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## American Irish Newsletter - July 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 7

July 1997

## Blair Apologizes for Great Hunger

As our members are aware, the PEC has been campaigning since July of 1995 to get the British government to acknowledge its responsibility for the more than one million deaths during Ireland's Great Hunger. **As a result of our campaign, British Prime Minister Tony Blair finally did so in a letter to the organizers of the Irish government sponsored "Great Irish Famine" Event.**

In his letter, Mr. Blair declared that, "The Famine of 1845-49 was a definitive event in the history of Ireland and Britain that had left deep scars. Those who governed Ireland at the time failed their people through standing by while a crop failure turned into a massive human tragedy. That one million people should have died in what was then part of the richest and most powerful nation in the world is something that still causes pain as we reflect on it today."

The PEC is gratified that the Labour government has made this honest acknowledgment of Britain's role in causing the starvation deaths during the period. While it was not a formal apology, it does satisfy the criteria set out by the PEC and has been described in the world media as an apology.

When the PEC began its campaign in 1995, it was often derided by many including the Irish government as being beneath the Irish people. Now that it has been given, the widespread applause that it has received is welcome if not entirely genuine from some quarters.

The Prime Minister's statement is a step in the right direction in the search for peace and reconciliation in Ireland. It is also an indicator of the progressive nature of the new Labour government in relation to Ireland. Only a few short months ago, the previous Conservative government in Britain, not only refused to acknowledge any culpability on Britain's part for The Great Hunger, but also made constant attempts to portray the Famine as a mere natural disaster going so far as to compare it to the Bubonic Plague which ravaged medieval Europe. Mr. Blair's statement put an end to that. For that alone he must be praised.

Lastly and most importantly, the PEC would like to thank all of our members and supporters who made this campaign possible. Your letters, petitions and constant pressure placed on the British government made this success a reality. It is a testament to your strength that our goal to get the British government to apologize for the Great Hunger has been achieved.

## Order More Raffle Books

The PEC needs volunteers to sell tickets for our 1997 Raffle. The raffle is a crucial factor in our annual fund-raising efforts. Please order as many extra raffle books as you can.

You can order more raffle books by writing to the American Ireland Education Foundation-PEC, 54 South Liberty Drive, Stony Point, NY 10980. You can also order more books by calling the PEC office at (800) 777-6807 (Tuesday thru Friday).

## Newsbits by Kathy Regan

Representatives of all northern Irish political parties attended a conference on conflict resolution in South Africa. Martin McGuinness was impressed by the tone of the conference were the government and people who were once their bitter enemies exchanged experiences. During one meeting, Nelson Mandela stressed that you don't negotiate with your friends. You negotiate with your enemies. Another lesson of the conference was that it doesn't mean you have given up your political views when you sit down and negotiate with your political opponents. Enemies of five years ago talked about how they got negotiations started and came through them. They made the point that an inclusive process was absolutely crucial to a successful outcome. These are all ideas which have been proposed to solve the conflict in Ireland. Given the fact that the South African government can now meet with former enemies and plan together for the future of the country, it seems that negotiation can work if those participating in it want to. Unfortunately, the likelihood of that happening in Ireland is small. In order to negotiate, you must first meet with you opponents. In this case, unionists attending the conference refused to have anything at all to do with Sinn

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## OUR VIEW

*Irish voters went to the polls on June 6 and sent the governing 'Rainbow Coalition' packing. In the election, the Fianna Fail/Progressive Democrats garnered 81 seats (out of 166) and the last government of Fine Gael, the Labour Party and the Democratic Left gained 75 seats. As we go to press, Fianna Fail is expected to form a government with the support of the PD's and a number of Independents.*

*From the PEC's perspective, this is a most welcome step. Our disapproval of the mishandling of the peace process in Northern Ireland by former Taoiseach John Bruton's government is well known. Since he became Taoiseach in December of 1994, Bruton's record was an utter failure regarding Northern Ireland.*

*A Fianna Fail led government is a welcome prospect for the peace process and the restoration of the pan-nationalist alliance. It was the last Fianna Fail government, led by Albert Reynolds, which made the present peace process a reality and the 18 month IRA cessation of 1994 a possibility. When Fianna Fail was in power, the process flourished. When Fine Gael was in power, it fell apart.*

*The other important aspect of the recent election is the continuing success of Sinn Fein candidates and the election of a Sinn Fein TD in Cavan-Monaghan.*

*Recent Sinn Fein successes in Northern Ireland and now the Republic are a testament to Sinn Fein's peace policy. However, if the IRA does not end its campaign and call a ceasefire, that success will likely be short-lived. It would certainly help Sinn Fein if the IRA called another ceasefire. Sinn Fein will not be allowed to participate fully in the democratic process if IRA violence continues. London, Dublin and Washington have made this clear. Further IRA actions like the killing of two RUC officers in Lurgan, County Armagh are detrimental and will only serve to harden unionist intransigence and marginalize Sinn Fein.*

## RUC Human Rights Violations Documented

Conduct of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) was scrutinized and a report has been issued by the human rights organization **Human Rights Watch**. In the report, *To Serve Without Favor: Policing, Human Rights and Accountability*, Human Rights Watch highlights four areas of policing that raise urgent human rights concern.

The first is the draconian police powers enjoyed by the RUC under Northern Ireland's emergency regime which allowed the RUC to stop, question, search, arrest, detain and interrogate people merely suspected of terrorist activity. Detainees can be held for up to seven days without charge. Intimidation and harassment are common. Such powers often serve to sustain political violence by creating an environment in which individual human rights are routinely violated.

The second area investigated was police conduct during the 1996 marching season. The document provides a

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detailed analysis of human rights abuses committed during the 1996 marching season when policing failures contributed to a serious breakdown in the rule of law. Police actions such as indiscriminate use of plastic bullets and the failure to halt illegal activities exacerbated the conflict instead of solving it.

The third area of concern is the dramatic rise in paramilitary punishment assaults and expulsions. Because the RUC has abdicated its role as an ordinary police force and does not deal with ordinary criminal activity, paramilitary organizations, both nationalist and loyalist, have stepped in and attempted to fill the gap with their own band of justice, often violent. Finally, the issue of collusion between the RUC and loyalist paramilitaries is raised. The RUC engages in collusion by conspiring directly with loyalists to carry out acts of violence or by facilitating the commission of such acts.

**Human Rights Watch Report (5/28/97)**

## From the North: The New British Government

by Robert Heatley, co-founder of the Campaign for Democracy, a predominantly Protestant organization that supports a united Ireland

With the installation of a new British government has come an expectation of change. But what kind of change? Will it be a case of the more things change, the more they stay the same?

Dr. Mo Mowlam, the new English Secretary of State at the Northern Ireland Office, has told the six-county unionists that the "status quo is not an option."

However Mr. Tony Blair, the Prime Minister at Westminster, her boss, has reassured the same unionists that there will not be a reunited Ireland in his lifetime or in the lifetime of the youngest person in the room where this message was being delivered. There is nothing in Mr. Blair's record to make us disbelieve that he means what he says. His devolution plans for Scotland and Wales are motivated by his desire to strengthen the present UK within which England exercises hegemony.

He has demanded that the Irish government, the government of another sovereign state, should alter its Constitution so as to nullify the aspiration of the vast majority of the whole Irish people for the reunification of their own country.

And so, it would seem that with respect to the most crucial issue at the heart of the conflict, the status quo will remain. This impression is further reinforced by his guarantee that any prospective cross-border institution, which might be mooted at the **multi-party** talks (Sinn Fein, despite its electoral mandate continuing to be excluded), will not be countenanced should it prove to be displeasing to the unionists. From the nationalist/republican point of view, therefore, one might well ask: what is the point of this talks process at all?

Mr. Blair has gone back even on the Framework Document which was negotiated by his immediate predecessor. In setting up this marker he is signifying that he is not going to stand far away from the footsteps of Wilson, Heath, Thatcher and Major, all of whom have mishandled the issue and are responsible for the problem which persists with us today.

Given the new Secretary of State's pronouncement that the 'status quo is not

an option,' just what are the British playing at? For once they are **not** being opaque or self-contradictory. They will countenance reforms which are confined to matters **internal** to Northern Ireland provided that they can be effected without dangerously impinging on the sacred cow of British sovereignty in this part of Ireland. They will do this only because such reforms are very much needed in the interests of the British. By this means they hope to placate significant sections of the young nationalist/republican electorate which is gravitating towards Sinn Fein and, as a consequence, facilitate their broader aim of achieving their long sought for 'middle ground.'

The problem is that this is difficult to do without further fueling the fears of the wilder elements of orange-unionism who are nervy and paranoid enough. The British have great experience in handling both sides in Ireland and in playing them off against each other, but this is a particularly difficult and intractable (a word they love to use) case. Two tests will enable an evaluation of Dr. Mowlam's credentials to be made.

1) On the issue of the forthcoming Orange parades: Will she **govern**? An ancient British strategy in Ireland is to avoid governing whenever a progressive decision, which would enhance democracy, has to be made. This they do by throwing the issue back on to the 'two communities' to resolve it themselves. This gives to their action a spurious democratic cover when in fact, it enables them to avoid having to commit themselves as to which side, unionism or nationalism, represents the high moral ground. The implication is that both standpoints are of equal political morality. Offending unionism is avoided. **Governing**, which invariably means repressing, is reserved for the nationalist/republican community.

2) With the resumption of the multi-party talks, Mowlam is hoping to advance her project of constructing the 'middle ground.' If she fails to face up to orange-unionism and prevent another Drumcree, that scheme will be scuttled. She wants this to happen within a matter

of weeks. She sees the possible vehicles for achieving this to be the Ulster Unionist Party, now that we have entered an election free zone, and the SDLP. This is what she means when she threatens that the settlement train will leave the station, if necessary, without Sinn Fein on board.

As well as being adamant that they will parade through Drumcree, Derry, Dunloy and Belaghy, the orange-unionists are not so keen as Dr. Mowlam to move the talks forward. The reason is that, not trusting the British, they feel the Union to be safe only when it is in their own safe keeping. For this purpose their ascendancy within the North has to be reasserted. Forcing the way through Catholic neighborhoods in the symbolic expression of continuing supremacy when it comes to the fate of 'Ulster's constitutional position.' Furthermore, this element of orange-unionism cannot countenance even modest internal reforms since this would be a weakening of their position - the one sure guarantee of the Union. They don't want the talks to progress.

They are adhering to the stalling device of decommissioning (of IRA weapons, that is) and they do not expect, contrary to Dr. Mowlam, negotiations on substantive matters at least before this autumn. The squaring of this circle, the placation of 'soft' nationalists while at the same time fearing to take on implacable unionists is an intellectual conundrum with which Dr. Mowlam and her NIO advisers will have to grapple in the months that lie ahead. If the settlement train ever leaves the platform, Sinn Fein might not be the only passenger whose face does not appear at the window, and what kind of settlement would that be?

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### Newsbits *cont. from page 1*

Fein. They traveled separately and had separate accommodation and conference arrangements. What was the sense of attending a conference on conflict resolution when you would not even travel on the same vehicle as your neighbor? (*RM Distribution 6/6/97*)

The "Siege of Harryville" continues. For months, Catholics have been harassed and abused as they tried to attend Mass and other church services in Harryville. However the situation is only getting worse. After 40 "flute bands" marched through the area as a gesture of defiance and intimidation directed at nationalists, a loyalist mob went on a rampage, broke into a Catholic church and smashed windows and pews. They threw petrol bombs, stones and other objects. They set fire to the church porch, causing structural damage, before they were finally ejected. (*RM Distribution, 6/7/97*)

Irish Republican Army guerillas ambushed two British policemen and shot them execution style yesterday in Northern Ireland, threatening a return to widespread sectarian violence and the collapse of peace talks. Britain's government broke all contacts with the IRA's political wing, Sinn Fein, which had been negotiating with British officials for a seat at the peace table. The officers, both married with young children, were on routine foot patrol in the town of Lurgan, southwest of Belfast. They were killed by point blank shots to the head. (*New York Daily News 6/17/97*)

In spite of the IRA killing of two RUC officers in Lurgan, the Fianna Fail leader, Mr. Bertie Ahern, has left open the possibility of a meeting with the Sinn Fein leadership before he becomes Taoiseach - provided it concerns a new IRA ceasefire. Under considerable pressure not to proceed with a proposed meeting with the Sinn Fein President, Mr. Gerry Adams, Mr. Ahern said yesterday that discussions would be "meaningless" unless they involved the unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire. Senior sources in Fianna Fail said a meeting between Mr. Ahern and Mr. Adams had been rendered "virtually impossible" in the wake of the murders. (*Irish Times 6/17/97*)

## William Barton Rogers (1804-82)

by: Kevin Murphy, *Massachusetts*

Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, MA is considered to be the premier educational institution in the world for science and technological breakthroughs. The United States has led the world in defense, computer technology and space exploration largely through research done at MIT. Most people do not realize that the founder of MIT was William Barton Rogers, the son of Dr. Patrick Rogers, a united Irishman with Wolfe Tone who fled Ireland with a bounty on his life from the British authorities.

Dr. Patrick Rogers fled to Philadelphia to the home of Thomas Moore, who also was an ally of Wolfe Tone in Ireland. Dr. Rogers married Hannah Blythe of Virginia who was also of Irish stock. The Rogers' had three sons, James, Henry and Robert. All the Rogers sons became leaders in medicine and science in America. They also had a keen interest in Ireland. Dr. Patrick Rogers became a close friend of Thomas Jefferson. President Jefferson urged Dr. Rogers to teach at the University of Virginia.

William B. Rogers became a keen scholar in the classics and science. In 1826, William opened a school in Windsor, MD that taught science. Rogers also became friends with Charles Carroll, the only Irish-Catholic signer of the Declaration of Independence. W.B. Rogers went on to become a science professor at Maryland Institute. While climbing the ladder of scientific expertise, WB Rogers kept a devoted interest in the campaign of Daniel O'Connell. In 1849, W.B. Rogers married a Miss Savage and visited Europe. In his writings of 1849, he described Ireland as, "that beautiful but helpless land and may God bless it." Throughout his years, he advocated a free Ireland and campaigned against British injustice.

As early as 1848, W.B. and his brother Henry advocated the creation of a Science College for Boston.

After years of work, on October 5, 1860, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology was created. Massachusetts Governor John Andrew signed the school's act of incorporation in 1861. Soon MIT attracted students from all over the United States, Europe and South America. Renowned Irish-American lecturer and scholar Henry Giles gave some very advanced lectures in the early years of MIT. W.B. Rogers resigned as President of MIT on June, 1 1870. Mr. Rogers died while addressing MIT's Graduation in 1882. The years of Mr. Rogers' life from 1804-82 saw America begin to emerge as a technological leader. Thanks to the inventions of W.B. Rogers' MIT, America has brought the world into an era of technology and advancement. W.B. Rogers was another of the American Irish who gave a huge contribution to our nation.

## Dr. Noel Browne (1915-1997)

Former Irish government Minister Dr. Noel Browne passed away in May at the age of 82. Dr. Browne was a monumental figure in Irish politics from the 1940's to the 1970's.

Browne's main achievement was, when as Minister for Health in the Coalition Government of 1948-51, he oversaw the elimination of the scourge of Tuberculosis which ravaged Ireland in the 30's and 40's. During that same period, Browne authored the controversial Mother and Child health scheme which drew the ire of the Catholic Hierarchy and ultimately forced the government to collapse.

A maverick throughout his entire political career, Browne was known to boast that he had the record for being kicked out of more political parties in Ireland than any other person. He will be missed.

# A Clever and Enigmatic Tony

by Capt. James Kelly, *Dublin, Ireland*

The new British Prime Minister Tony Blair (call me Tony) seems to be a very personable fellow. He smiles a lot and we see him on TV in Ireland every second day pressing the flesh with an apparently ever present fixed grin.

One recalls his first day in Downing Street when, with his equally charming wife by his side, he strolled through an ecstatic, overflow crowd to the door of Number 10, shaking hands left, right and center. It was an impressive display of apparently spontaneous joyous affection for the new PM. That is until it was revealed that the event was in fact, a well orchestrated affair - the enthusiastic laughing well wishers were specially bussed Labour activists, their wives, partners and children.

One gets the impression that this epitomizes Tony. Everything about him is well orchestrated. Nothing is left to chance. Consequently, when he came to Belfast in mid-May to the inevitable fanfare and hope associated with the new regime, it must be assumed that his address on the occasion was calculated and arranged to the ninth degree. If so, it gave little consolation to Irish nationalists, forcing many of them to wonder if he was going to condemn Northern Ireland to at least seventy or so years of at best sporadic political violence.

In speaking to the people of Ireland, he adopted something of a "Wild West" approach. Laying down the law, with the threat of the fastest gun in the West to back it up.

Listen and listen well, all you Republicans! I'm giving you one last chance, lay down your arms, come to the table and parley on my terms or else. And what of the else? Quite simply, the train is leaving shortly - again the Hollywood imagery - and if you fail to make the station on time, you'll be left behind. To show his goodwill, he offered Sinn Fein limited contact with British officials to talk

about talks, but with the crucial question of terms for any IRA ceasefire not on the agenda. It was a minor concession to Republicanism, to which Sinn Fein reacted positively.

He gave little solace, however, to those advocating a united Ireland, a concept which Sinn Fein seeks to put on the table in all-inclusive, open ended talks. Instead, he stated that he saw Northern Ireland remaining part of the United Kingdom for at least seventy or so years and that in no way will his government act as "persuaders for Irish unity." Yet, he saw nothing unusual, ironical or cynical in stating in the same speech that his government "is fully committed to the approach set out in the Downing Street Declaration."

As most readers are aware, the Joint Declaration by both the Irish and British governments to which Mr. Blair referred was the formal document which set the peace ball rolling by bringing about an IRA ceasefire for close to 18 months. This came about because the document contained a definite Irish dimension which was shelved by the British side in the person of former Prime Minister John Major.

The Declaration stated that the British government "have no selfish, strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland. Their primary interest is to see peace and reconciliation established by agreement among all the people who inhabit the island." Mr. Major went on to talk about "agreed structures for the island as a whole including a united Ireland achieved by peaceful means. He also affirmed "as a binding obligation that the British will, for their part, introduce the necessary legislation to give effect to this, or equally to any measure of agreement on future relationships in Ireland which the people in Ireland may so determine without impediment."

In this context it is obvious that Britain is "the external impediment," something which Mr. Blair does not

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seem to recognize, or perhaps he does which would explain why, like his predecessor, Mr. Major, objects to the Irish dimension and continues to refuse to put it on the peace talks agenda.

It is time, indeed past time, that a British Prime Minister played fair with the Irish people. It is incontrovertible that the Joint Declaration brought about the ceasefires that made the peace process possible. It is also incontrovertible that it contained an Irish dimension, allotting to all the people of Ireland "as a whole" and the people of Ireland "alone" the right to decide on future political structures for the island without external impediment.

The Irish dimension must be on the agenda at the peace negotiations if Britain wants to keep faith with the Irish people. Lastly, permanent peace on the island of Ireland demands this. Obviously, the drafters of the Declaration realized this and Mr. Major accepted it. It poses the question, is Mr. Blair is willing to accept the terms delineated by his Conservative predecessor, or like him, is he going to shy away from an essential element of a platform for peace, which the British government itself delineated?

Finally, is Mr. Blair big enough to put the Declaration on the negotiating table in its entirety, Irish dimension and all? Or is he just another British Prime Minister, willing to sacrifice Ireland at the cost of his own and his government's integrity.

He claims that he is committed to the Declaration, yet he drops the Irish dimension while promoting the Unionist dimension. If he does not keep his word on the Joint Declaration, how can he be trusted?

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# PEC Vindicated: Famine "Party" Flops

by Albert R. Doyle, *Vice-President*

Initial reports from Ireland are that the Irish government's commercially sponsored "Great Irish Famine Event" at Millstreet, Co. Cork was seen by most Irish people at home and abroad for what we said it was - an inappropriate "fun" commemoration of a tragic event in Irish history. The Irish and visitors stayed away in droves. Attendance was reported to be about 12,000 mostly locals from Cork, a far cry from the promoters' expected 100,000 free spending tourists.

Far from attracting the expected 100,000 members of the Irish diaspora, especially America, one television crew reported difficulty finding any Americans whatsoever to interview at the event.

Key musical groups, especially the Hothouse Flowers, pulled out for various reasons, including some who specifically mentioned the wrong "party" message of the entire program: a program, remember, openly billed by the sponsors as being intended to "bury the ghost of the famine" and to tap the pocketbooks of the "successful" emigrants!

The PEC had taken the lead in the United States in pointing out the anti-historical and crass, commercial features of the event, which we first called a "party" when we became aware of it a year ago.

We take no pleasure in now saying that our worst fears proved correct. The Irish Times described the main musical event as "an open-air rock bash." Some who attended advised us that the concert had no relation at all to the famine; that no books at all were sold, famine related or otherwise, but that "famine event" teddy bears were for sale.

Credit must be given however to the people of Cobh, who without any assistance from the "event" promoters,

conducted a number of spontaneous, dignified and free famine related activities of their own. We're sorry that the main event wasn't as good and that the 150th anniversary of "The Great Hunger" was not the "serious, dignified and reflective" commemoration which we called for and which that tragedy deserved. And by the way, we, the children of the great famine diaspora of the Irish, make no apology for offering our views on the subject.

We regret to say that our concerns about the nature of the "event" were not widely supported by Irish American organizations, some of whom didn't even know about it (an exception being the Ancient Order of Hibernians' James Gallagher); nor was our campaign supported by the Irish American press. And since the PEC also took the lead and stood virtually alone in calling for a British apology for the mishandling of the famine by the British government of the time, we hope our readers will excuse our feelings of vindication when it turned out that the principal positive feature of the entire "Famine Event" was British Prime Minister Tony Blair's taking the occasion - at which the promoters were at great pains to avoid any suggestion of British culpability for the terrible hardship, death and emigration of millions of Irish people - to issue a generous statement acknowledging British responsibility for the disaster! Bravo, Tony Blair! And shame on those Irish "leaders" who suggested that the idea of a British apology was inappropriate or untimely or demeaning! Only Bertie Ahern had the courage to support the idea of a British apology. Could this augur well for his future rapport with Tony Blair?

We said from the beginning that the British would be wise to admit their responsibility for the famine tragedy and that such a healing gesture would help the current peace process rather than hinder it, as some had suggested.

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John Major did not have Tony Blair's wisdom on this subject. Perhaps Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern can actually cause the moribund Northern Ireland peace process to come up with something worthwhile. We hope so.

Also we hope that the Irish government will abandon its "nationalist damage control" approach in time for the 200th anniversary of the 'United Irishmen and Defenders' revolt of 1798 against British colonialism in Ireland - the first cousin of our own American War of Independence. This will be a unique and timely opportunity to show that Irish patriotism and national integrity is not a religiously divisive subject, the New York Times' "Protestant vs Catholic" rhetoric notwithstanding, particularly in view of the historic fact of the Protestant leadership of the United Irishmen. Can the Irish government redeem themselves from their Great Hunger failure? We think so, if they have the nerve! But please, no rock concert!

An enormous amount of credit must be given to the Irish people. Much has been said by commentators that, with the great economic gains made by people in Ireland in recent times, the Irish people have become selfish and greedy. The commercial aspects of the "Great Irish Famine Event" were even described by some as a natural occurrence, due to the changing nature of Irish society. The profound failure of the Famine Event is a testament that shows the untruth of these myths.

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## Where is Justice?

by Sandy Carlson, *PEC Representative*

As the British government tries to brush its conflict with Ireland under the peace process rug, the struggle continues for the imprisoned Irish men and women who have been denied justice as a direct result of the war.

Although human rights groups around the world have claimed for years that hundreds of Irish people have been wrongly convicted based on unfair prosecutions and court proceedings, the British government was slow to acknowledge this issue.

Not until March 31, 1997 did the British government establish a Criminal Cases Review Commission to examine alleged miscarriages of justice. The setting up of the commission came years after the release of victims of sham justice such as the Guildford Four, the Birmingham Six and the Maguire family.

The British government's establishment of this commission is clear recognition that its justice system is flawed, at best. It begs the questions, why won't the British government examine the police system that is a key element of these miscarriages? If the British government promises Irish people "parity of esteem," then why does it inflict an unequal form of justice on Irish people?

The commission has been charged to "refer cases back to the Court of Appeal if [it considers] that there is a 'real possibility, that a conviction, verdict, finding, or sentence would not be upheld,'" according to the Belfast-based Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ). The legislation does not define a "real possibility," however. The CAJ has suggested that the British government ensure that the new commission does not rely on the police to investigate miscarriages of justice. (This could amount to the police force investigating itself.) It has also suggested that the emergency legislation that severely curtails civil rights in Northern Ireland

be repealed.

"The constant erosion of the rights of those detained in police custody has contributed significantly to miscarriages of justice," CAJ has said. A list follows of some individuals whose convictions are wrongful.

1. Sean Kelly, Michael Timmons and Pat Kane, known as the Casement Three, were convicted of the murder of two British army corporals during a funeral in Andersonstown in 1988. Although they were a quarter of a mile away from the scene of the actual shooting of the soldiers, Lord Justice Carswell convicted them on the basis of common purpose. The men, who are in the seventh year of their jail terms, were recently denied a chance to refer their cases back to the Court of Appeal by the Secretary of State.

2. Billy Gorman, who is now out of prison, is fighting to clear his name of a conviction for killing a police officer in 1974, when he was 14. Gorman claims that he confessed after serious mistreatment in Castlereagh. The Secretary of State is reviewing his case to decide whether to refer it to the Court of Appeal. It is believed that tests will prove that the police tampered with interview notes. However, the DPP has recently indicated that the police officers involved are not to be prosecuted.

3. Danny McNamee was convicted in 1986 of conspiracy to cause explosions in England in the early 1980s. The Crown forensic scientist who gave the evidence that led to McNamee's charge has since been discredited as an expert witness. The Home Secretary is considering whether the case will be sent to the Court of Appeal.

4. Thomas Quigley and Paul Kavanagh were convicted of three murders arising out of two bombings in the early 1980s in London. They were charged on the basis of fingerprints

found in a cache of arms and explosives uncovered almost two years after the bombings. However, the items on which the fingerprints were found were not used in the bombings but were similar. Others who were charged on the basis of the same evidence were charged with conspiracy, not murder.

5. Gerard Magee was arrested in 1988 in connection with an attack on British soldiers in an Antrim housing estate. He claims he knew nothing of the attack. He was interrogated at Castlereagh and denied a lawyer for 58 hours. Magee alleges he was subject to mental and physical abuse -- including abusive language, punching and jabbing, burning with a cigarette, threats and forced physical rigors. Magee said he made a false confession as a result of this abuse. Evidence regarding rewritten reports being rewritten were dismissed. Magee was sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment.

Several loyalists also claim they have suffered under the British judicial system. They include Neil Latimer, a part-time British soldier who admitted killing a Catholic. The three other Ulster Defense Regiment members who were accused have since been released. Loyalists Christopher Sheals, William Bell and Thomas Green also claim they were wrongfully convicted of killing Catholics.

The CAJ has suggested that the British government take steps to prevent further miscarriages of justice. They suggest that the government restore the right to silence; close detention centers at Castlereagh, Gough, and Strand Road; ensure that detainees have immediate access to lawyers; prosecute officers who have secured wrongful confessions; provide human rights training to the police and judiciary; train officers how to avoid such cases in future; incorporate the European Convention of Human Rights into domestic law; and ensure that the defense has access to all police and prosecution documents.



## Action Requests

*Write the letters below (or call), preferably in your own words, or as is. Have friends, business associates, etc., do the same.*

**Mention in your letters that you are a member of the PEC.**

**1. Mr. Tirso del Junco**  
Chairman, Board of Governors  
US Postal Service  
475 L'Enfant Plaza, SW  
Washington, DC 20260

**Message:** Please advise the Citizens Advisory Committee to issue a stamp commemorating Ireland's Great Hunger. That event was a watershed in Irish and American history. Almost 1.5 million people emigrated from Ireland to this country during the period. A stamp would be a fitting gesture to the enormous contributions made by these Americans.

**2. Hon. John Kasich**  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

**Message:** Please take a public position of support for US involvement in the peace process in Northern Ireland. In light of your intentions to seek national office, such a gesture would go a long way in gaining support for you in the American Irish community.

## Roisin McAliskey Gives Birth to Baby Girl

The daughter of Irish civil rights leader Bernadette Devlin McAliskey gave birth to a baby girl Loinnir in a London hospital on May 26.

Roisin McAliskey, who has been imprisoned in England under a German extradition warrant, gave birth to the 5 lb 13oz. baby girl with her mother and her partner, Sean McCotter, by her side.

McAliskey, whose treatment at the hand of British authorities has been the subject of worldwide condemnation, was released on conditional bail from Holloway prison three days prior to the birth.

McAliskey is wanted by German authorities for questioning relating to an IRA bombing of a British base in Osnabruck, Germany last June. She has vehemently proclaimed her innocence, denied any involvement whatsoever in the attack and stated that she was at home in Northern Ireland at the time of the attack.

English reporter, Lynn Soloman, has reported in the *Sunday Business Post* that the case against McAliskey has been deteriorating rapidly. The main evidence against McAliskey was reportedly an eyewitness identification by the landlord of the apartment where the alleged IRA unit stayed. The landlord, Manfred Schmidt, when shown a picture of Roisin recently on German television stated that he had never seen McAliskey before. Supposed handwriting matches with Roisin have also been discounted as unreliable.

Bernadette McAliskey has stated, that not only has her daughter never even been to Germany but also, "there is not any single supportable shred of evidence to indicate that she has the most minimal knowledge of that offense." Soloman also said that German evidence had now been reduced to one small piece of adhesive tape in a garbage bag that they claim has Roisin's fingerprints on it.

After the birth, the High Court allowed McAliskey to remain on bail at a specialist mother and baby health care facility. Her supporters are angry that McAliskey was not given unconditional bail. Concerns by British police that she is a flight risk have been labeled as ridiculous. Hundreds of thousands of pounds have been put up as bail and many of her supporters in Northern Ireland and London have promised to put up their homes as collateral if she is given bail. Roisin has been granted further conditional bail until a hearing on July 8.

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