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American Irish Newsletter - November 1995

American Ireland Education Foundation - PEC

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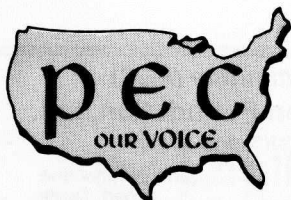
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AMERICAN IRISH NEWSLETTER

Political Education Committee of the American Ireland Education Foundation

Volume 20, Number 11

November 1995

TIME for ALL-PARTY PEACE TALKS

Seven years after the British army's Special Air Service shot dead three unarmed IRA members in Gibraltar, the European Court of Human Rights found the killing unlawful. The ruling has paved the way for up to 350 other families whose relatives were killed by the British state to seek justice. British Deputy Prime Minister Michael Heseltine said the British government would ignore the verdict, which he called "ludicrous." This ruling, and Britain's response to it, reminds us that the British share responsibility for the conflict in Ireland and have been flouting their responsibility to resolve it peacefully, permanently, and democratically.

At the same time the British government was found guilty of murder, it continued to refuse to sit with Sinn Fein at all-party peace talks on the grounds that the IRA had not surrendered any weapons. The SAS remains as armed as ever, yet nationalists are still prepared to talk with the British government. Both republican and loyalist paramilitaries acknowledged their responsibility for many of the atrocities they committed in the name of their politics. Yet, the British government has refused to accept its responsibility for abusing human rights in Ireland. Maybe they believe Irish life is not nearly as important as British life? This anti-Irish chauvinism may be at the heart of the political deadlock preventing all-party talks between England and Ireland right now.

Or, it may be that the British don't know what to do next. Perhaps they're just stalling. After all, the British wasted almost two months last year insisting that the IRA declare its ceasefire "permanent." Then, on October 21, 1994, British Prime Minister John Major said he would make the "working assumption" that the ceasefire was permanent. The hair-splitting bought him nothing but time. It did not bring England and Ireland any closer to all-party talks.

When the loyalist paramilitary UVF publicly boasted in early April this year that their weapons were "more up-to-date" and that they had infiltrated nationalist areas so they would be able to "hit hard" when the ceasefire broke, the British said nothing. Instead, four days later, they announced they would engage in "exploratory" talks with Sinn Fein about the "decommissioning" of IRA weapons. Still no sign of all-party talks--just more time wasted and news that more lives are at risk. Later that month, former Irish Prime Minister Albert Reynolds revealed that part of the Downing Street Declaration was written "word for word" by loyalist paramilitaries. Nevertheless, Irish nationalists continued their call for all-party talks.

When the summer marching season in the north began with predictable tension between the RUC and loyalists against nationalists, Major took advantage of the moment to threaten that even "exploratory" talks with Sinn Fein might not take place. But he said nothing as loyalists engaged in violent confrontations with the RUC.

In August, Reynolds said he would not have signed the Downing Street Declaration if the British had insisted on the decommissioning of weapons as a precondition for all-party talks. "This new precondition they have introduced was not part of the Downing Street Declaration. It was no part of the dialogue and negotiations which took place in relation to the Framework Document. It was not a condition laid down before the ceasefire," he said.

Newsbits by Kathy Regan

After meeting with Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams, Congressman Benjamin Gilman called for "immediate all party talks" on peace in Northern Ireland and suggested that arms decommissioning be addressed by an international commission on a separate track. "Efforts by the British government to dictate preconditions or outcomes prior to talks merely obstruct access to the only means of finding a consensus political solution in Ireland: the peace table," said Gilman. (*AIN-PEC* 9/13/95)

Fine Gael TD Mary Flaherty visited three British prisons and met half the Irish political prisoners held in Britain. She said she thought Britain was using them as pawns to ensure more concessions from the IRA. "Twelve months on, the fact that these men remain in these inhumane conditions cannot have a positive effect on the peace process," she said. (*IRIS* 9/18/95)

"I told them I was waiting for a scan, but they didn't want to know. They just frogmarched me out of the hospital with my arms up my back." Terence Clark, a Belfast republican who is suffering from cancer, after being ejected from the Royal Victoria Hospital just before the visit of the duchess of Kent. (*Andersonstown News* 9/30/95)

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OUR VIEW

Twenty-seven years ago, Irish nationalists in Northern Ireland had neither democracy nor a military element within their community. They had experienced neither for a very long time when the RUC attacked civil rights campaigners on the streets of the north in the 1960s. Militant groups emerged in response to Britain's undemocratic role in Ireland.

Yet, the British would have us believe the IRA is the sole source of trouble in the English-Irish peace process. This is silly, of course. You can't have a peace process without first having a war, and wars require at least two adversaries. In a recent op-ed article in the New York Times, Northern Secretary Patrick Mayhew said, "We need to be confident that a return to violence is neither a threat nor an option" before his government would participate in all-party peace talks. Yet, it was the lack of democracy that caused the conflict, not the presence of arms.

Britain's demand for a few guns is a demand for the IRA to accept psychological defeat. A surrender of weapons would be tantamount to an acceptance of Britain's position that the IRA are the sole cause of the conflict. This would deliver an unjustified moral advantage to the British before all-party talks begin. The British have no right to claim moral advantage over anybody. They have been found guilty of murdering the Gibraltar Three, of wrongfully prolonging the imprisonment of IRA members, of wrongfully convicting the Birmingham Six, the Guildford Four, the Winchester Three, Judith Ward, the Casement Accused, to name a few victims of British "democracy." The British have been found guilty of discriminating against Catholics in the work place, of killing defenseless civil rights campaigners, of colluding with loyalist paramilitaries to kill innocent Catholics. They do not occupy the moral high ground and have no right to delay peace in Ireland by setting preconditions to talks.

URGENT ALERT National Telephone Chain

PEC members--especially those who are part of the National Telephone Chain--should telephone, e-mail, or fax President Bill Clinton and ask him to call for immediate, all-party peace talks and to meet with the leaders of all political parties in a gesture that will set an example for the British government. It is very important to encourage friends and family to do the same.

Contact President Clinton by November 15
telephone: (202) 456-1111
fax: (202) 456-2461
e-mail: president@whitehouse.gov

This is a regular alert. However, we are activating the telephone chain through the newsletter because we have time to notify you before President Clinton visits Ireland.

Members who do not want to telephone President Clinton can turn to Action Request No. 1 on Page 6.

Political Education Committee (PEC) American Ireland Education Foundation, Inc.

A non-profit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization

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GREAT HUNGER AWARENESS CAMPAIGN DIRECTOR: Frank Morris, Jr., 821 Briarwood Ln, Camp Hill, PA 17011-(717) 737-7013

NATIONAL ORGANIZER:Pete Foley, 3177 Villa Ave. #3H, Bronx, NY 10468-(718)933-7196

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Offensive Situations

by Paul Newman, *New York*

Ireland continues to be linked with alcohol when the country is marketed for profit. Last month, we reported on **Murphy's** Irish stout ads promoting Ireland as the alcohol capitol of the world. This negative stereotype of the Irish as alcohol abusers was cited by some residents of Briarcliff Manor, NY, as a reason not to allow the Irish cultural center to set up there.

Now we have a **Club ABC Tours** brochure from PEC member **Claire Curtin**. The brochure describes package tours to countries around the world. The Irish tour is, as we have come to expect, a "pub tour." No other country is described in a similar, negative way. These companies have no right to ask us for money at the same time they demean us.

Please Turn to Action Request No. 2, Page 6

**Send Offensive Situations to: Paul Newman,
9 Deltic Road, New City, NY 10956**

From the North

by Kate Campbell, *West Belfast Community Activist*

To paraphrase--and alter--a line from the Van Morrison song used in the Northern Ireland Office's advertising campaign, "Wouldn't it be great if it weren't like this all the time?" What, after all, is so marvelous about this "normality?" Britain's war against the Irish continues, albeit with different weapons and on different fronts.

The British are not involved in a peace process but a pacification process. Their war continues on the economic front--and it can't be asked to decommission the Treasury and the economy, the strongest items in its arsenal. Funding is war by other means. It's no accident that Catholics are 2 1/2 times as likely to be unemployed as Protestants, that the areas of strongest opposition to the state are those with the highest levels of infant mortality, long-term illness, bad housing, overcrowding, and economic blight.

The Stormont regime pursued a policy of consistent anti-nationalist discrimination, and London turned a blind eye. Since 1972, this strategy has been more subtle, but the objective is still the same: the maintenance of British control of this part of Ireland.

Fragmenting the nationalist community is the aim. "Buying off" a certain number of Catholics in the hope that they will become unionists is the

method. This cynical theory assumes nationalists who become cushioned by wealth will ignore the myriad injustices their community suffers.

People who live in the poorest areas know how ruthlessly this economic warfare is waged. In areas like West Belfast, they see community projects starved of funds through political discrimination. So, when nationalists are promised economic renewal, we are very wary and ask, "Will the NIO control the funding?" For example, the stalling of the announcement, because of pressure from the NIO, of approximately \$500,000 from the European Community makes us wonder whether that money will eventually find its way to us.

People want justice, jobs, and houses--all in short supply over the last 75 years. There will not be a settlement that will produce peace here unless these are recognized as essential rights. Nationalists are pinning their hopes on international pressure to create the first and international investment to secure the other two. Over the last 25 years, people in the most beleaguered nationalist communities have developed skills and networks of voluntary organizations; loyalists in poverty-stricken areas are belatedly learning from their example. The skills are there, the

enthusiasm is there. All that is needed is money. But the British, having failed to stifle these independent organizations by depriving them of funds, are determined to try to control any outside financial support, whether it comes from Europe or the US.

The British fear real jobs that give financial security, confidence, and hope to nationalists. At present, 30 percent of households in West Belfast have an annual income of less than \$6,400. Government funding is directed towards "non-jobs" which are temporary, very badly paid, and demoralizing. Young people, on penalty of losing all state benefits, are compelled to participate in "training schemes" which provide inadequate training for jobs that don't exist. They are being trained for emigration.

There is a grave danger that President Clinton's visit here will be presented as an endorsement of the British administration's appalling economic record here. His visit will probably be preceded by a deluge of leaks of details of all sorts of "positive" economic developments.

The smoke screen must not obscure the facts. Without a resolution of the tensions caused by the northern set-up, no amount of aid will improve the situation here--and the economic injustice will continue until funds are administered independently of all British government agencies.

continued from page 1

Later that month, Reynolds, SDLP leader John Hume, Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams, and British Prime Minister John Major received a peace prize at the Humbert School in Ireland. There, Reynolds suggested that decommissioning become a condition of the final political settlement. The Northern Ireland Office rejected his proposal.

Britain's refusal to engage in the peace process recalls Margaret Thatcher's famous "no, no, no" and "out, out, out"--her response to the 1984 New Ireland Forum, another nationalist initiative undertaken to resolve the conflict in Ireland.

Ironically, the European Court of Human Rights returned to the British another Thatcherism in a judgment against their treatment of the Irish: "murder is murder is murder." On the same day as this ruling, Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams was also repeating himself: "Our primary commitment is to a negotiated peace settlement." Anything but immediate all-party talks would, of course, be "ludicrous."

President Bill Clinton has said he will re-emphasize his commitment to advancing peace in Ireland when he visits later this year. Write to him and ask him to call for all-party talks now.

See Action Request No. 1, Page 6

Raffle Winners

We are happy to announce the winners of our 1995 annual raffle: first prize of 2 round-trip airfares to Ireland or \$1,000 cash: Richard Logan, Cary, North Carolina.

The five \$100 consolation prize winners are: Andrew McKevitt, Long Beach, New York; Dan Smith, Miami, Florida; L. O'Reilly, Staten Is., New York; Martucci Family, Basking Ridge, NJ and Maureen Porter, Madison, Connecticut.

We are especially grateful to all who supported the raffle and all who sold extra raffle tickets.

Kentucky PEC State Director Appointed

The PEC is happy to announce the appointment of **Michael Flannery** as **PEC Kentucky State Director**. Michael can be contacted at 3065 Prestwicke Drive, Edgewood, KY 41017. His telephone number is (606) 341-9028.

Newsbits *cont. from page 1*

PEC National President John Finucane has welcomed the Ulster Unionist Party to the US. "We hope the Ulster Unionist Party's North American Bureau in Washington, DC, will further dialogue and debate in the US on issues of peace and justice in Ireland," he said. The PEC has been meeting with unionists/loyalists since 1989. (*AIN-PEC* 10/5/95)

All-party talks have not begun because of British government intransigence on IRA arms decommissioning. Many precedents exist for not insisting on such capitulation. In 1921, British negotiations with the Irish led to the creation of the Republic of Ireland. Britain made similar arrangements with "terrorists" in Israel, Kenya, and elsewhere. Perhaps more relevant is the recent experience of El Salvador. The generals conducted a scorched-earth campaign for more than a decade against a popular revolutionary army, the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) in a project that cost more than 50,000 lives. Fr. Ignacio Ellacuria insisted that a peace treaty must precede disarming because "an FMLN reasoning without arms would be a reasoning without forcefulness." He and his colleagues paid with their lives for this stance. The worldwide horror produced by their slaughter forced Washington to abandon its alliance with the Salvadoran military. A UN mediator repeated Ellacuria's message to Salvador's President Alfredo Cristiani. The peace treaty was signed and the UN supervised implementation of its major provisions, including the decommissioning of arms. (*National Catholic Reporter* 10/6/95)

An American Great Hunger Memory

by Ida DeLage, *New Jersey*

When people ask me what circumstances led to the immigration of my maternal grandmother from Ireland in the 1870s, I start off with, "Well, it all began with a window--or lack of one."

With a good opener like that, of course I have to "go on with the story." The story is a sad one, as are so many about the Irish who left their country because nothing remained for them there but oppression, hopelessness, and despair.

It took place in Heath Scardaune in County Mayo when my great-grandmother, Bridget Higgins Hannon, was a young girl during the years of the Great Hunger. In later years, Bridget told her daughter, Honor (my grandmother) about the horrors of the "starving times." She told of how she and her little sisters and brothers crept through the grass to catch insects, grubs, and worms, which her mother cooked along with grass and weeds to provide her children with a soup to keep them alive while ducks and chickens, geese and pigs were given over to the lords of the manor.

Bridget could not know that a second, more personal, famine would be waiting for her.

One very warm day in summer, Bridget was trying to quiet her infant son in the little stone hut which served as their home. It was stuffy in the hut, which had only two small windows, one on each side of the door.

Bridget longed for a little cross breeze to refresh the stifling air. "Miles, darlin,'" she said to my great-grandfather. "Do you think you could knock out a little window on the back wall to let in a little fresh air for the baby?"

Miles did so, but the comfort wasn't to last long. Within a few days, the overseer of the manor rode up on horseback and pointed his whip toward the new window, which was just a hole in the wall with no casement or glass or even a bit of linen like the other two

windows. "What is that?" he bel-lowed. "Who told you that you could have another window? How dare you! Put those stones back. And for being so uppity, you have to give everything you raise to the lord of the manor for one whole year!"

Bridget threw herself on her knees, and with her hands clasped she pleaded, "Oh, please, sir. Don't do this. We'll all starve."

"Starve and go to hell," said the overseer. "And if any of the neighbors help you, they'll get the same punishment."

Of course, the neighbors did help and Miles did sneak an egg or two, a pat of butter, and a couple of potatoes. But the two older boys were hired out to help in a horseshoe shop in Claremorris and the two older girls were sent to the nuns to help out in the convent.

Within a couple of years, the boys were able to get enough money saved up for one passage to America. The oldest boy found work in New York and sent over enough money to bring the other brother over. Then they both saved up to send for the two older girls. With four working, they soon brought over Honor, who was to be my grandmother. When Honor left Ireland, Bridget wept and said, "She's only 16 and I'll never see her again." And she was right. None of her children were ever able to return and see their parents again.

In 1971, over a hundred years after the "window punishment," this grandchild of Irish immigrants visited the spot where the little stone hut still stands. It is now a tool shed. I went around to the back wall. Sure enough, it was clear to the eye that a little rectangle of stones had been removed and re-set to disturb the original alignment. As I looked, I placed a hand over the re-set stones and you can be sure that more than one tear for little Bridget Burke Hannon wet my cheeks.

[Ida DeLage writes books for children.]

The GREAT HUNGER and IRELAND'S WAR

by Sandy Carlson

Go down the New Lodge Road in north Belfast, and you'll see two women and a child foraging for potatoes. You'll see the shack they live in just behind them. In the distance, a ship waits to take the unfortunate women's neighbors far away to a better life, if their starving bodies endure the trip.

This is a picture of the destitute life-style of many Irish people during the famine years of the 1840s. A scarcity of potatoes--the staple food for most of the population--caused the starvation and exile of millions of Irish people. The virus that caused the potato blight was inadvertently imported to Ireland from America.

This is a picture painted on a gable wall in a nationalist ghetto in Belfast that has endured more than its share of the conflict over the past 27 years. Local youths painted the mural to coincide with the New Lodge's cultural festival in August.

"The festival is a celebration of our culture and the right to celebrate our culture," according to Michael Rogan, who heads the New Lodge Cultural Society. "This is the first major festival in the New Lodge," he said. "Last year, we had a bonfire, but this year we are celebrating our culture in a more positive way."

Part of the cultural celebration

has involved a study of the historical problems that have led to today's conflict in Northern Ireland. Mr. Rogan and his colleagues see a relationship between the causes of the Great Hunger and the causes of the political conflict in Ireland today.

Mr. Rogan says the Great Hunger--*An Gorta Mor* in Irish--marked the "onslaught by the British government 150 years ago against our people. The poverty that exists in nationalist areas today is not here by chance," he explains. "*An Gorta Mor* was the beginning of an economic war against the Irish people."

The potato failure and the landlords' exporting of other Irish foodstuffs caused an influx of rural dwellers into Belfast. "The Great Hunger marks the first generation of large-scale Catholic male unemployment," Mr. Rogan said.

The mural is part of the New Lodge Cultural Society's efforts to start debates on the impact of the Great Hunger on areas like the nationalist New Lodge. "Britain chose to let us starve," Mr. Rogan says.

Already, "the mural has almost caused a number of motor accidents," according to Mr. Rogan. "People are curious, so they slow down to get a look at the mural." He says the mural has

Reproduce and Distribute

not been "marked" by vandals. "It's a tribute to the people of the area. They understand its significance. Everybody respects it."

The lack of jobs in north Belfast links the Great Hunger destitution depicted in the mural with the New Lodge's current economic underdevelopment, according to Mr. Rogan. "It's no accident that you walk two minutes out of the New Lodge, or any other Catholic part of the city, and there are loads of shops," he said. "But there is no industry in our areas, no economic infrastructure at all."

The painting of the mural in the New Lodge coincides with the beginning of the three-year Great Hunger Arts Project in West Belfast.

Other New Lodge residents say they see the mural as a way to bring dignity to their neighborhood. Sinead Crossen, a teenager in the area, says, "The mural shows what our people came through--it's okay to remember." Donncha O'Hara, who lives in the area says, "It was the Famine then; it's Castlereagh now." Castlereagh is an interrogation center in Belfast recently criticized by the United Nations as the site of human rights abuses of suspects by the police. "The mural," Mr. O'Hara adds, "reminds us of what we survived--that we can survive."

Great Hunger Education Legislation

The New York State legislature is considering amending its education law to include teaching the Great Hunger in public schools. Assemblyman **Joe Crowley** and Senator **Michael Hoblock** are sponsoring the legislation. Recently, New York state law was amended to include pre-Civil War slavery and the Holocaust as mandated subjects.

The bill says: "the regents of the University of the State of New York shall prescribe courses of instruction in the mass starvation in Ireland from 1845-1850 to be maintained and followed in all the schools of the state." New Jersey's education bill already includes teaching

about "the Holocausts and genocides," which includes the Great Hunger. Crowley has received calls from around the US from people interested in having the legislation in their own states.

We again call on **New York State residents** to contact their assemblymen and senators at: Legislative Office Building, Albany, NY 12248. Phone numbers are: Assembly (518)455-4100; Senate (518)455-2800. Adapt this message.

Dear _____,

Please support Bill #A 6510 introduced by Assemblyman Joe Crowley (in the Senate, Bill #S 4880 introduced by Sen. Michael Hoblock), which amends

New York State education law to include education about Ireland's Great Hunger.

Sincerely,

Other members should contact their state legislators to find out whether their state has similar legislation, and, if so, urge that it include the Great Hunger. Send the PEC a self-addressed, stamped envelope for a free copy of the New York and New Jersey state bills.

For more information, contact:

**American Ireland
Education Foundation-PEC
54 South Liberty Drive
Stony Point, NY 10980
(914) 947-2726**

published Nov. 1995 by AIEF-PEC

IRISH POLITICIAN CALLS on BRITAIN to APOLOGIZE for GREAT HUNGER

[Reprinted from the October 6, 1995 Irish Times]

The Fianna Fail leader, Mr. Bertie Ahern, demanded an apology from the British government for the Great Famine.

He said: "I think a frank acknowledgment and expression of regret from the highest level about the shortcomings of the then-British government's response to the Famine would contribute to a better climate of relations between Irish people, or people of Irish stock across the world, and the British, who after all have in so many respects intertwined historical experiences."

Mr. Ahern said he hoped the government, "not the British ambassador or a junior member of the royal family or a churchman," would grasp the opportunity.

He called for a considered statement on the Famine from the British government, at the highest level, as part of addressing what the Downing Street Declaration had described as the most urgent and important issue relating the peace and reconciliation, which was to "overcome the legacy of history and to heal divisions."

Obviously, neither the present British government nor British people now living had any personal responsibility for what happened 150 years ago, said Mr. Ahern. Indeed, the government of Sir Robert Peel, who as chief secretary had some experience of and responsibility for managing previous subsistence crises, managed the early

stages of the Famine reasonably well without loss of life. But not for the first time in Irish history, a British change of government was disastrous.

"I believe in the long history of relations between the two islands, over many centuries, the Irish people were more sinned against than sinning, notwithstanding some of the terrible deeds committed in their name over the last 25 years," he added.

Mr. Ahern, who was speaking during a special debate on the 150th anniversary of the Famine, said that not much was spoken about it in succeeding generations. It was an experience that people wanted to forget. Yet, it had left in many ways an indelible mark.

The population of Ireland was decimated. Apart from one million deaths, it caused a population drop from eight million to five million, at a time when the population of the rest of Europe was increasing. "It was a devastating and crippling blow to economic hopes and national self-confidence," he declared.

It had also led to a hardening of attitudes towards peaceful accommodation. The aftermath of the Famine helped to revive the physical force tradition, which had been quiescent for a half-century since 1798. **There was a symbolic revolt in 1848 against the conditions to which Ireland and the Irish people had been reduced and against what was seen then as the ineffective methods of constitutional nationalism.**

That failure, said Mr. Ahern, led to the formation of the IRB, the Fenian revolt of 1867, and as was now known, the underground tradition survived, until it burst forth again from 1916 to 1921.

Mr. Ahern said the Famine had also left a legacy among the denominations. The exploitation of misery for religious gain through proselytism left much bitterness, which lingered for several generations.

"We are all grateful to Archbishop Eames for his acknowledgment at Tuam recently of the faults committed by what was then the established church," he added.

The Famine had also discredited the landlord system, which the British used as a scapegoat for their own inaction, and it led after some decades of mainly peaceful struggle to a system of farmer proprietorship, which was the basis of the land tenure system today.

But in all the talk and debate since the start of the year about the Famine, there had been little reference so far to the major cultural disaster it represented for the Irish nation. The vast majority of those who died, or who emigrated, were Irish speakers. In excess of two million in all, many of them monoglots, were lost to their country. "The assault on the Irish language was devastating," said Mr. Ahern.

He said the only slight defect in the Government's commemoration program was that it had not been extended to countries that gave refuge to those forced to leave Ireland: the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada.

Teach Friends and Family about Ireland's Great Hunger and the English-Irish Peace Process

Give a 6-month gift subscription for \$7. Send us the names and addresses of friends and family you want to receive the *American Irish Newsletter*, and we'll start their subscriptions immediately.

Order a copy of **Paddy's Lament** by Thomas Gallagher to educate friends and family about Ireland's Great Hunger. 345 pages. \$10.95 plus \$2 p&h.

Wish friends and family a **Merry Christmas in Irish** with our Christmas greeting cards. 10 for \$5.00.

IRELAND'S GREAT HUNGER

150th Anniversary

1995-2000. Commemorate Ireland's Great Hunger of the 1840s by Working for Peace in Ireland Today.
American Ireland Education Foundation, 54 South Liberty Drive, Stony Brook, New York 10960 (516) 947-2726

"Ireland's Great Hunger" Bumper Sticker

Honor the millions of Irish men, women, and children who died or fled Ireland during the Great Hunger of the 1840s by displaying this bumper sticker on your vehicle. You'll also be reminding others to remember the Great Hunger. \$2.00 ea.; 6 or more, \$1 ea.

To Take Arms: the English-Irish Peace Process and the Question of IRA Weapons

by Captain James Kelly, *Dublin, Ireland*

In seeking to have the IRA decommission arms in advance of round-table talks, Britain is introducing a military dimension into what is now a political matter. It is somewhat disingenuous for Britain to seek the military victory option of unconditional surrender by calling for unilateral decommissioning in the wake of the ceasefire.

First, it was the IRA who called the ceasefire that facilitated the evolution of a peaceful, political way forward, with the British forces and the loyalist paramilitaries reacting to the IRA initiative.

Second, the legality of British arms in Northern Ireland is challenged by the 1993 Joint Declaration of the British and Irish governments. The Declaration places the Union with Britain and a United Sovereign Independent Ireland side-by-side as possible political alternative solutions to the Northern Ireland problem. If the Irish alternative of a united Ireland should emerge as an agreed solution, British arms would be illegal in Ireland.

Another factor, relevant to decommissioning, relates to the contradictory Irish and British constitutional claims to jurisdiction over Northern Ireland. The British claim that part of Ireland is part of the United Kingdom is officially enforced by military means. The Irish constitutional claim is not officially enforced.

Recently, the British army mounted a public relations exercise to show that it is fully prepared to resume full scale counter-insurgency operations in support of the British claim to control part of Ireland.

One is reminded of the hype that surrounded the British resort to arms in 1970, in what it termed low-offensive, psychological operations, with its military establishment claiming that it would stabilize the situation within five years. The major effect, however, was to antagonize such a large segment of the Northern population that the evolution of a people's army such as the Provisional IRA as an effective revolutionary force was

inevitable. In a classic manner, it further muddled the sea of discontent in which the guerrilla fish, acting in defence of an oppressed group, could swim with a large degree of impunity.

Now that the IRA has declared a ceasefire, it has cleared the ground for political advance. Because of the complexities of the contradictory constitutional positions in politico-military terms, negotiations will be tedious and long. In the meantime, Britain raises the decommissioning roadblock to talks, while it mounts a public relations exercise to indicate that it is again preparing to use military means.

All Irish people know where the British military means led to in 1970. It would be disastrous to go down that road again, because Britain wants to enforce the military victory option of unconditional surrender prior to talks. In the current circumstances of ceasefire, it is not on. This is especially so where the whole vexed question of disarmament could be at the top of the agenda at round-table talks.

[Captain James Kelly, a former editor of An Cosantoir, the Irish Defense Journal, has written extensively on politico-military affairs, with special reference to revolutionary and counter-revolutionary war.]

"Use the PEC Hotline to Increase Your Influence"--PEC Member

Following a recent trip to Northern Ireland with his family, New York PEC member **Terence Hannigan** has suggested how PEC letter writers can increase their impact on opinion-makers throughout our country.

Terence suggests buying packs of postcards from the post office for PEC Hotline action requests. They come with the stamp printed on them and cost only 20 cents each--the price of the stamp by itself. "A year's supply will cost you \$10.20," Terence said. "Who said freedom can't come cheap?"

Leave the postcards near the phone. Then, when you call the

Hotline number--(914) 429-7849--for the weekly action letter, you'll be ready to write.

His experiences in Ireland brought home to him the importance of PEC letter-writing campaigns. "Walking through nationalist areas," Terence said, "I was stunned by the many murals that speak to the oppression these people live under, day in and day out. What a contrast for this Irish American who has the advantage of a much more comfortable life, free of the fear of local authorities breaking into my home or torturing a family member.

"Time spent in the nationalist areas heightened my resolve to use the

pen and the letter to write to my legislators, president, and other individuals in influential positions about the injustices that I witnessed and read about in Ireland," he said.

Terence said he keeps the Hotline number taped to his telephone so he won't forget to make the call every week. The Hotline allows him to "increase his letter writing campaign to 52 letters yearly for the cause of a better life for all the Irish in their own country."

**Call the Hotline
(914) 429-7849**

new message every Sunday night

Action Requests

Write the letters below (or call) in your own words or as they are. Be courteous. Have friends, family, organizations, business associates, etc., do the same.

1. Hon. Bill Clinton
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, DC 20500
(202) 456-1111

Message: Please call for immediate, all-party peace talks in Northern Ireland and meet with the leaders of all political parties in a gesture that will set an example for the British government.

2. Club ABC Tours
Ms. Carol Mango
200 Broadacres Drive
Bloomfield, NJ 07003

Message: Please remove the derogatory "pub tour" description of Ireland in your travel brochure and highlight Ireland's impressive cultural attractions for visitors instead.

3. Please send PEC a donation to support the British Apology Campaign.

BRITAIN APOLOGY CAMPAIGN UPDATE

The Campaign for a British Apology for the Great Hunger has gained considerable ground since we launched it with our letter to the British ambassador to the US in July. We asked that his government apologize for the callous neglect that caused the Great Hunger in Ireland 150 years ago. We said this gesture would further the English-Irish peace process by helping to heal the legacy of pain the Irish people and the Irish diaspora continue to experience.

The British government has failed to respond to our correspondence. The British have exhibited the same callous behavior as their political precursors 150 years ago. They are ignoring us in the same way they are ignoring the Irish people's demands for political dialogue and permanent peace. Nonetheless, this project has received considerable publicity and support in England and Ireland as well as the US. Britain's *Sunday Telegraph* and *BBC World at One* radio program have interviewed the PEC and carried stories about the campaign. Dublin's *Irish Times* and Belfast's *Irish News* have also published stories. New York's *Daily News* published PEC Vice-president Al Doyle's op-ed story about the Great Hunger. The American Irish press has also been reporting on this campaign for Britain to finally treat the Irish people with dignity.

The campaign received an important boost October 5, when Bertie Ahern, the leader of Fianna Fail, Ireland's largest political party, called for a British apology. (see *Irish Politician Calls on Britain to Apologize for the Great Hunger*.)

You can help achieve a British apology by circulating the petition and the *Reproduce and Distribute* articles to your politicians, local media, and other influential members of your community. This grassroots activism educates opinion-makers on the impact of the Great Hunger on Ireland and the US as well as of the English-Irish peace process. This kind of activism may have had a role to play in the insightful editorials that have appeared in the *San Francisco Examiner*, the *Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel*, the *New York Times*, and the *Boston Herald*. On the first anniversary of the IRA ceasefire in September, these papers said the British must act now to advance the peace process. We've come a long way from when the press blamed the Irish people for the conflict in Ireland. Be prepared for a long-term campaign.

Because of your participation, this campaign is succeeding and will ultimately secure Britain's acknowledgment of responsibility for the Great Hunger and the northern conflict. It is also an excellent opportunity to create international Irish unity. **Contact the PEC National Office for:** British Apology petitions directed to the British Prime Minister; British Apology postcards directed to the British ambassador to the US; copies of draft Great Hunger education legislation; Great Hunger Anniversary flyers; and copies of local government resolutions recognizing the Great Hunger and its effects on Ireland and the US.

To Join Or Renew Your Membership PEC-AIEF

[] New Membership \$25 [] Membership Renewal \$25
[] Senior Citizen \$20 [] Student \$10
[] Additional Donation \$ _____
[] Donation Only \$ _____ Total \$ _____

Members receive the monthly *American Irish Newsletter*.

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Phone number () _____

Name of your Congressman/woman _____

Make checks payable to AIEF-PEC and mail to 54 South Liberty Drive, Suite 401, Stony Point, NY 10980. For information call (914) 947-2726.

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