eamonn McCann to Ivan Cooper and Austin Currie. There were some calls to arms from the platform.

13. The latter was picked up by the Unionist propaganda machine and played for what it was worth. The Minister for Home Affairs, Mr. Porter, has referred to the meeting. Solidarity were blamed by the *Irish Times* and the Unionists for organising the meeting. The chairman of

Solidarity (an organisation which the Labour Party has an interest in) has issued a disclaimer to both the media and the Unionist Party. The Unionist Party PRO has been told that the meeting organisers were the Monaghan Civil Rights Office. 14. But the activities directly attributable to the Monaghan office continue to expand. It is now clear that a large number of meetings have been organised, especially in the Western counties, and are aimed purely at rising the spirit of “Republicanism”.

15. On Friday next the first of a series of weekly propaganda newspapers will be circulated and distributed in the North. The paper will be bitterly anti-Unionist. The committee of management involves some of those named on the Monaghan committee; Blaney, Boland and Haughey's agent, and others, also known to me. The paper will be printed in the Anglo Celt, Cavan. Five or six vans, necessary for transporting the newspaper, have already been acquired.

16. As well, plans are well in hand for the setting up of a powerful mobile pirate radio. Those involved in this operation are, in part, known to me. The operation is expected to be finalised soon. This also has limited Cabinet backing. It is doubtful, in fact, unlikely, that the remainder of the Cabinet, and certainly not the Taoiseach, know anything about what is going on.

17. The activity of People's Democracy on this side of the Border is also intense. Michael Farrell and his leaders have been having meetings with a number of Labour Party people and on Tuesday night next, in the Mansion House, the PD will hold a meeting at which (according to the billing) prominent Labour Party speakers will address the crowds.

John Devine,
Public Relations Officer.”

PERSONNEL

This undated document probably originates around the first week of October 1969. The meeting mentioned in paragraph 12 was probably the one held at the end of September 1969. It is mentioned that 'Solidarity' denied organising the meeting (para 13); there is also the information that Labour "has an interest in" the organisation. In a telegram to London, British Ambassador to Dublin, Sir Andrew Gilchrist describes Solidarity as a republican front (see below).

The Jack Lynch speech mentioned in paragraph 2 is probably his 'One Nation' speech of 28th August which infuriated Unionists. His further 'Tralee' speech of 20th September is usually taken as an attempt to rectify the damage done. (See Angela Clifford, *The Arms Conspiracy Trial*, p558-.)

A couple of weeks after this report, two Intelligence officers were named in the November 1969 *United Irishman* (Editor, Seamus O Tuathail) as working out of the Monaghan office: Captain Drohan and Captain Duggan (mentioned in *Irish Times* 12.5.70). Drohan is probably the 'Doolan' referred to by Devine above. (The typescript has letters overtyped and the word could also be Drolin or Drohin.) The general theme of the *United Irishman* complaint was that Fianna Fail was attempting to take control of the civil rights movement.

The Denis Haughey described as a "Coalisland republican" above (second para 7) is presumably the same NICRA activist who is a prominent SDLP member today and who has been very critical of the Provos.

The "agent" referred to by John Devine is probably Seamus Brady, an employee of the Government Information Service acting directly under, and reporting to, the Department of the Taoiseach. The 'agent' certainly is not Captain Kelly. To call Brady an 'agent', with its spook implications, is somewhat misleading. A journalist, originally from Derry and with a lot of Northern contacts, Brady was useful to the Government in providing up-to-date reports of what was happening in crisis areas and was able to convey Government thinking to his contacts. The "bitterly anti-Unionist" paper mentioned in paragraph 15 did appear. It was called *Voice Of The North* and it raised agitational issues from a viewpoint which was that of the SDLP when it was formed some time later.

The Unionist Party PRO is quoted as a source by Devine in all of this.

Devine refers to the 'agent' and Intelligence officers as "Fianna Fail people" (para. 4). This is tendentious: all three were acting under orders: Brady under the Government Information Office and Jack Lynch; the Intelligence Officers under the Army chain of command and

Director of Intelligence Colonel Michael Hefferon. This is confirmed by released official papers and Arms Trial evidence.

Devine is concerned to target Haughey, Blaney and Boland in this report, referring to them as instigators in actions which we now know were initiated under the authority of Government. In paragraph 16 Devine almost admits that Ministers were acting on the authority of Government when he speaks of "Cabinet backing" for a radio scheme, but then goes on to refer to "the remainder of the Cabinet" and hastens to deny that "the Taoiseach" knows what is going on. We will come back to the point of what Jack Lynch did and did not know below.

SOME COMMENTS

In general John Devine's report shows a Dublin incomprehension for a situation in which a community has to improvise a defence. There is a general tone of disapproval over republicans and civil rights activists establishing coherent organisation across Northern Ireland and a complaint that NICRA won't condemn its members who are involved in the Monaghan civil rights office. While Devine does not specifically mention the Defence Committees, the consolidation of these is what he is describing. On these Committees there was cooperation across the spectrum of the Northern minority, encompassing also the highly effective ex-Servicemen of the British forces.

While the report contains hints of arms being acquired, there is little specific: paragraph 4 mentions ammunition being "distributed", and suggests that the "agent" can deliver what the IRA cannot", and paragraph 12 refers to a public "call to arms" by speakers at a public meeting, representing "a wide range of Northern political thought (and non-thought)". 'Non-thought' was not something one came across very much in the Northern Catholic community during the period after August 1969.

What Devine describes as "Fianna Fail" interference is in fact the Irish State and others responding to urgent appeals for military help from every section of the Northern minority. His complaints are of a kind with those of the *United Irishman* and Goulding's republicans who tried to establish a monopoly of legitimacy for themselves in the situation. One has to wonder whether the latter are not the source of them.

Significantly, Devine dates Irish Intelligence interest in the North to October 1968 (para 3): well before the events of August 1969. At the Arms Conspiracy Trial, Director of Military Intelligence Michael Hefferon told the Court that, after the RUC attack on a peaceful demonstration held in Derry on 5th October

1968, he foresaw serious trouble in the North. This report agrees that he set in motion steps to inform himself of the situation there.

The general tone of the report is hostile to the Monaghan Civil Rights Office. While Devine suggests that the Monaghan Civil Rights Office is a front for Fianna Fail, he actually fails to substantiate that allegation: the people he names as associated with it come from various parties and none; not one of the Southern participants is described by him as a Fianna Fail member. It is admitted in paragraph 9 that Austin Currie (Nationalist Party and later Fine Gael) and other Northern elected representatives and their supporters have a leading role in the Monaghan grouping. To get over the inconsistency Devine lamely suggests that the activists involved with the office may not know they are acting as a 'front'. However, the actual facts in the report suggest something different: that the office is non-party and solely concerned with Northern issues.

NIAMH PUIRSÉIL

The minimal references to arms in this report enable Niamh Puirseil to see it as evidence that Devine had uncovered the 'plot' which was prosecuted at the Arms Conspiracy Trials a year later:

"It was through conversations with Paddy Kennedy that John Devine first became aware of the importation and distribution of arms to northern nationalists and the role being played by certain Fianna Fail ministers in facilitating this. Using information gleaned from Kennedy and others, including Paddy Devlin, Gerry Fitt and sources in the press, Devine began to piece together a remarkably detailed picture of covert operations that were ongoing across the North. Clearly a great deal of work went into compiling the document and checking the veracity of its claims. Devine noted: 'Much of the information which follows has been checked out by me, and found to be fairly accurate. What is contained, unchecked, is passed on because it comes from what are described as "usually reliable" sources.' The information that emerged subsequently, through the arms trials, the investigation by the public accounts committee, Peter Berry's 'diaries'... and the numerous exposés on the subject, have shown that the material contained in this memorandum was remarkably accurate in almost all respects. If most of the contents of the document are, however, at this stage well known to those familiar with the arms trials, in mid-October 1969 the information was truly explosive... " (p37).

The Arms Trials were solely concerned with a particular shipment of arms to be brought in from the Continent six months after Devine's report. As emerged at the

Trials, the proposed Importation was a fully authorised Intelligence operation, which was authorised by Government and broke no law. This was confirmed by the release of secret documents nine years ago. It is hard to see any connection between the subject matter of the prosecution and the bits of gossip assembled here for the Labour Party leader.

Interestingly, Puirseil takes it for granted that a law-abiding citizen, having found that arms are being sent to beleaguered communities in Northern Ireland, would do his utmost to stop it! She writes:

"Having gathered and verified this information, which implicated government ministers and agents of the state in the illegal importation of arms, what was Devine to do... The information was good, but not legally publishable. How then to bring this evidence to light?..."

Why would verified information of an illegal importation of arms not have been "legally publishable"?

Apparently, "*Devine passed the information to the one person he believed had the sophistication to deal with the information in the correct manner...*" (p38). That was Conor Cruise O'Brien, Labour's spokesman on the North.

However, instead of raising it in the Dáil, she complains, he was concerned with a forthcoming trip to the United States and a play of his, *King Herod*. He "*exited stage left*". If Conor Cruise had used the information, she suggests, "*Lynch would have been compelled to act sooner rather than later, and at the very least the arms crisis of the following year would have been averted*" (p38).

LYNCH TOLD

It should be said that Niamh Puirseil does Conor Cruise O'Brien an injustice here. Far from ignoring the information about the Monaghan Civil Rights Office, he took it to what he considered were the appropriate authorities. He discussed the matter both with Taoiseach Jack Lynch and the British Ambassador to Dublin, Sir Andrew Gilchrist. Here is what the latter reported to his masters in London in a Confidential Telegram dated 10th November 1969:

"Civil Rights—Suitors

There appears to be a competition going on in the South at present for liaison with or control over the Civil Rights movement in the North.

2. So far, the Marxist-oriented I R A and its front groups like Solidarity have been making the running, providing free platform opportunities in the South which the Civil Rights [people] have gladly accepted. The same process can be seen currently in America... where Cathal Goulding, Chief of Staff is hard at work

raising funds for "Civil Rights" in partnership with Mr. Frank Fogarty, "Chairman of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association" (see front page report in today's Irish Times).

3. Last week, however, the I R A through its organ "The United Irishman" put out a cry of distress: a felonious attempt to take over the Civil Rights movement was being made by Fianna Fail, the ruling constitutional party.

4. I have been trying to probe for some time reports linking Mr. Haughey, Minister of Finance, with an organisation in Monaghan devoted to trans-Border activities. Following is the best I can do at present:—

(a) The organisation is quite a small one and was set up by Haughey with party funds.

(b) It contains an Intelligence Unit, where Irish Army Intelligence Officers brief and debrief visitors to and from the North.

(c) There is a propaganda unit for liaison with civil rights workers in the North, principally in the field of journalism: funds are readily made available to suitable contacts.

(d) Lists are prepared of civil rights Defence Units in Northern cities and of their requirements "for self-defence" if further disorders should break out.

(e) Plans are ready for the quick support of these units by way of weapons, radio sets and personnel.

(f) Numerous weapons have already been supplied, not on the responsibility of the organisation itself but by people who have been given access to its lists.

5. I regard Points (a) to (d) as credible and reliable, though I cannot say anything about the size or efficiency of the operation. Point (e) is certainly an intention if not a fact, while (f) if [is] unconfirmed, being only my own attempt to reconcile conflicting rumours and reports.

6. The political background is as follows. The Irish Government, having been blackguarded by Civil Rights leaders on IRA platforms, were at first reluctant to make friends with them. They have now got around to doing so and Hillery is reported to have put out feelers to Hume and other moderate leaders. (This is confirmed in a recent report from Mr. Oliver Wright). The object is no doubt to establish a new liaison with the Opposition in Northern Ireland, to replace the former liaison with McAteer and his Nationalists, now old hat. (Liaison with Unionists is not apparently contemplated except in one unlikely context, negotiations for a United Ireland).

7. Haughey's passion for Irish unity being greater than that of Lynch and Hillery, he is even more certain than they are that the Unionist Government cannot hold the position in the North and that further disturbances will break out. Hence

his Monaghan organisation, which he would no doubt describe as an essential Contingency Plan, to secure control of Northern Ireland through the Civil Rights movement in quicker time than Hillery's line of approach.

8. According to Conor Cruise O'Brien, Lynch until a few days ago was quite unaware of the range of Haughey's activities and is much perturbed, particularly as security is beginning to break down so that more about the organisation is likely to come out.

9. An important question is how far Lynch/Hillery and Haughey (and the I R A) are succeeding in their efforts, how far the Civil Rights movement in the North is becoming orientated towards the South and away from loyalty to and participation in a Northern administration, even a reformed one. (The joker in the pack is People's Democracy: I don't think anyone can buy Bernadette).

10. Perhaps I should add that Conor Cruise O'Brien does not believe in the seriousness of Haughey's organisation in the sense of an effective military or subversive plan. In his view the activities in Monaghan are intended to come to public knowledge, as [a] move in internal Irish politics, to bolster the image of Fianna Fail as the patriotic party, still fighting for Irish unity. He may be right, but we should keep our eyes open to this threat on our flank. In my letter of 24 October to Sir Edward Peck about the mild Dail Debate, I referred to two considerable unheard voices, the "Republican" wing of Fianna Fail and the I R A. This telegram is about them" (quoted in *Arms Conspiracy Trial*, p663-).

Gilchrist went on to put Lynch on the spot about the matter. On 19th November he was able to report to London:

"Towards the end of the interview, after Lynch had made a remark about the need for British troops to break up the extremist arsenal in the Shankill road, I reminded him of the need for the South also to keep its nose clean. It had come to my notice that there were alleged to be activities on this side of the frontier which, if reported back to the people in Stormont, whom he had just criticised, would strengthen them in their suspicion of the Republic and furnish them with arguments in support of their old-fashioned attitude. I had no reliable information whatever on what if anything was actually going on: my concern was with the rumours, some of them plausible enough on the surface, and with the political effects which might arise from them.

2. Lynch at first denied all knowledge of the rumours, even when I mentioned the word "Monaghan": but rather gave himself away by asking if the rumours might relate to activities by a certain

member of his Cabinet... I said such a name had been mentioned, and we left it at that, with a promise by Lynch to look into the whole matter" (ibid p6651).

So Lynch heard about 'Monaghan' from two sources: from Conor Cruise O'Brien—who found the Taoiseach "perturbed"—and from the British Ambassador who challenged him about it and who obtained a promise of further investigation.

Thus, not only does Puirseil do Conor Cruise O'Brien an injustice, she totally misconceives Taoiseach Lynch! In her view the information uncovered about 'Monaghan' related directly to the arms crisis a year later. If 'Honest Jack' had been privy to that information, things would have taken a different turn.

Yet we have the word of the Ambassador that Lynch did know and was evasive.

Of course, the Monaghan goings on had no direct relevance to the Arms Crisis of 1970. Yet academia refuses to accept that the Taoiseach could have implicated his Government in such matters—even though there is documentary evidence showing that he was in the picture.

FIANNA FAIL?

Minister for Finance Charles Haughey is mentioned both in Devine's and in Ambassador Gilchrist's reports. Yet at the time he was not generally considered as being particularly 'republican' in orientation. At the end of September 1969, Gilchrist had sent a telegram to London reporting on the "hard liners" in the Fianna Fail Cabinet: Blaney, Boland and George Colley (see *Arms Conspiracy Trial* p660). There was no mention of Haughey. In fact, Gilchrist only became aware of Haughey's interest in Northern affairs at the beginning of October, when Haughey called him to an interview in which he forecast the demise of the Northern administration and offered Ireland's full cooperation with Britain in international affairs in return for Irish unity. If that offer had been accepted, a united Ireland would have functioned as part of the Anglo sphere. The Haughey that emerges from that lengthy report was anti-Partition but not anti-British (see ibid, p661-). There are indications that Haughey saw the Anti-Partitionism built into the structure of the state as a nuisance, an obstacle to reformist modernisation of the state. If Haughey later became anti-British as well, there was sufficient reason for it in the British handling of the North.

It would have been not long after that Haughey/Gilchrist encounter that Conor Cruise O'Brien brought the British Ambassador the gossip assembled by Devine and targetted at Fianna Fail, gossip undoubtedly partly originating with Goulding elements in the IRA. (If there was any conspiracy, it was within elements of the republican leadership which saw the

Northern crisis as a means to an end—a socialist revolution: the old ideal of a united Ireland no longer stood. And even the practical objective of acting as defender of the Northern nationalist community was frowned upon, as sowing divisions amongst the working class.)

Facts to support the allegation of a Fianna Fail plot centering on the Monaghan civil rights office seem thin on the ground. Prominent amongst the 'Monaghan' activists named by Devine are a Nationalist Party MP, Austin Currie (who subsequently moved South and joined Fine Gael), a Nationalist Party councillor (Michael McLaughlin), a Republican Labour MP (Paddy Kennedy), and an Independent MP (Paddy O'Hanlon). Also involved are civil rights activists, such as Denis Haughey. Two members of the Irish Labour Party are named: Nicholas Coffey and Bernard Rushe. (And the fact is that elements of the Irish Labour Party were very active in assisting the minority in the North—at the same time as O'Brien, the Northern spokesman of the party was playing a rather different game.)

Usually in a 'front', the controllers make sure they hold key positions!

Looked at objectively, what emerges is that the crisis in the North was forcing nationalists to forge a new political coherence and defensive ability. Old divisions and ideas were cast aside and a new vigorous self-confidence and determination were being forged. The Government in the South was forced by pressure from Northern community leaders to end the old policy of non-interference and grant such assistance as it was able. I suspect that Fine Gael in power would not have acted much differently.

With facts such as these ignored, it is apparent that professional historians, for whatever reason, are refusing to examine the events of 1969-70 and the evidence of the Arms Trials impartially. But one thing seems clear: *History Ireland* is not going to be the forum in which these things are sorted out. Maybe that is understandable as it depends on the patronage of academics who are themselves under Oxbridge patronage. And maybe the time is ripe for a history magazine published outside the thought control project.

Angela Clifford

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Does It Up

Stack

?

FLOODING On Thursday 19th November 2009 it rained all day and all night in County Cork and in all Counties on the Western sea-coast of Ireland and parts of the Midlands. Thousands of acres were flooded. Emergency services were called out to rescue people from flooded homes. Electricity and water supplies were cut off. Roads and rail connections to Galway were affected. On Friday 20th, shops and homes in Bandon were so destroyed that whole shop fronts were dismantled by JCBs, and dumpers were used to remove the sodden, filthy mass of carpets, display stands, merchandise and freezers full of rotting food. Anyone who is familiar with Bandon would know it has been a huge winner in the Tidy Towns Competition for a number of years and Bandon people were justly proud of their much admired myriad-coloured shop-fronts with hanging baskets of flowers everywhere. They set the standard for everyone else. Already with the financial meltdown, businesses were struggling but many were counting on the run-up to Christmas with early stocks already bought and ready for sale. Now that is all gone, washed away with surging waters arising from many rivers breaking their banks, especially the Rivers Bandon, Lee and the Blackwater. It will be a miracle if these businesses can cope financially with this terrible blow and there is now talk that many will never open their doors again.

The extreme rainfall was, as insurance policies state, "An Act of God", thereby allowing them to walk away from any compensation. But many were not insured, so already there are appeals to Government. Into this "storm of biblical proportions", as the *Daily Mail* called it, who should the Government send in but the Minister for Flooding, Martin Mansergh TD, the State Minister for the Board of Works. On the paper's front page of 21st November 2009 there is a photograph of a sour-looking Martin wading with his wellies through the water in Clonmel, dressed in a beautiful Barbour coat, lined with coloured waterproof cloth and a gold watch hanging from his wrist. Juxtaposed with this perfect English gent is another photograph of a young man, giving a lift on his back to an elderly man in North Main Street, Cork and the latter poor pensioner hasn't even a pair of socks on with his shoes.

These are the very people that are going to pay for the corrupt developers, bankers and other fraudsters whom our Government has pledged to protect with the taxpayers' money in NAMA. But poor Martin didn't last long as our Minister for Flooding because after some awful blunders, where the people started heckling him even in his

own constituency, he was further humiliated when Labour leader Eamon Gilmore, TD, called for a more senior Minister to take charge. Only then did our Taoiseach, Brian Cowen, TD convene a meeting of the Cabinet, but it was a woefully inadequate response—a little too late as our drinking water had been contaminated and the Army was bought in to finally deal with an escalating situation.

But the question must be asked, why in these days of technology are the rivers still flooding at all? Because an awful lot of greedy builders with the planners and politicians on board, built Lego-style buildings on floodplains right, left and centre. The quality of the building work by immigrant *unqualified* labour—with not a peep from our Trade Unions—was staggeringly bad and will be another burden to fall on future generations. A whole industry of so-called competent people—engineers, architects, planning personnel, journalists and builders—were complicit in letting greed be their god and taking us all in a hand-cart to hell.

The media were making so much money with advertisements that they actually had *additional property inserts* in their papers and they had no incentive to call the tune, rather—it was "*play the game*" too. Now of course they are whining like the devil and I had to laugh at last Saturday's *Irish Times* Weekend Review, where the Literary Editor, Ms Caroline Walsh wrote that journalists who have lately written books "*on our economic woes*"—like Fintan O'Toole of her parish—are all at the top of the selling charts. She even had the gall to add that this was because "*there's a hunger out there to understand what's happened—and find a way out of it*". The title alone of O'Toole's book, *Ship Of Fools: How Stupidity and Corruption Sank the Celtic Tiger* shows the kind of ignorant thinking that allows him to peddle the conceit that Ireland *alone* is suffering from the great fall of Western Banking. His *insular thinking* should be a warning to us all. And how many people have bought the book anyway—well even according to the *Irish Times* chart—just a little over a thousand people! And he allows himself to be titled in the book as "*an acclaimed historian, biographer and critic*". He is also "*Ireland's most respected and controversial political commentator, whose name is almost a term of abuse among the politicians who presided over the economic debacle of recent years*". Don't you just love that "*almost*"?

As someone who has constantly spoken and written about the weather/climate, I have already seen the climate-change people hysterically claiming doom and more doom. But as ever, the truth is rather more prosaic. The *location and design* of many of the new buildings was and is due to the greed that made many overlook the faultlines of our countryside. Take, as an example, the recently constructed Bandon Garda Station which

was so badly flooded in our recent rainfall, that the Guards who had their divisional and communication headquarters there, had to take themselves off to Kanturk. In Cork city, the newly built Kingsley Hotel, the new County Hall, the new County Library, the new UCC Sports Complex at the Mardyke, the new Glucksman Gallery, were all built on the flood plains of the River Lee and were surprise, surprise all flooded. The UCC Science Building on the Western Road (built on the old dog-track) have all the electric switch-boards in the *basement* and was completely under water with the result that the University suffered so much damage that it is closed all this week. The former President of UCC, Jerry Wrixon, who oversaw this extravagant building spree, so impressed the Government that his contract was extended in the face of bitter academic opposition and, now retired, he has been made the new Chairman of the Cork Docklands Agency. The reason the site was a dog-track, as every Cork child knew, was because it got flooded every Winter, but this didn't matter much as it was only the old dog-track. So how come the geniuses in the University spent millions of tax-payers' money on this building? And you know what the really awful thing is—that our students, they of our future hopes—are being taught by these incompetent academics that commissioned and supervised the expenditure of so many millions of tax-payers' money on what is rapidly becoming another of Cork's "*white elephants*".

I reiterate the flooding has nothing whatsoever to do with climate change. Bandon has been flooded previously. The Carrigrohane Road where the Cork County Hall is built and the Mardyke Sports Grounds and the former dog-track have *always* been liable to winter flooding. As has the City Waterworks where the new electric pumps were installed *below flood level*. And the Kingsley Hotel is built in the site of the former Outdoor Swimming Baths which did suffer from winter flooding in the past and now, to compound the damage, some genius architect or engineer put in *an underground car-park* where the cars are now floating around, as photographs from the *Evening Echo* showed. No—you just couldn't make it up. These former well-paid professionals obviously didn't bother with ordinary local climate conditions not to mind now moaning about climate change. What they are doing just doesn't *stack up*?

CLIMATE CHANGE On the subject of Climate Change caused supposedly by human activity, what have the climatologists to say about the Thames River being frozen over *before* the Industrial Revolution produced any carbon emissions? Likewise Niagara Falls froze in 1911 and in 1912 and on other occasions in an area where at the time, the levels of carbon emissions were not significant. There is evidence in abundance that

climate has always been changing on Earth long before humankind existed and long before so-called carbon-emitting industries could possibly have influenced the climate. Carbon comes and carbon goes but the total carbon on the planet does not increase—it simply changes into trees, out of which trees when they fall, into rain, out of rain into trees again and so on the process goes. Dishonest scientists, influenced by Governments and *private* grants are obviously trying to make money out of this bogus science called "*climate change*" by trying to frighten the taxpayers. Is it not interesting how the climate change conferences continue to be held—Barcelona, Copenhagen etc. at enormous expense and enormous aero fuel consumption, even though it has been agreed that no agreement will be reached on climate change due to the interference of United States of America President Barack Obama? Abraham Lincoln was wrong; you can fool all of the people all the time. We know we are being fooled all the time but the interesting question is how the people eventually respond?

DICTIONARY OF IRISH BIOGRAPHY The DIB in 9 volumes was launched at Dublin Castle on the 18th November 2009 by An Taoiseach, Brian Cowen TD, in the presence of hundreds of contributors, scholars, academics and a few (very few) politicians. President Nicholas Canny of the Royal Irish Academy introduced the Taoiseach and thanked him for the financial backing (by the taxpayers) for the project. The project was organised at University College, Dublin under the Editors, James McGuire and James Quinn. They had a difficult job producing over 9,000 biographies from almost 700 voluntary contributors. Mr. James McGuire, it was said, should be in the Diplomatic Service such was his negotiating skills with contributors and all others involved with this great project.

Strangely a representative of the Cambridge Syndicate which published the Dictionary, announced that Cambridge is the oldest publisher in the world. Publishing since 1559 apparently. It seems hard to believe that the University of Paris has not been publishing long before 1559 or that the University of Karuein, Morocco, founded in 859, has not been publishing the Koran and Moslem texts for a much longer time. And why Cambridge for the DIB? I asked the question of an RIA member and was told "*because we didn't have the expertise in Ireland*". This is rubbish, of course, seeing that James McGuire and James Quinn *are* in Ireland and did all the work at UCD on computer. In 1775, Johnson's *Dictionary* in two huge volumes was published in Dublin by Thomas Ewing in Capel Street and all done by hand—every single letter. If it could be done then, it could be done today for our own national self respect. It just doesn't *stack up*.

Michael Stack. ©

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Labour Comment is edited by **Pat Maloney**; unless otherwise stated, the articles are by him.

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PROPERTY continued

* Based on the fact that Irish homes have an average of 2.75 occupants, the zoning provides for enough extra housing to accommodate more than three million people.

The figures call into question the principle of the State's bad bank offering long-term values of 10 years on these landbanks, especially as the property market has stalled and few people are buying homes.

But some Councils are still zoning land for residential purposes and making drafts of their development plans obsolete weeks after they are finalised.

A senior planner in the north of the country said: "*We had a plan two weeks ago but the council keep adding more... against our wishes*".

While not all the land is serviced, in many cases the taxpayer has also invested hundreds of millions of Euro providing roads, sewage treatment plants, power lines and drinking water. These are investments which are unlikely to be used for years.

New planning guidelines due out next month suggest that, in a low-growth scenario, the country's population will rise by 953,200 people to 5,375,200 by 2022. But there is enough land zoned for housing to accommodate three times this population surge.

Under new laws, Environment Minister John Gormley will oversee a radical change in the country's planning system.

Councils will be allowed to rezone land from residential back to agricultural use if there is an over-supply. But they will not be allowed zone land which does not meet national planning guidelines.

OVER-SUPPLY

But oversupply already exists on a massive scale.

Donegal, with a population of 147,000, has enough zoned land for 92,491 houses or 250,000 people.

Meath, with a population of 162,000, has enough zoned land for 318,205 more people.

Visiting a housing estate in County Donegal last month, the present writer discovered a neat scam—you get planning permission for 20 houses, but you build 24 or 25, of course, there's no Deeds, how can there be, there's no planning permission for the extra four houses! Beat that for ingenuity!

Last year an acre of agricultural land in Meath cost €20,000 while development land would have cost €200,000.

One local auctioneer said: "*Agriculture is about €8,000 to €10,000 an acre now, but there really is no market for develop-*

ment land".

A Department of Finance spokesman said NAMA "*will only take on loans it sees it can realise over 10 years... If there's that amount of land, it doesn't mean NAMA will take it on. There is a discretionary part to this*", he added.

PROPERTY WRITER VIEW!

Last September, Con Power, the Property Reporter for the *Irish Independent*, wrote the following : it provokes a few thoughts:

"One of the big ironies of the Great 1930s Recession was that despite the ensuing mayhem (soup kitchens, suicides, two World Wars etc) it shaped the society we inhabit today in one enduring aspect. President Roosevelt's New Deal pioneered the first ever property-owning democracy.

"While the notion of an aristocratic land-owning elite was essentially British, the concept of a property-owning democracy is distinctively American. Roosevelt kick-started nationwide mortgage lenders "Fannie Mae" and "Freddie Mac", paving the way for economic recovery.

"While America's coloured population was, until recently, largely excluded from the party, this notion has proven mightily influential. Most of Europe (us included), and the rest of the world, adopted it lock, stock and barrel. The rest is history.

"At one level, the New Deal was an attempt by government to step in where the market had failed", Niall Ferguson writes in his excellent 'The Ascent of Money'.

"Some New Dealers favoured the increased provision of public housing, the model that was adopted in most European countries. Indeed, the Public Works Administration spent nearly 15% of its budget on low-cost homes and slum clearance.

"But of far more importance was the Roosevelt administration's lifeline to the rapidly sinking market. A new Home Owners' Loan Corporation stepped in to refinance mortgages on longer terms, up to 15 years.

"The idea was that putting money in mortgages would be even safer than houses, because if borrowers defaulted, the government would simply compensate the savers."

"Now, whether or not you view NAMA as a four-letter word, one thing is for sure: the new body currently thrashing about in the throes of its birth pangs is 100% an establishment creature. Conceived by the two Brians and delivered by the European Central Bank, the proposed new agency is predicated on the principle of pulling our zombie banks back from the brink and precipitating a return to business as usual. No matter that Anglo Irish Bank has never been truly "systemic" to the wider economy, taxpayers have to grin and bear the cost of bailing it out. More generally, the pattern of banks privatising profits and

socialising loss sits very uneasily on the rest of our shoulders.

"One of the great myths about the NAMA debate so far has been the trite, "It's the only game in town", trotted out by its (generally well-heeled and articulate) advocates.

"Nationalisation is, of course, fundamentally alien to the property-owning democracy we have become. But Fine Gael's failure to comprehensively argue the case for its "good bank" has been one of the biggest disappointments to date.

"Indeed, the ultimate irony in recent days has been that the most recent call for a "new deal" on property came not from a woolly-cardiganed socialist, but from a prominent American academic and former adviser to Bill Clinton.

"Addressing an Irish Council for Social Housing conference in Athlone, Nic Retsinas, director, Centre for Housing Studies, Harvard University, argued that Ireland should end its obsession with home ownership and look at alternatives such as renting or leasing. In the past, he said, home ownership had been the ideal in both the US and Ireland, with those who rented their homes being looked down on by some people. But, as it turns out, those who rented could be said to be the smart ones now as property prices crash.

"Mr Retsinas said that too often in the past, home ownership had been seen mainly as an investment opportunity and added: "We should no longer see home ownership as an asset for buying or selling but as a place to live and raise a family in. People should not be obsessed with owning a property. Maybe the issue should not be about home ownership but about something such as making sure people live in decent homes."

"People, both in Ireland and the US, had to "prepare for the new reality" of the property market and look at different ways of providing a home.

"It was also important, said Mr Retsinas—who is also a director of major US mortgage corporation Freddie Mac that homes be seen as part of a community or neighbourhood and not just as stand alone properties or assets.

"Such words strike a chord with one who has always viewed housing as, first and foremost, a factor of accommodation—not a hole-in-the-wall to draw down more borrowings.

"Maybe then, instead of trying to put a floor under land values, our politicians should consider that cheaper homes are good news for thousands of voters."

Con Power undoubtedly believes the property bubble has burst and there will be no return to the halcyon days. Does the Government believe this? It is doubtful, their entire energy appears to be devoted towards a return to the good old days of astronomical house prices, otherwise NAMA is a beaten docket.

The Irish people may yet grasp the meaning of Machiavelli words:

"*He learnt to do without, before he learnt to enjoy.*"

PROPERTY continued

On top of that, we spent €15 million in 2002 in a programme to convert documents held by the Land Registry and the Registry of Deeds in fully electronic format.

"Good governance has eluded Cowen since he took over from Bertie Ahern, who eluded it all the time he was in office. The difference was that Ahern was no reformist. Cowen says he is.

Yet, in nearly 18 months, he has failed to introduce any legislative measure of serious reform in any area including ethics and political expenses.

He has done nothing to abandon and dismantle the huge array of costly agencies for carrying out trivial tasks, such as regulating taxis, which a higher executive officer in the civil service could have done with time left over to regulate other things as well.

Instead, in all of these organisations, costing hundreds of millions of Euros, we have hired office space, secretarial staff, appointed paid boards, printed stationery, and furnished handsomely the life for those involved. It is useless paraphernalia waiting to be dismembered. We did not need Colm McCarthy to advise us and we needed no one to tell us how to do it. We did need a measure of courage to carry it through. None is evident in Fianna Fail.

On the biggest initiative of them all, NAMA, Cowen and Lenihan did the opposite—they sought no advice and consulted with no one.

The State possesses two fine organisations equipped for property valuation.

The first is the Valuation Office, the second the Office of Public Works. Together they have more experience, combined with balance and integrity, than the whole private property sector.

Did we give them charge? Did we hell! (Bruce Arnold, *Ir. Indep*, 19.9.2009).

But does all this surprise anybody? In 1984, Taoiseach Garret FitzGerald abolished the Land Commission—14 years later, 50 civil servants continued to work at the Commission.

Come to think of it, a more worthy body could not have been chosen to compile what we so badly need today, a National Housing Registry.

THE OPPOSITION

Labour Finance Spokeswoman Joan Burton said her expectations for the report had been high, but voiced immediate disappointment that the Commission had "sidelined" an in-depth examination of Property Tax relief, some of which would continue to cost hundreds of millions of Euro in tax relief.

She said Labour was not convinced that the Commission had come up with a workable model for a system of Property Tax that was fair and equitable.

She welcomed recommendations on new rules to tighten up tax residency requirements, but suggested they did not go far enough.

The Fianna Fáil-led Government was planning to tax Ireland back to recovery, something no other country had ever done, Fine Gael Finance Spokesman Richard Bruton said yesterday.

In his response to the publication of the Commission report, Mr. Bruton said the last thing taxpayers needed now was a Government "dreaming up even more ways to tax them".

While broadly supporting the recommendation on Carbon Tax, the party was less enthusiastic about the introduction of a Property Tax on the basis that it would be hard to implement fairly.

Sinn Féin's Spokesman on Finance Arthur Morgan dismissed the report almost in its entirety, saying it was deeply flawed and would result in ordinary householders getting squeezed.

The Green Party favour a Water Tax and a Property Tax.

THE FARMERS

There has been furious reaction from farmers to suggestions the new 80% windfall tax will apply to the sale of sites and re-zoned land. This is despite the fact that "The Lords of the Land" have escaped the double whammy of a possible Carbon Tax on livestock and Local Authority Rates on land and buildings in what was a relatively benign assessment by the Commission. But not enough for the farmers.

Tax experts have confirmed that the existing proposals, introduced as part of the NAMA legislation, would leave all lands zoned for development subject to the new high rate of capital gains tax.

ICSA General Secretary, Eddie Punch said the proposal was unjust and doomed to failure, while the IFA warned against its introduction.

"This ill-thought out, knee-jerk policy will ultimately self-destruct, but in the meantime will cause all sorts of injustice and negative economic spin-offs", Mr Punch said.

"I challenge the Government to outline a single example of an 80% tax which has been implemented successfully."

He said the impact of the new tax rate on farm families whose land is the subject of a compulsory purchase order (CPO), or farmers who are forced to sell a site in order to solve a debt crisis, was particularly concerning.

"We are into Dick Turpin country if the Government really believes that it can

impose a CPO and then take back 80% of the payment over and above agricultural value", Mr Punch claimed.

"Where a farmer has land taken under a CPO, he is already severely damaged by the difficulty in replacing that ground. This will be challenged in the courts."

The ICSA General Secretary also said the association was particularly worried about the effect an 80% capital gains tax would have on families in financial difficulty.

"We have been inundated with representations from farmers who are deeply worried about their financial position. Many will have no way out other than to sell a site or some other type of development land. The 80% tax will rule this out and it will cause some of them to go to the wall," Mr Punch predicted.

Meanwhile, Jer Bergin of the IFA has described the proposed measure as an "unacceptable kite-flying exercise" by the Government".

He said farmers would refuse to cooperate with road-building projects if the Government attempted to introduce the windfall tax. "It simply will not happen", Mr. Bergin insisted.

This is one gang that have no intention of sharing any national pain!

THE MADNESS GOES ON AND ON!

There is enough land zoned in Ireland to build homes for over three million extra people—equal to two-thirds of the current population.

According to the *Irish Independent* (10.10.2009) investigation today reveals there is enough zoned land to build over a million homes—or 22 years' supply in a normal market.

But Councillors continue to allow would-be developers to turn fields into landbanks, even in a stalled housing market.

One-third of the toxic property loans going into NAMA are linked to land, meaning that the taxpayer could be stuck with €20 billion of loans linked to fields that may never be developed.

The huge oversupply also casts doubt on the ability of the 'bad bank' to turn a profit or break even.

Based on an annual need of 50,000 homes a year in a normal market, there is enough land to meet demand for housing until at least 2031.

A staggering 38,000 hectares (One Hectare=2.4 acres) of land could now lie undeveloped for decades to come—presenting a major headache for the taxpayer.

* There are currently 1.46 million homes in the country, but enough zoned land for 1.1 million more houses and apartments to be built.

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PROPERTY continued

which they say will raise "close to €1 billion per year".

EXEMPTION

While calling for a Property Tax, the economists admit that any new tax would be unfair on people who have recently bought a home, paid tens of thousands of Euros in Stamp Duty, and now face an additional Property Tax. They want a temporary exemption from any Property Tax put in place for this group of people.

NATIONAL HOUSING REGISTER?

"A property database, which would facilitate homeowners in valuing their properties, should be established 'as a priority issue', the Commission advised."

The Commission on Taxation has suggested that the Property Tax will be linked to the value of residential property, based on a band of values predetermined by Government. For many years, commentators have bemoaned the fact that the Government has very poor statistical information on the housing sector. Implementing a national residential Property Tax in the absence of a national housing register or decent national house price statistics is practically impossible and it is clear that the Government doesn't have the resources (or the time) to compile this in the short to medium term.

So, the responsibility will fall on the house-owners themselves to produce their own annual valuations. This is a difficult exercise in a market with so little transactional evidence and the natural outcome will undoubtedly be that most of the electorate will underestimate the value of their property in order to reduce their liability.

How will the Government ensure that homeowners select the appropriate bands for the value of their property and what will the penalties be for those who underpay or indeed avoid payment?

While the Government might hope that getting people to value their own properties will reduce the bureaucracy (and cost) involved in implementing this tax, the reality is that a huge effort will still be required to explain, administer and manage the process nationally.

Many other European countries permit the publication of property sale prices. Not so Ireland!

Under existing data protection legislation, the publication of residential prices for individual sales here is possible only with the consent of both parties (except for sales at auction). This is rarely forthcoming.

The country's biggest housing charity, Respond, last August accused banks of keeping property prices "artificially high" by refusing to fund mortgages for low-cost homes.

Ironically, however, our Government agencies are already privy to comprehensive details of all property transactions in the State, for tax, registrations and other reasons.

It has thus been argued time and again that such information should be declassified and a Government agency directed to collate/publish a national price register.

For a market that is undergoing a likely 50% price adjustment, the non-disclosure of relevant price information to market participants risks creating a false market; one subject to rumour, misinformation and manipulation.

In the revised Programme for Government, both Coalition parties have agreed to amend the Data Protection Act to allow publication of sale prices and to set up a register of the details of residential and property sales. In Britain, all house transactions are registered and sale details are made available to the public. As yet, it is not clear how accessible the proposed Irish Register will be or how often it will be updated. In a depressed property market, the Government needs to do more to restore public confidence in how it operates. It has delayed far too long in ensuring buyers and sellers can make informed investment decisions based on accurate and up-to-date house price data.

Such a move would allow the general public to keep tabs on house-price transactions street by street. The two Brians, meantime, go right on vacillating around the Property Tax "final solution".

Should this nuclear option be chosen, it seems that the new tax would initially be a self-assessed tax, with homeowners asked to file a tax return indicating the approximate worth of their property.

TAX RELIEF ON HOUSING TO GO?

Most tax reliefs on mortgages, housing and property should be either abolished or modified, according to the Commission on Taxation.

However, it recommends the continuation of capital gains tax exemption on the sale of principal private residences which costs the Exchequer around €2.4 billion each year.

In its review of tax expenditure on housing, the Commission has recommended that mortgage interest relief should be abolished for all but first-time buyers. The Government already announced in its supplementary budget earlier this year that mortgage interest relief will be discontinued for any mortgage over seven years from 1st May 2009. Around 750,000

taxpayers obtained mortgage interest relief in 2008 at a cost of €705 million to the Exchequer.

However, the Commission said it agreed with the views of the National Economic and Social Council that any policy which sought to improve affordability of housing through offering higher levels of relief was unlikely to be successful. Instead, it believed that mortgage interest relief might actually result in higher property prices.

The Commission point out that high earners accounted for almost 50% of the tax foregone under mortgage interest relief in 2005.

Although the Commission argued that abolition of mortgage interest relief could improve the efficiency of the housing market in the long term, it recognised that its continuation could be justified for first-time buyers. It also proposed that the present diminishing rate of relief which ranges from 25%-20% over a seven year period should continue to apply.

The Commission also proposed the abolition of income tax relief for rent and service charges as well as rent-a-room relief. The discontinuation of capital gains tax and Stamp Duty relief for the disposal of a site to a child has also been recommended.

LANDLORDS

Income tax relief on rent for private accommodation is claimed by around 144,500 individuals at a cost of €48 million per annum.

The Commission claims the existence of rent relief, similar to mortgage interest relief, merely increases the cost of private rented accommodation. It suggests that there is a case for rent relief to be abolished on a phased basis.

The rent-a-room relief which exempts individuals who rent a room of their home from income tax on the first €10,000 of rent should also be abolished.

LOGISTICAL PROBLEMS

"The introduction of an annual tax based on the value of houses would involve a major logistical effort that would take a year or more, according to one commission source. A first step would have to be the drawing up of a list of all the houses in the State." (*Irish Times*, 5.2.2009).

This is incredible! We have to draw up a list of all the houses in the state. Let's see then!

- * 750,000 benefit from Mortgage Relief.
- * 144,500 claim Tax Relief on Private Rented Accommodation.
- * Up to November 12, 2009, €44 million was received by the exchequer for the Second-Home Levy from the owners of 220,000 houses.

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PROPERTY continued

People with valuable properties but limited income would not be required to pay, and those living on low-income margins would also be exempt.

Chairman, Frank Daly said the tax would reduce distortions caused by the current tax system's over-reliance on Stamp Duty, which yielded a massive €1 billion in 2007 at the peak of the property boom, but is likely to deliver just about €100 million this year, after €445 million in 2008.

"It is appropriate to move away from an undue reliance on stamp duty," he said.

If the Property Tax is introduced, Mr. Daly said "*stamp duty on principal private residences should be zero-rated*".

Windfalls from increases in land values should be subjected to an additional capital gain, while the Commission also recommends that a "recurrent property tax" be introduced on land zoned for development but not used for that purpose.

Overall, the tax will be based on the "*open market value*", with homes bracketed within valuation bands.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

Properties will also be subject to self-assessment.

Surely there can be no better way to achieve an across-the-board decline in house prices at one fell swoop than to ask householders to value their own homes for tax purposes?

The Commission on Taxation's long-term strategy, however, is that self-assessment would ultimately be replaced in time with a comprehensive valuation, duly put on every house in the State by a much expanded State Valuations Offices and Stamp Duty will be phased out.

"When push comes to shove, of course, there is every chance that the two Bs [Brian Cowen and Brian Lenihan] will bottle out on this one.

" And, if the Property Tax zombie is cravenly shunned again for reasons of sheer political expediency, Stamp Duty reform and an overhaul of our arcane house price gathering system will quietly fall by the wayside" (Con Power, *Irish Independent*, 28.8.2009).

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVENUE

As the tax applies to rented properties, second homes and holiday homes, it should replace the €200 levy introduced this year, the Commission says. Vacant residential properties would also fall within the net.

It believes that revenue raised from the new tax should be earmarked for Local Government financing. By 2014, the

Government should give Local Authorities the flexibility to set the annual Property Tax rate themselves, Mr. Daly said.

One more reason why Lenihan won't be in any hurry to forfeit his limited Stamp Duty revenue.

The tax would be self-assessed, rather than being directly assessed by the Revenue Commissioners. Therefore it would be vital that appropriate monitoring and auditing be carried out.

The report advised that homeowners should have to file a Property Tax return every three to five years. The return would then be used to calculate the tax for the following three to five years.

Mr. Daly acknowledged the difficulties in accurately valuing property in the current market. "*It's not as easy... as it was, [but] most people will have an idea of the value of their home*", he said. "*It doesn't have to be absolutely precise*", he added, referring to the wide valuation bands proposed.

Only if the value of the property exceeded €1.5 million would an exact valuation be required.

A property database, which would facilitate homeowners in valuing their properties, should be established "as a priority issue", the Commission advised.

In addition, if a householder gets a professional assessment of the value of their property, they should get a tax credit of up to €75 in the first year to compensate them for the cost incurred.

The Commission also recommended that a waiver be provided to exempt homeowners below a certain low-income threshold from the tax. The threshold for the waiver should take into account criteria such as social welfare rates and the annual minimum wage, it said.

STAMP DUTY

Once the annual Property Tax is in place, the Commission recommends that Stamp Duty for purchasers of principal private residences (ie a persons main home) be reduced to zero.

However, Stamp Duty would continue to apply to investors buying residential housing. The rate of Stamp Duty applicable in this case should be competitive in relation to the rates and thresholds that apply across the EU, so that it does not deter people from buying residential housing in Ireland, the report warned.

Mr. Daly argued that the proposed Property Tax differs significantly from the residential Property Tax (RPT) in place from 1983 to 1996. The income and house valuation thresholds that applied to RPT were "*very high*", he said, with the result that it applied to very few properties. By contrast, the proposed tax should apply to all homeowners, apart from those on very low incomes.

How the Property Tax would be applied!

- * The tax would apply to all residential housing units with the broad exception of local authority and social housing and some limited other exceptions.
- * It will be payable by the owner of the property.
- * Tax calculated by reference to the open market value of the property using valuation bands and be subject to self-assessment.
- * It will apply at a rate which is proportionate.
- * With regard to ability to pay with a general waiver provision exempting homeowners under a low income threshold.
- * A person who paid Stamp Duty on a principal private residence should be exempted for seven years from the year in which they paid the duty.
- * Owner to have a wide range of payment options. "*In particular, we would like to see PAYE taxpayers have the option to pay their Property Tax through the PAYE system*", the report said.
- * Revenues should be ear-marked for Local Government financing and before the next local elections—June 2014—Government should give Local Authorities flexibility regarding setting the rates of tax.

ESRI BUDGET SUBMISSION

The Government should introduce a middle-class Property Tax, according to an influential Government-funded think tank.

The €1 billion Property Tax should be targeted at the richest two-thirds of the population, the Economic and Social Research Institute stated on 13th October 2009.

The ESRI's recommendation for a new Property Tax comes less than two months after Finance Minister Brian Lenihan declared there would be "*no new taxes—except a carbon tax*".

But a Department of Finance source last night said there were no plans to introduce a Property Tax in the December Budget. Although householders are facing the prospect of €175-a-year water charges as part of the new coalition deal between the Green Party and Fianna Fail, this may be deferred until next year's budget.

ESRI analysts believe "*a new property tax could be designed to take considerations of fairness and ability to pay into account*".

The economists' claim that a Property Tax could be linked to the ability to pay by providing "*full or partial relief to the one-third of the population with lowest incomes*". This would leave the rest of the country picking up the tab for the tax

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LABOUR

Comment

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**"Property was the thing which gave a man position in life but which then prevented him from keeping it up."
Oscar Wilde**

Anything, but Reform?

"The car tax thing was a nonsense and abolishing rates was totally wrong. All we needed was a waiver scheme... 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... I agree 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 in *Bertie Ahern: Taoiseach & Peacemaker* by Whelan and Masterson-Blackwater Press, 1998-p.24).

The guiding principle which determined the Commission on Taxation was the raising of taxes in some areas so taxes could be reduced in other areas, in an exercise designed to reform the tax system — "*The idea of the report is that it would be revenue neutral*".

The Commission was guided by the view of the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development that lower Corporation Taxes and Income Taxes stimulate the economy. With Corporation Tax already very low, the core emphasis of the report would be on shifting the tax burden from income tax towards other areas, such as property.

However, members of the Commission pointed out that comments from Taoiseach Brian Cowen and Minister for Finance Brian Lenihan indicated that a Property Tax was unlikely.

"But the property tax would bring in €1 billion", a Commission member said. "The idea of the report is that it would be revenue neutral", so a dismissal of the property tax measure would affect other changes suggested in the report, the Commission member said. If the Government rejects the idea of a property tax, "it will be necessary to raise revenue elsewhere".

"Taoiseach Brian Cowen last month said he was not 'wedded' to the idea of a property tax. "Now a property tax of itself—if you look at the total amount that is taken in property tax, any property tax anywhere—compared to the total tax

take, it is not the big element... If we can find a way to better fund local authorities, let's look at it", the Taoiseach said.

"I'm not wedded to the idea of a property tax. But I want to make it clear that I want to come to a decision with my colleagues as to what is the best tax structure to keep as many jobs as we can in the country and provide a sustainable tax base for the future"... (IT, 5.9.2009).

"The ESRI's recommendation for a new property tax comes less than two months after Finance Minister Brian Lenihan declared that there would be "no new taxes—except a carbon tax"...". (Irish Independent, 13.10.2009).

Ireland became one of the few countries in Europe not to have some element of tax on primary homes after former Taoiseach, Jack Lynch in what was surely the single most irresponsible economic action in the history of the state, abolished rates in the 1978.

Economists have argued for decades that a Property Tax should replace erratic Stamp Duty, which is currently generating a fraction of what it once made for the State. Economists say a Property Tax would provide a much more even income

stream for the State and end the discrimination against younger buyers trading up or people who want to move for work reasons.

It is difficult to comprehend how any Socialist or Trade Unionist could oppose the concept of property bearing a greater share of the tax burden—is this how little we have advanced? Spring and Desmond attempted to introduce a Land Tax in the 1980s and got sod-all support from the general body of labour—where do our Social Partners stand on Property Tax?

COMMISSION ON TAXATION

The Commission on Taxation, chaired by Frank Daly (September 2009), has recommended the introduction of an annual Property Tax on Irish homes, to be accompanied by the abolition of Stamp Duty.

So bad is the property craze that it is almost a misnomer to refer to 'homes'—in to-day's jargon, it is probably more correct to call them housing units. It is hard to believe that the owners of 220,000 houses paid the state €45 million in respect of the Second Home Levy up until mid-November, 2009. Houses they own but don't occupy!

The tax would raise more than €1 billion annually, depending on the tax rate imposed to homes valued from a low of €150,000 up to €1.5 million and higher.

The "*Irish Times*" (8.9.2009), estimates that 1,165,500 housing units would come under the €150,000-€300,000 proposed valuation band. It claims about a 1,000 housing units would come under the €1,000,000-€1.5 million band.

A tax of a lower rate of 0.25% would yield €926 million annually, while the 0.3% rate would generate a return of over €1.1 billion per annum, according to the report.

It would apply to all residential homes, with the exception of social housing and other "*limited exceptions where certain waivers*" would be introduced.

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