

INC NEWS



JANUARY 1999

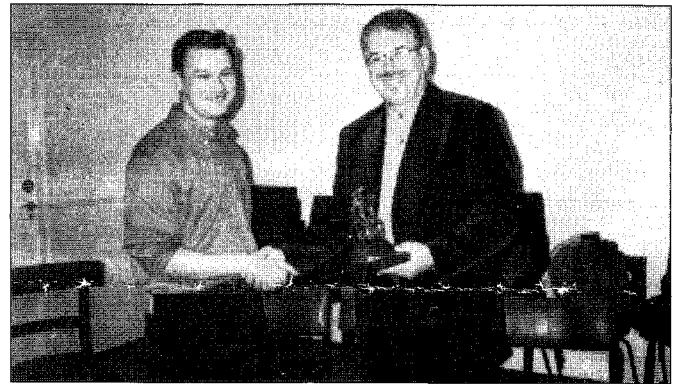
HISTORIC TIMES

1998 will be remembered as a truly historic year for Ireland and for the INC. It witnessed the signing of the Belfast Agreement and subsequent referenda towards which the INC adopted a critical but not hostile approach. It also witnessed the tragedies of the murder of the three Quinn children by loyalist sectarianism in Ballymoney in July and the killing of 29 innocent civilians by republican paramilitary incompetence in Omagh in August. Both atrocities the INC vigorously condemned.

On a brighter note 1998 witnessed INLA, RIRA and LVF cease-fires which the INC unequivocally supports. Obviously during such an eventful year the INC has been extremely active. However, due to media marginalisation and the behind-the-scenes nature of some of our lobbying we have not always received coverage.

In Spring 1998, the INC launched a pre-emptive campaign to influence the Government's thinking on proposed changes to Articles 2 and 3. We held a frank meeting with the Government's special advisor, Martin Mansergh, and launched a media campaign which resulted in unprecedented coverage, in the national and local media, particularly the Sunday Business Post. Although this campaign undoubtedly influenced the Government's drafting of these amendments it failed to do so to a satisfactory degree.

During the referenda campaign on the Belfast Agreement and constitutional changes, the INC launched a media campaign criticising the proposed wording as well as the indecent haste and lack of debate surrounding the amendments. To counteract the unanimously one sided media coverage the INC also produced a Critique of the Belfast Agreement pointing out some of its shortcomings. The INC once again campaigned against the obscenity of the loyalist sectarian marching season by hosting public meetings with Garvaghy road residents and the anti sectarian 'Catalyst' group within the Church of Ireland. We also assisted in the celebration of the non-sectarian 1798 United Irishmen rebellion. The I.N.C made a submission to the Patten commission on policing in the Six Counties in which we advocated changes so sweeping that they would result in the RUC's virtual abolition.



Pictured at an event to mark the retirement of Robert Ballagh from the Chair of the INC after 10 years were: Robert Ballagh (right) accepting a gift from incoming chairperson, Paul McGuill.

ROBERT BALLAGH RETIRES AFTER 10 YRS IN THE CHAIR

1998 was also significant for the INC in another way as it witnessed the retirement of our esteemed Chairperson, Robert Ballagh. Robert's life-long contribution to republicanism, democracy and equality was celebrated by a night in his honour hosted by the INC National Executive where his courage, vision and many sacrifices, his many achievements in challenging revisionism, defending Articles 2 and 3 and upholding human rights were acknowledged. His dedication and ability will be greatly missed and hopefully his absence from the National Executive will be temporary.

The new National Executive, led by incoming chairperson, Paul McGuill, have adopted a programme 'The INC and the New Millennium' which will seek to enforce rather than endorse the Belfast Agreement and will not hesitate to draw the public's attention to failure to implement any aspects beneficial to nationalists. We will also work to transcend the Belfast Agreement by lobbying for additional reforms and changes such as to the R.I.R. and Judiciary. The INC view the Belfast Agreement not as the end, or even the beginning of the end but rather as the end of the beginning. Clearly all nationalists and republicans who wish to see an end to sectarianism, inequality and division still have a long and hard road ahead of them and as long as these evils exist the necessity and role of the INC will remain.



Remembering 1916

The Rising of Easter 1916 marks a key point in the efforts of successive generations of Irish women and men to establish an independent Irish Republic. Despite this, there has been a reluctance in recent times to mark this most historic of events.

The INC proposes to initiate an annual 1916 Memorial Lecture Series, the first of which will be hosted in Dublin this year. Full details of the event will be forwarded to all INC members at the earliest possible opportunity. It is hoped that the lecture series will contribute in some way to redressing the lack of debate and commemoration of the 1916 Rising.

INC ON-LINE

The INC is hoping to establish a Web page to raise awareness about our aims and objectives and to disseminate information worldwide. We urgently need someone to design, upload and maintain the website as we do not have the financial resources to pay for this service. Anyone who might be interested in assisting us can contact Orla O'Neill at (01) 4546467 or email at oponeill@iol.ie.

If you would like to join the INC, fill in the form below and return to: INC PO Box 2814, Dublin 7.

MEMBERSHIP FEE £5 WAGED/£3 UNWAGED

Name:

Address:

Please renew your membership for 1999 now. We urgently need your subscriptions.

THE BELFAST AGREEMENT: A NATIONALIST CRITIQUE

In an attempt to redress the imbalance of uncritical media coverage of the Belfast Agreement, the INC produced a critique from a nationalist perspective which was supplied to all media organisations prior to the May referendum. The following article is a summary of that Critique.

Constitutional issues

The Belfast Agreement and the subsequent referenda claimed to be an exercise of the right of self-determination. The INC vigorously dispute this as the electorate in the six counties voted to endorse the Belfast Agreement whereas the electorate in the south voted to amend articles 2, 3 and 29 of our constitution. This cannot possibly be an exercise in national self-determination as, unlike in 1918, the people were not voting on the same issue. Additionally, there was a disparity in the value of votes north and south. Had a majority in the south voted yes and a majority in the north voted no, the agreement would have been deemed to have been rejected even if it had majority all-Ireland support, which only further highlights how 'concurrent self determination' cannot be confused with 'national self determination'.

The proposed changes to Articles 2 and 3 were also a matter of grave concern to the INC as they failed to define the Irish national territory, bestowed a veto over national unification upon a majority of the Six County electorate and consequently retrospectively legitimised Britain's right to partition Ireland in 1920, setting a dangerous precedent for the future. By abandoning the Irish nation's claim of legal right to govern the entire Island of Ireland, we have, in effect acknowledged Britain's territorial claim to govern the north as long as an artificial majority there so wishes.

Strand One

The parallel consent provision contained in Paragraph 5 (d) 1 will allow a majority of unionist assembly representatives to veto any proposed change supported by a majority of assembly members, this is a recipe for inertia and the status quo, not reform and equality.

Although committee chairmanships may be allocated fairly, as committee membership will be in proportion to party strength, unionists will have a majority on all committees.

Strand Two

The proposed powers and areas of responsibility of the North South ministerial council mentioned in the Belfast Agreement are a pale imitation of similar councils proposed in 1921 and 1973. Both previous councils were brought down by unionist obstructionism. The failure of the agreement to identify what 'alternative arrangements' will be implemented if unionists 'fail to participate normally in the council' inspires little confidence that this council will meet with a happier fate than its predecessors.

Strand Three

The INC believes that the proposed council of the isles is a retrograde step for Irish sovereignty and prestige. For a

continued on page 3

sovereign independent State like Ireland to sit in a council on terms of equality with a subordinate legislature without tax raising powers, like the Welsh assembly or a crown dependency like the Channel Islands, is an insult to the sacrifices of those who struggled for Irish sovereignty and will send out a churlish image of Irish statehood internationally. The British Irish intergovernmental council merely perpetuates the Irish State's right to be ignored contained in the 1985 Anglo Irish Agreement, rather than building upon it by granting the south executive or veto power.

Rights and Equality

The INC vigorously asserts that human rights and equality are exactly that, rights to be demanded rather than rewards to bequeathed by a benevolent Government in return for good behaviour. We also find it perverse that the very Government accused of denying such human rights and equality is that which will appoint the Human Rights and Equality commissions which seek to right the wrongs of the past. The precedent of the appointments to the parades and policing commissions where Irish Government nominees were rejected, does not bode well for the possibility of impartial commissions. As well as this, the fact that the Human Rights commission will 'reflect the community balance,' i.e. have a unionist majority and none of the commissions have any international appointments, fails to inspire the confidence of nationalists.

Decommissioning and Policing Commission

While the INC acknowledges the desirability of multilateral paramilitary decommissioning we stress that this cannot be seen in isolation from the de-militarisation of the State, RUC, R.I.R., and the 150,000 privately held legal firearms. We also believe that the interests of civil liberties will be best served by the abolition of juryless courts north and south, and the repeal of repressive legislation such as the Offences against the State and Prevention of Terrorism Acts. We criticised the appointment of a former British colonial governor as chairman of the policing commission which raises doubts about its impartiality as well as its time scale of two years for long overdue reforms.

Prisoners

The INC criticised attempts by the Irish and British governments to 'cherry pick' for purely electoral reasons which prisoner would be entitled to early release as this could possibly unravel the entire agreement.

Summary

The INC was uncomfortable with the unseemly haste of the negotiations and debate prior to the referenda where constitutional amendments were railroaded through the Oireachtas in 48 hours. The atmosphere was one of a choice between peace or war which made the referenda an abuse of democracy not an exercise of it. The decision to hold the Articles 2, 3 and 29 referendum on the same day as that adopting the Amsterdam treaty only served to confuse the issues at stake. The INC believes that the Belfast Agreement does not represent a 'balanced constitutional settlement' and that the fundamental constitutional concessions by the Irish Government represented the price to be paid by nationalists in exchange for reforms they deserve as of right.

An Taoiseach supports call for Easter Monday Commemoration

An Taoiseach, Mr Bertie Ahern, TD, has supported the call for the restoration of a full State ceremony to commemorate the women and men who died in 1916.

Following the set-up of a new campaign to demand the restoration of the Easter Monday Commemoration, Mr Ahern was approached by one of the organisers at the recent Fianna Fail Ard Fheis to discuss the issue. He was told the basis of the campaign is a citizen's petition currently being circulated nationwide. He agreed that when the target figure of 10,000 signatures is reached, he will accept it in Dail Eireann.

The Campaign needs your support now! Please photocopy the attached petition, get as many signatures as you can and return to Sean Mac Amhlaoibh, Siul Iochtarach Na Manach, Corcaigh.

Chairperson, Pearse Gunn, has received a huge amount of support since the campaign started and was invited to speak on Cork local radio with Maurice Manning on the issue. Commenting on the campaign so far he said, "The response has been tremendous. It's obvious we're pushing an open door - we intend to continue our campaign until our objective is achieved. It seems we can honour everyone's dead except our own."

Mr Gunn went on to say the campaign was also concentrating on having local Councils pass resolutions in support of the issue. A resolution was passed unanimously in Youghal, and was also successful in Clonakilty. Other Councils are now being lobbied.

Please lobby your local Council to have this issue raised and supported.

There has been much speculation as to the reason why Easter Monday no longer has a full State Ceremony. It has been intimated that Jack Lynch was the first to suggest the date and nature of the commemoration be changed to 16th July, to honour the dead of all wars because he didn't want to have to stay in Dublin during the Easter holidays!

THE RUC: A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH

The Irish National Congress believes that the RUC is not now, never has been and never will be a police force which is acceptable to the overwhelming majority of northern nationalists and a substantial proportion of northern loyalists. In our submission to the Patten Commission in 1998, we called for measures which would result in the force's virtual abolition. The reasons for the need for such changes are obvious and well documented.

Today while the RUC may be 93% Protestant, it is effectively 100% unionist. In December 1996 an opinion poll found that 82% of Catholics and 32% of Protestants wanted the RUC reformed, replaced or disbanded. 63% of Catholic RUC members claim to have been harassed by Protestant colleagues. Many RUC officers are members of secret societies like the Freemasons or overtly sectarian ones like the Orange Order, Royal Black Perceptory and Apprentice Boys.

Throughout its history the RUC has been constantly dogged by allegations of collusion with loyalist paramilitaries. Many founding members of the RUC in 1922 were former members of Carson's U.V.F. In 1922 RUC District Inspector John William Nixon orchestrated numerous loyalist killings in Belfast, particularly those of the five members of the McMahan family on 24 March.

In the 1970's, Albert Baker, a convicted UDA murderer, claimed RUC special branch men supplied the U.D.A. with weapons and information to assist the murder of nationalists. On 19 April 1977, a Catholic father of eight, William Stratheame, was shot dead by the infamous U.V.F. murderer Robin 'The Jackal' Jackson in the Antrim village of Ahoghill. On this raid he was accompanied by RUC Constable William McCaughey and Sergeant John Weir later convicted of this killing.

On 5 June 1978, one man was wounded when Constable McCaughey and three RUC officers (Lawrence Mc Clure, Ian Mitchell and David Wilson) engaged in a gun and bomb attack on the Rock bar in Keady. On 17 June 1978 McCaughey and RUC Sergeant Gary Armstrong kidnapped and threatened to kill Fr. Hugh Murphy from Ahoghill. Although Weir and McCaughey received life sentences, the other RUC officers walked free with only suspended sentences.

In 1989 the British government was forced to set up the Stevens enquiry into security force collaboration with loyalist paramilitaries after photo-montages of suspected republicans were publicised by loyalists. It is believed this enquiry uncovered allegations of a high ranking secret conspiracy inside the RUC called the 'inner circle' which was dedicated to destroying republicanism and the Anglo Irish Agreement. Claims about this group have re-emerged in a recent book 'The Committee', by Sean McPhilemy, currently banned in Ireland, but available for purchase through the internet.

The RUC has been persistently accused of dubious if not illegal policing methods that constituted violations of human rights. In August 1978 an Amnesty International report found there were grounds to support allegations of systematic abuse during RUC interrogations at Castlereagh. In 1977 there were over 2000 complaints against the RUC - 671 of these for

assault. Dr Joe Hendron of the SDLP claimed one third of all prisoners were ill-treated. In protest at this RUC ill-treatment, Donal Murphy and Jack Hassard, members of the police authority, and police doctors, Denis Elliot and Robert Irwin, resigned.

Later, in three separate 'shoot to kill' incidents in Armagh in 1982, five unarmed republicans and a Catholic civilian were shot dead by the RUC firearms team, E4A, trained by the SAS. At their trials it emerged they had been instructed by senior officers to lie under oath and their surveillance operation involved illegal cross-border incursions sanctioned by the British government. Nevertheless the officers were acquitted of murder. The following investigation by John Stalker was obstructed by the RUC and Stalker was controversially replaced by Colin Sampson amid allegations of a Masonic conspiracy. To this day neither the Stalker nor Sampson reports have been made public.

The RUC are not, and never were, intended to be a fair and impartial police force. The very names 'Royal' and 'Ulster' as well as its armed, military and unionist ethos effectively excluded nationalists from membership. The flying of the Union Jack, its oath of loyalty to the Queen, and its overtly British symbolism fail to provide a neutral working environment required by law. Consequently the RUC was perceived by many nationalists as the military wing of the Ulster Unionist Party and treated not as a respected police force but as a hostile colonial militia.

The RUC were involved in the violent suppression of the civil rights movement in 1968-9 which led to the first deaths of the troubles including that of 9yr old Patrick Rooney in Belfast shot by a RUC heavy machine gun while looking out his bedroom window. The RUC killed 55 people between 1969-1998, 35 of which were civilians, including children killed by plastic bullets. During the 1996 Drumcree stand-off, which saw five days of unionist riots and blockades across the North 400 plastic bullets were fired. However in the following two days of nationalist noting the RUC fired 6000 plastic bullets.

Clearly a police force which persistently fails to earn the confidence and trust of such a significant proportion of the public is in need of such fundamental reconstitution that it could only result in that body's virtual abolition. The Irish National Congress believes the RUC should be disarmed, its numbers reduced to 3000, its name, symbols and ethos changed and simultaneous membership of the police service and illegal, secret or sectarian organisations be forbidden. The make up of the new police service should have a 50/50 Nationalist/Unionist community balance. Recruitment and promotion for such a new service should be open to all without criminal convictions regardless of their views on the constitutional future of the North and should ensure a substantial proportion of Gaelic speaking officers. The objective of such reforms should be to right the wrongs of the past and create for the first time an impartial, anti-sectarian, non-militaristic and culturally balanced police service which respects and protects the legitimacy of both political traditions of the people of Ireland, upholds human rights and implements the rule of law without fear or favour.