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## American Irish Newsletter - April 1997

American Ireland Education Foundation - PEC

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# AMERICAN IRISH NEWSLETTER

Political Education Committee of the American Ireland Education Foundation

Volume 22, Number 4

April 1997

**. Urgent Letter-Writing Request for Roisin McAliskey** (see Action Request number two on page six)

**. New York's Pataki Puts Brits In Place**  
(see R&D)

## *Immediate Action Requested*

### **Post Office Stamp Committee To Meet On Great Hunger Commemorative Stamp**

Immediately write another letter to the US Post Office Stamp Committee. PEC has been informed that the US Postal Service Stamp Committee will meet this month and that the Great Hunger commemorative stamp will be on the agenda. We must step up our letter writing and post card campaign to the Postal Service demanding that it issue an appropriate commemorative stamp.

Issuing a stamp would be a most fitting tribute to the victims of the Great Hunger and to the unparalleled accomplishments of those who fled starvation and came to America. We must let the Postal Service know that there is significant national support for a commemorative stamp.

You can also order postcards addressed to the Postal Service calling on them to issue a stamp. To order call the PEC at (800) 777-6807.

**Turn To Action Request #1 On Page Six**

**IF YOU DID NOT SUPPORT PEC'S  
RECENT FUNDRAISER,  
PLEASE DO SO NOW.  
THANK YOU !!!**

We need your generous financial support in response to our recent fundraiser. It's not too late to send your donation. If you don't have the donation coupon, make out a check payable to American Ireland Education Foundation and mail to the PEC. The PEC's address is: 54 South Liberty Drive, Suite 401, Stony Point, NY 10980. If you prefer to charge your donation, call (800) 777-6807 Tuesday thru Friday between 9 and 5. Visa/Mastercard only.

## **Newsbits** by Kathy Regan

RE: The European Community and northern Ireland - "We have little to thank European governments for. In this part of Ireland for year after weary year, over 600,000 citizens of the European Community have been persecuted - relentlessly, ruthlessly and cynically. During all that time not one act, word or gesture of help has come from any government in the mainland European Union ... European people have often helped and we are forever grateful to them but their governments have, most of the time, ignored or injured us. What do you think would happen if 600,000 Jewish people were being persecuted in France, deprived of jobs and political representation, howled at with obscenities by church-led thugs as they went to their synagogues or were being arrested at random day and night? Or in Belgium, or in Italy? Do you think we would be listening to the outraged cries of liberal governments in every other European Union country? Of course we would. Why then the silence from European Union governments about the sustained persecution of over 600,000 European Union citizens here? By a government whom most European people despise?"

(Andersonstown News, 2/15/97)

*cont. on page 4*

## **INSIDE**

From the North . . . . . 3  
The Peace Process. . . . . 4  
John Lahey on the Great  
Hunger. . . . . R&D  
New York's Pataki . . . . . R&D  
American Pressure . . . . . 5  
Robinson Declines to Run . . . 6

## OUR VIEW

*Once again Irish Prime Minister John Bruton has thrown a monkey wrench into the delicate Northern Ireland situation. In a speech last month, he restated his long held belief that unionists in Northern Ireland should have a veto over the outcome of any negotiated settlement in Northern Ireland.*

*This is a recipe for disaster. If the peace process is to be credible and viable, all issues must be on the table and no parties should have a veto that would predetermine the outcome. The position of both governments has long been that the status of Northern Ireland will not change unless a majority in Northern Ireland approves a referendum for change. Mr. Bruton has raised the bar much higher.*

*Is Mr. Bruton now saying that any changes in Northern Ireland would have to be approved by a majority in the unionist community? Is he saying that unionists in Northern Ireland will now have complete power to decide the future of Northern Ireland irrespective of the feelings of nationalists? If proposals were put to the voters in Northern Ireland and obtained an overall majority with massive nationalist support but only minority unionist support, would they then be void?*

*There will never be any progress towards a just and democratic solution if the unionist parties are given a veto over progress. Furthermore, this veto does not take into account the wishes of the Irish people and the British people, both having declared their support for Irish unity.*

*It is a fact of life that the British and Irish governments have agreed that the status of Northern Ireland will not change without approval of the majority of voters. Now unionists alone have the final say. That's not democracy.*

*Not only are the talks doomed to failure because of it, but this is just the latest action by a Prime Minister who has failed miserably in his handling of this peace process.*

## Use the PEC Telephone Hotline

Use the PEC Telephone Hotline. The number for the PEC Hotline is (914) 429-7849. The Hotline is a 24 hour a day, seven-day a week service. Messages change every Sunday.

The Hotline provides you with the names and addresses of people to write to. We even provide you with a sample message. This is one of our most important weapons for political activists.

Please call the Hotline each and every week.

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## Send Mailing Lists to PEC

Please send PEC any mailing lists that you have. You can send us lists of members of Irish and non-Irish social, religious, etc. organizations. If a list is not all Irish simply cross out the non-Irish names. Send the names and addresses of people you know that support our views on the British-Irish conflict to the PEC.

We will send these people a membership brochure.

We need a large influx of new members to keep PEC thriving and financially sound.

You can also give a six-month gift subscription to the American Irish Newsletter for only \$7.

Send us the name(s) and address(es) of the people you want to receive the gift subscription and a check (\$7 per subscription) payable to American Ireland Education Foundation. We will advise the new subscribers that you are the gift giver.

## **From the North: Fair Employment - New Report Exposes British Government**

by The Irish National Congress, Dublin, Ireland February 1997

The British Government's Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights has issued a set of research papers which collectively raises serious questions over the willingness of the British government to make any meaningful effort to eliminate or even significantly reduce discrimination in employment against nationalists in Northern Ireland. (Across Northern Ireland, Catholic men are still 2.2 times more likely to be unemployed than Protestant men and Catholic women are still 1.8 times more likely to be unemployed than Protestant women.) A short review of some of the 25 papers provides compelling evidence of the British government's lack of good faith on this issue.

Christine Bell, lecturer in law at Queens University Belfast, in a review of the cases before the Fair Employment Tribunal (FET) comments, "While discussions around fair employment often seek to address the subtleties of structural discrimination, for the most part the cases (before the FET) concern fairly blatant direct discrimination. As the 'worst' cases are usually settled, the cases before the FET are ones where the employer felt it had a case. In many of the cases, Bell says the employers' arguments contain an implicit rejection of the legitimacy of fair employment legislation.

The papers by Bell and Maureen Maguire raise another interesting issue. The extent to which legislation covers discrimination on grounds of political opinion is fatally compromised by the qualification introduced under unionist pressure in 1976 that the act would not outlaw discrimination against those whose political opinions included support for 'political violence'. The FET has ruled that an employer who 'reasonably believed' that a person supported political violence would not be guilty of

discrimination. Justice Kerr, in the Northern Ireland High Court, has ruled that s.42 certificates preventing Fair Employment Commission (FEC) investigations could be legally issued not just if there was suspicion of 'personal association with terrorists' but by reason of a 'perceived vulnerability to pressure from terrorist organizations'. How wide could such a justification for discriminating go? Could it for example include all Sinn Fein voters, or relatives of Sinn Fein voters or all of those living in strongly republican areas?

Maura Sheehan and Mike Tomlinson carried out a survey of the long term unemployed in West Belfast (both Falls and Shankill) which confirms the importance of the overall unemployment differentials as an indicator of labor market inequalities. Sheehan and Tomlinson also find in their survey that, for respondents who had ever worked, 42% of Catholic men and 18% of Catholic women (18% and 14% for Protestant respondents) had been intimidated at work and nearly a third of these Catholics had experienced physical violence. Yet, despite this evidence of intimidation and discrimination, unionist and British commentators talk of a voluntary 'chill factor' when they deny that discrimination is behind the reluctance of many nationalists to even seek work in strongly unionist areas.

Policy Appraisal and Fair Treatment (PAFT) and Targeting Social Need (TSN) programs were launched amid huge publicity by the British government as evidence of their commitment to equality. PAFT guidelines are supposed to ensure that all public policy decisions are 'equality proved' to ensure that there is no discriminatory impact. TSN was designed to target public spending in areas of high disadvantage as a means of reducing the relative disadvantage of

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the nationalist community, without specifically introducing positive discrimination in favor of nationalists. The review of the PAFT guidelines concluded that they have received very little priority in their implementation and are largely a symbolic and publicity measure. Many civil service departments had not even circulated these 'priority' guidelines. Where they were implemented, they show little awareness of the nationalist community. The Northern Ireland Office for example tried to use 'equality' guidelines to try and justify the extension of an RUC liaison scheme to Newry. Nationalist towns, it seems, had not been getting their fair share of RUC 'liaisons.' With equality like this on offer who can blame people for being cynical? The review of TSN showed that, despite its declared aim of reducing the differential between Catholic and Protestant unemployment rates, it has been implemented in a manner which largely neutralized this objective. As civil service departments declared that all public expenditure was meeting some 'social need', the need to focus on the level of inequality between the two communities was side-lined.

While the collapse of the peace process has meant that very little attention has been focused on the review of fair employment laws in Northern Ireland, it is important that this issue is kept on the political agenda. It is one of the clearest examples, along with the RUC decisions in Drumcree and other areas, of the British government's utter unwillingness to tackle unionist intransigence. So much for no selfish or strategic interests!

#### **For further information contact:**

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## Newsbits *cont. from page 1*

Patrick Mayhew of the Northern Ireland Office has said that the British government will not apologize for Bloody Sunday. Who ever thought they would? British governments do not apologize for their atrocities. Why ask them to apologize for what was after all a deliberate act, deliberately ordered as part of a deliberate policy to frighten the Irish into submission? ... There may seem little point in asking for an apology from a government which will do exactly the same thing again if it suits them ... That does not mean an apology should not be demanded. Internationally, the request for and refusal of an apology will show once again that the regime here is founded on force by a government which has always used terror as a normal means of getting what it wants. (*Andersonstown News*, 2/22/97)

Parks in unionist areas of Belfast will have had 4,139,400 pounds spent on them by the end of the fiscal year while parks in nationalist areas will have only 479,850 pounds spent on them. (*Andersonstown News*, 2/1/97)

Paratrooper Lee Clegg - freed from a life jail sentence over an Ulster killing, has been brutally beaten up by two fellow squaddies. The 28 year old Lance Corporal was found slumped on the pavement after being repeatedly smashed in the face with an ashtray. He had extensive bruises and cuts, which needed stitches, and a broken tooth. Lance Corporal Clegg was 'jumped' from behind as he walked alone back to barracks at Catterick, North Yorks, after a night out drinking with pals. He was detained in hospital for 24 hours after the weekend attack, which is being investigated by military police. Lance Corporal Clegg, now a PT instructor, was convicted in 1993 of murdering 18 year old car passenger Karen Reilly at a checkpoint in Belfast. The controversial case sparked a huge campaign in the British establishment in support of Clegg. He was freed on license from Wakefield jail, Yorks, in July 1995 after serving four years in custody. (*Sunday Mirror*, 3/9/97)

## The Peace Process: Dublin's Constitutional Responsibility

Conflict resolution demands placing the issues causing division and consequent violence on the table and working towards a compromise based on the principle of mutual consent.

The Joint Declaration by the Irish and British governments of December 1993 recognized this. The result was the IRA ceasefire of August 1994, followed by the Loyalist ceasefire of October 1994.

Since then, the Irish dimension in the Declaration has been abrogated by the Irish government, thus violating the peace potential of the Declaration, the formal inter-governmental peace document.

Consequently, United Ireland Forum, an organization formed to forward peace through negotiation in 1989, has written to the Irish Attorney General, Mr. Dermot Gleeson, as follows:

*Dear Sir:*

*As the author of a plan for peace in Ireland, inclusive of a ceasefire based on a Declaration by both governments, launched under the auspices of the United Ireland Forum in Belfast's Conway Mill on Thursday, August 24th, 1989, I appeal to you as Attorney General and as such legal guardian of the Constitution on behalf of the Irish people to advise the government to give effect to the constitutional position in relation to Northern Ireland.*

*As you are aware, the Supreme Court has ruled that there is a binding obligation - a legal imperative - on the government to do so. This had been defined earlier by the late Mr. Justice O'Keefe when he stated that it would not be within the competence of the Irish government having regard to the terms of the Constitution not to claim to be entitled as of right to jurisdiction over Northern Ireland.*

*In view of this constitutional position, the Irish government is obliged to at least actively support the "Irish Dimension" outlined by British Prime Minister Major on behalf of the British government, at paragraph 4 of the Joint Declaration issued by both the Irish and British governments in December 1993. The Irish government is also similarly obligated to ensure that any political conditions laid down by Britain do not block and contravene the possibility of the implementation of this "Irish Dimension."*

*At this stage of the peace process, it is a matter of urgency that this constitutional position be positively activated at the peace negotiations if final peace is to be achieved.*

*In this regard, it is beneficial to note that the New Ireland Forum 1983/84 was convinced that a united Ireland in the form of a sovereign, independent Irish state would, to quote paragraph 5.5 of its Report, "offer the best and most durable basis for peace and stability." The report also listed the reasons why.*

*In these circumstances, it seems to be in your constitutional remit to advise the Government on behalf of the Irish people to adopt and put into effect the binding constitutional position as defined in the paragraphs of the Constitution dealing with the nation in any negotiations dealing with the future of Northern Ireland.*

*Yours sincerely,*

**James J. Kelly**

**Chairman, United Ireland Forum**

The *Courage of the Brave*, the plan for peace referred to above, was published in America by the PEC in the early nineties.

# New York's Pataki Puts Brits In Place

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Dear Mr. Ambassador [John Kerr]:

Although I had thought it best not to respond to your October 17, 1996 letter, the continuing controversy over Assembly Bill No. 6510 has prompted me to reconsider.

To begin, I am surprised that you profess to believe that the bill, which I am proud to have signed into law appears to equate [The Great Irish Hunger] with the Holocaust." Having somehow made this equation, you are able to find the bill insulting to the millions who died from Nazi barbarity. The lofty perspective you assume, however, is entirely indefensible. Of course, as Elie Wiesel has written: "You cannot compare the Holocaust to the massacre of the Armenians by the Turks, to the destruction of the American Indians, or to anything else in history." The simple truth, one no fair-minded person could dispute, is that nothing in the bill purports to make such an equation. Rather, the bill simply requires "the horror of The Great Hunger" (ironically, your apt description) to be included (with genocide, slavery and the Holocaust) in the human rights issues to be taught in New York's schools.

Although the Great Irish Hunger cannot, of course, be equated with the Holocaust or, for that matter, with slavery or genocide, it hardly follows that it is not a worthy subject for instruction. To the contrary, sharing Santayana's view that "[t]hose who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." I believe the Great Irish Hunger to be a subject of vital importance because of its profound human rights implications.

With respect, your view of the Great Irish Hunger as a "natural disaster" is insulting to the more than one million Irish men, women and children who suffered and died, for it cannot thus be dismissed as an act of nature -- like some devastating hurricane or earthquake -- for which the British government was blameless. In support of your view, you cite only a quotation from *The Economist*, the crux of which is the contention that currently the revisionists, some of whom apparently paint a rather benign picture of British responsibility, "probably predominate" in Irish universities. Whether they predominate or not, I do not know. I do know, however, that the prevalence of a view does not establish its legitimacy and that currently much nonsense is peddled in academe -- such as the notion that the study of history

can yield no truths. In any event, I consider facts and primary source material to be much more reliable than appears to "[s]o-called 'revisionist' Irish historians."

Asserting that the famine was but a "natural disaster" ignores at least two important issues: how the Irish became utterly dependent on the potato and the adequacy of British relief efforts. With respect to the former issue, the answer, in a nutshell, is the oppressive, colonial land policies of the British government. Although the cruel specifics of the policies cannot be recounted in a letter, for more than one hundred years Britain had been attempting to separate Catholic farmers from the land and to consolidate small farms. Unquestionably, the unyielding pursuit of these policies greatly weakened Irish agriculture. One measure of the damage done is that by the 1840s some 40% of the Irish population relied totally on the potato for sustenance.

Dismayingly, these policies continued to enjoy support even during the famine. As Sir Charles Trevelyan, the chief English official responsible for Irish policy, wrote with astounding insensitivity (to put it charitably) in 1848: *I do not know how farms are to be consolidated if small farmers do not emigrate and, by acting for the purpose of keeping them at home, we should be defaulting on our own object. We must not complain of what we really want to obtain. If small farmers go and their landlords are reduced to sell portions of their estates to persons who will invest capital, we shall at last arrive at something like a satisfactory settlement of the country.* (Emphasis added.)

And after the potato blight struck with such terrible force, there can be no doubt about the gross inadequacy of British relief efforts. Again, the details are too numerous to relate. Clearly, however, Edward Twistleton -- the Poor Law Commissioner for Ireland -- was not so blind as to view the starvation in Ireland as a "natural disaster." After resigning his position, Twistleton testified in 1849 before the House of Lords and stressed: *"the comparatively trifling sum with which it is possible for the country to spare itself the deep disgrace of permitting any of our miserable fellow subjects in [Ireland] to die of starvation. I wish to leave distinctly on the record that, from want of sufficient food, many persons in [Ireland] are at*

*present dying or wasting away; and, at the same time, it is quite possible for the country to prevent the occurrence there of any death from starvation, by the advance of a few hundred pounds...."*

*"I wish to remark that it is wholly unnecessary that there should be a single death from starvation this year ... in Ireland ... [A]ll that is requisite is that the necessary funds should be furnished to those that are entrusted with the administration of relief.* (Emphasis added.)

Indeed, Twistleton resigned because, as Lord Clarendon put it, "[h]e thinks that the destitution [in Ireland] is so horrible, and the indifference of the House of Commons to it is so manifest, that he is an unfit agent of a policy which must be one of exterminations...."

Nor can there be any doubt that the suffering and death in Ireland were in part the result of racist and all too prevalent British beliefs in the inferiority of the Irish. While this notorious fact scarcely needs support, permit me to quote Lord George Hill: *"The Irish people have profited much from the famine. The lesson was severe, but so rooted were they in old prejudice and old ways, that no teacher could have induced them to make the changes which the Visitation of Divine Providence has brought about, both in their habits of life and in their mode of agriculture.* (Emphasis added.)

Such obscenely callous attitudes, to be sure, were not typical; the underlying racism, however, was common. As one knowledgeable (modern, I might add) historian, Professor Thomas J. Archdeacon, has written, "[t]oo many in English government and society ... accepted the idea that the backward Irish were getting what they deserved."

But, although we are not obliged to take offense on behalf of our great-grandparents, we are obliged to learn from history. And while I, too, "want no more 'battles over history,'" I want the truth above all to be taught. If it is, children in New York schools will learn that the Great Irish Hunger was no "natural disaster."

Sincerely,  
Governor George E. Pataki

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# John Lahey on The Great Hunger

Interview by Sandy Carlson, *PEC Representative*

The Grand Marshal of this year's St. Patrick's Day parade in New York City was John Lahey, president of Quinnipiac College in Hamden, Conn. In a recent interview, he explained his views on Ireland's famine and its relevance to America and Ireland today.

**Q. Recently, you testified in Hartford, Conn. in support of a bill that would add Ireland's Great Hunger to the state's public school curriculum. Why do you think Connecticut students should learn about a disaster that took place in Ireland 150 years ago?**

**A.** The Great Hunger in Ireland had an enormous impact on the United States as well as on Ireland, but there's not much information out there and not many people who know about it. We need to teach the facts about the causes and effects of Ireland's famine so we can understand the disaster and prevent similar human and civil rights abuses from taking place.

This year, Irish Americans are talking about The Great Hunger because it's the 150th anniversary of Black '47, the worst year of the potato blight in Ireland. [The potato failure lasted about five years and caused the death or emigration of almost half of Ireland's population of 8 million.] So it's a good time to promote education about the event.

**Q. What are the facts of The Great Hunger?**

**A.** The Great Hunger itself needs to be seen in context. There was a series of events that led to the Irish people's dependence on the potato crop as a sole source of food. Catholics in Ireland were denied the right to own land beginning in the 16th century.

In the 17th century, the British government denied them their civil rights to practice their religion, own property, groom themselves in an Irish way, or even speak their language, in an effort to conquer Ireland. The Irish people were forced into poverty by these policies and, as a result, depended on the potato for food. It was possible to grow potatoes on the rocky soil left to the native Irish for their own use by the colonizers. These conditions set the stage for the disaster

that resulted when the potato crops failed in the mid-19th century.

The British government's response to the crisis was grossly inadequate and showed a callous disregard for human life. After all, the potato failed in Scotland and England at the same time, but the British didn't allow the same suffering there.

**Q. How did the disaster in Ireland affect this country?**

**A.** The immigration of so many Irish people to this country influenced its development for the better. Clearly, they have played an important role in the labor movement—in the rank and file as well as in leadership roles. They've seen their struggle for labor rights as a continuation of their struggle for civil rights in Ireland... Irish Americans have played a major role in transforming the Catholic Church into one of the most powerful and most respected religious organizations in this country.

Certainly, in urban politics, Irish Americans have played a vital role, too. When the history of 20th century urban politics is written, the story will be dominated by Irish mayors and so on.

**Q. How should the British government respond to contemporary interest in Ireland's Great Hunger?**

**A.** Their response should be twofold. First, the British should acknowledge their responsibility. Then they should apologize for the then-British government's failure to ameliorate the conditions that caused the disaster.

Certainly, nobody would hold the current British political leaders responsible for what happened a century and a half ago. Current political leaders in Britain should acknowledge that the laissez-faire policies of the time and the otherwise inadequate response of the government contributed to the suffering in Ireland, rather than rationalize the problem as the result of overpopulation and a natural disaster in Ireland. I think this would go a long way to improve relations between the British and the Irish people.

A British apology for the neglect that caused the suffering during The Great Hunger would also go a long way to heal

the wound of the past that Irish Americans certainly still feel. An apology might also improve the Irish people's view of the peace process in Northern Ireland by improving the condition of trust that is so important to peace negotiations.

**Q. Have the British opposed your efforts to promote Great Hunger education?**

**A.** Famine education legislation passed in New Jersey and New York last year. It's interesting that the British have never challenged the basic facts of The Great Hunger. Instead, they created a side issue by saying that Gov. Pataki should not equate The Great Hunger with the Holocaust. He never did. The British also said I equated The Great Hunger with the Holocaust. Well, I never did.

**Q. The Irish government has said it is wrapping up its commemoration of The Great Hunger this year so it can begin planning for the commemoration of the 1798 Rising. Do you think it's appropriate to end the commemoration of The Great Hunger this year?**

**A.** The Great Hunger is an important issue and I don't think it should be forgotten after the Irish government completes the last event of its Great Hunger commemoration in June.

**Q. Do you intend to continue to promote education on The Great Hunger?**

**A.** I see it as a long-term project, not something that will end with the end of the anniversary year. I'd like to see the facts of The Great Hunger taught in the fifty states, where more than 40 million people claim Irish heritage. I think our best hope is in getting it taught, first, in the northeast, where 24 percent of the population claim Irish heritage.

It's a winning issue for Irish Americans.

For information  
on The Great Hunger contact:

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## American Pressure on British Mounting

The following are excerpts from a speech by Senator Edward Kennedy on March 14 in New York City at the Irish America Awards Presentation. Earlier that day, PEC National President John Finucane was advised by a top Fianna Fail adviser that the position expressed by the Massachusetts Senator is that of President Bill Clinton. The PEC is proud that its continued efforts, and those of its members, to keep the President committed have paid off.

**Editor's note: Irish-American grassroots political activity is what got President Clinton involved in finding a solution to the conflict in Ireland. It was the activists (letter writers, etc...) who kept the pressure on. They must be given the proper credit. Activist organizations must remain active to keep the President involved and to ensure that Senator Kennedy's support remains firm and he does not lose his way again.**

The following text are excerpts from Sen. Kennedy's address:

One of the key steps -- perhaps the key step -- in achieving the IRA ceasefire was the visa given to Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams to visit the United States in January 1994. Granting the visa was a courageous decision by President Clinton, who understood the importance of taking a risk for peace. And the American who first recognized that opportunity also deserves great credit -- Ambassador Jean Kennedy-Smith.

**(Editors note: The PEC does not wish to down-play the work of politicians who were involved in the campaign for a visa for Gerry Adams but it is a well known fact that the PEC National Telephone Chain played a crucial role in securing the Adams visa. This cannot be allowed to be forgotten)**

First, I urge Prime Minister John Major and Labour Party leader Tony Blair to make a clear statement that, if the IRA restores its ceasefire, then Sinn Fein will be admitted to the peace talks on Northern Ireland when the talks resume on the date which is now scheduled, the third of June, with no further preconditions.

I continue to believe that the 17 month IRA ceasefire, which began in August 1994 and ended in February 1996, was genuine. I know that it is now fashionable for some to say that the ceasefire wasn't authentic; that it was a sham. But that revisionism comes with ill grace from those in high places who do not want to admit or accept their responsibility for failing to respond to the ceasefire. I reply to them -- how can anyone say that 17 months of peace was a sham?

When the ceasefire was declared in 1994, it was declared with the clear understanding that, if it held, Sinn Fein would be brought into peace talks. But instead of convening talks within a

reasonable period of time after the ceasefire was announced, the British government and the unionists erected barrier after barrier -- precondition after precondition -- to Sinn Fein participation in any talks.

Decommissioning, as it's called, was the most significant of the preconditions -- the surrender by the IRA of at least some arms and weapons. But decommissioning wasn't part of the ground rules when the ceasefire was being considered and declared. It was injected later as a new condition by those who didn't want Sinn Fein to join any talks.

Decommissioning is also a phony issue, because the IRA and the Loyalist paramilitaries can each disarm today and rearm tomorrow. In fact, there is no situation in the world in which such groups have handed in weapons in advance of a peaceful settlement. It didn't happen in South Africa. It didn't happen in El Salvador. It isn't happening in the Middle East. And it won't happen in Northern Ireland.

## Sullivan Conviction Overturned

On March 14, 1997, the High Court of Appeals in Northern Ireland overturned the Diplock Court conviction of Damien Sullivan.

Sullivan was convicted and sentenced to life in prison in July of 1996 for the murder of a loyalist paramilitary. Sullivan's conviction was based on the only evidence - a video of gunmen wearing hats and masks. Experts who examined the video could not identify Mr. Sullivan and even the judge admitted that it was insufficient evidence. Instead, the judge convicted Sullivan based on reports that he had been seen in the past with individuals who were identified in the video.

Congressman Robert Menendez (D-NJ), who led the fight for Sullivan's release on Capitol Hill, hailed the decision. However he added that, "I fear that, if it were not for the oversight of the United States Congress and Irish-American activists, men like Damien Sullivan would be wrongfully convicted by the British Court without a second thought."

PEC would like to congratulate Jean Forrest and Voice of the Innocent for leading the fight for Sullivan's release.

## Action Requests

*Transmit the messages below, preferably in your own words, or as is. Be courteous. Have friends, business associates, clubs, etc., do the same.*

*Mention that you are a member of the American Ireland Education Foundation-PEC.*

**1. James C. Tolbert, Jr.**  
Manager, Stamp Committee  
U.S. Postal Service  
475 L'Enfant Plaza SW  
Washington, DC 20260

**Message:** I have been advised by the American Ireland Education Foundation of its appeal to you to issue a stamp to commemorate Ireland's Great Hunger. Please direct the stamp committee to issue such a stamp. There is still plenty of time to do so as the 150th anniversary commemoration period is from 1995 through 2000. Thank you.

**2. Dr. Cornel Metternich**  
German Consul General  
460 Park Avenue  
New York, NY 10022  
Ph# 212 308-8700

**Message:** Why has Germany joined forces with the British government in the brutal treatment of Roisin McAliskey? Please stop the brutality.

## Robinson Declines to Run for Reelection

Irish President Mary Robinson announced on March 13, that she would not seek a second seven-year term as President of the Irish Republic.

Mrs. Robinson said that, by the end of her current term, her contribution would be "made" and the people would "give a mandate to a new President with vision to represent them as we move into the new millennium."

President Robinson's future plans had been up in the air for some time. Had she decided to run for reelection, she would have, in all likelihood, been unopposed. Robinson, whose name had been in contention for the position of United Nations Secretary-General, is now the leading candidate to head the UN Human Rights Commission.

Elected in 1990, the first woman President of Ireland quickly transformed the largely ceremonial position from being a useless office, retirement home for elder statesmen and a position of little consequence.

While still working within the constitutional constraints of the office, Robinson's accomplishments included major gains in celebrating the role of the Irish diaspora, commemoration of the Great Hunger, the search for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland as well as the promotion of human rights and justice in the third world.

One of Mrs. Robinson's finest moments came in 1993 when, despite vehement opposition from the British government, elements of the Dublin government and all sections of the Irish media, Robinson met and shook hands with Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams at a school in West Belfast. Robinson's refusal to engage in the campaign of demonization and marginalization of the Sinn Fein President was one of the first signals of positive changes in Dublin's policy towards republicans that set conditions in motion for the present peace process in Northern Ireland. Mrs. Robinson also made extensive efforts to reach out to the unionist community in Northern Ireland on her many visits.

On her announcement, Taoiseach John Bruton said Mrs. Robinson was the best President the country ever had and that she had performed her role "outstandingly well." Tanaiste Dick Spring said the President had made Ireland a more tolerant and pluralistic society, while "transforming the office of the Presidency itself."

Possible successors already being mentioned for Robinson's office include former Taoiseach Albert Reynolds, SDLP Leader John Hume and former Fianna Fail Foreign Minister David Andrews.

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