

THE IRA: PUBLICITY AND PROPAGANDA

Propaganda plays a major role in the campaign of the Provisional IRA and it has Press or public relations officers at national, regional and local level. The main object of IRA propaganda is to exploit the nationalist emotions of Irish Catholics in Ireland and overseas.

Major Provisional IRA communiques are issued to the news media from Dublin under the name of the "Irish Republican Publicity Bureau". On these statements the traditional signature "P O'Neill" is used. In similar communiques the Official IRA uses that of "J J McGarrity". Leading figures in both Provisional IRA and Provisional Sinn Fein make policy pronouncements on traditional Republican occasions such as the anniversaries of the 1916 Easter Rising and of the death of Wolfe Tone (celebrated at his grave in Bodenstown, Co Kildare, in mid-June). The appearance of wanted Provisional IRA figures at "secret" Press conferences is designed to stimulate publicity even when their pronouncements are not in themselves newsworthy.

CHANNELS

Provisional Sinn Fein

The movement's main publication is the weekly *An Phoblacht Republican News*, published in Belfast and Dublin since two separate newspapers merged in January 1979. In Northern Ireland, a number of local publications closely reflect Provisional Sinn Fein and Provisional IRA views. Belfast's *Andersonstown News*, for example, although owned and controlled by the Andersonstown Central Civil Resistance Committee, is virtually a Provisional publication. The Belfast Provisionals have telex facilities at their office in the Falls Road to transmit communiques direct to the media.

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The Provisionals have published a number of pamphlets. One of the first, *Ireland: The Facts*, was issued in December 1971, shortly after the introduction of internment, to explain the "justness of the demand for the unity and freedom of Ireland". This was followed by several more setting out the *Eire Nua* ("new Ireland") policy. In July 1973, 10,000 copies of a Provisional IRA pamphlet, *Freedom Struggle*, dealing with alleged British atrocities in Northern Ireland, were seized by the Dublin police. In Dublin in September 1975, the distribution of 250,000 copies of a leaflet, *The Moment of Truth*, was announced as part of a publicity campaign "seeking support throughout Ireland for a British declaration of intent to withdraw". In December, following the end of detention, a new series of pamphlets and newspaper advertisements was launched in an attempt to arouse sympathy for convicted IRA members. A "little red book", *Notes for Revolutionaries*, was published in 1982 containing quotations by Tone, Connolly, Lenin, Che Cuevara, Fidel Castro and Mao Tse-tung ("political power comes out of the barrel of a gun"); a second edition, published in April 1983, "made up for the obvious omission of Karl Marx from the first one" (*An Phoblacht*, 14 April 1983).

The Provisionals have also operated clandestine radio stations for short periods in Belfast and Londonderry. The Provisionals' *Radio Saoirse* ("the Voice of Freedom"), in Londonderry, broadcast traditional music and resistance songs. Record programmes presided over by "Sam the Sniper" or the "Armalite Army" accept requests, local news and announcements, submitted through "Sinn Fein Advice and Complaint Centres" (*An Phoblacht*, 6 June 1975). The radio closed in 1979.

During the general election in the Republic of Ireland in 1982, and again during the 1983 election, the Government banned Sinn Fein candidates from giving any party political broadcasts on radio or television.

/Overseas

Overseas outlets

Provisional IRA publicity for overseas audiences is usually channeled through the "Irish Republican Information Service" (IRIS). Set up in Dublin in 1973, at the head office of Sinn Fein, IRIS issues information leaflets together with a quarterly magazine that "reflects every aspect of the republican struggle" and includes "extensive coverage of the military struggle in the six counties" (though the magazine is published only spasmodically).

In the United States, The Irish People is the main instrument of Provisional IRA propaganda. The paper makes liberal use of direct reprints from An Phoblacht and is financed by the Irish Northern Aid Committee (NORAI). A case brought against the paper by the Department of Justice claiming that the newspaper should register as an agent of the Provisional IRA, was rejected by a US District Court because the US Government refused to reveal in court British and Irish government documents sought by the defence. But in 1982 the US Appeal Court overturned the District Court ruling and the Department of Justice intend to pursue the case again. The American Irish Unity Committee, a republican organisation having close links with NORAI, has placed television advertisements attacking British policy in Northern Ireland on two occasions.

The Irish People is also distributed in Western Europe, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Regular publications such as An Phoblacht Republican News are not distributed abroad on a large scale, but the Provisionals usually send copies of their major pamphlets overseas.

Civil Rights organisations

The Provisionals control "civil rights" organisations which campaign for the abolition of security measures. The formation of the Irish Civil Rights Association (ICRA) in December 1972 followed an internal Provisional Sinn Fein circular which stated that Sinn Fein "must be totally involved in this project", the success of which would be measured by the number of non-members of the Republican Movement it attracted (Irish Times, Dublin

5 January 1973). Leading Provisionals David O'Connell and Rory and Sean O'Brady have been involved in ICRA, together with Provisional sympathisers and members of People's Democracy (PD) and Aontacht Eireann.

Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA)

Originally a broad-based organisation which led the early campaigns for reform and civil rights in Northern Ireland, NICRA was strongly infiltrated by PD, and by 1971 had fallen under the control of the Official Sinn Fein and the Communist Party of Ireland (CPI). NICRA has declined into a small pressure group with a few hundred adherents.

Association for Legal Justice (ALJ)

An all-Ireland organisation formed in 1971, the ALJ is not directly controlled by the IRA but is strongly pro-Republican. Its allegations that security measures in the North are biased against Catholics and its campaigns against conditions in the Maze Prison have been cited in Provisional IRA publicity.

The Workers' Party

The Workers' Party (the official wing of Sinn Fein, formerly known as Sinn Fein The Workers Party) exploits many of the same themes as the Provisionals in its propaganda but attempts to interpret them in a Socialist context. The main enemy is presented more as an abstract imperialism with world-wide, and particularly American, connexions, the working-class as a whole being cast as victim. It devotes much of its effort to discrediting the Provisionals in their turn for "sectarianism" and "mindless militarism".

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Workers' Party
The/ principal publications are the Irish People (a radical current affairs weekly), United Irishman, a monthly non-violent but politically extreme magazine, Teoiric, a theoretical journal, and Pobal, a trade union publication. The Starry Plough (Londonderry) followed the Officials' line until its editor defected to the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP). Since April 1975 it has been published in Dublin by the IRSP.

THEMES

IRA propaganda seeks to appeal to wide sections of opinion concerned with such issues as civil rights by publicising alleged repression in Northern Ireland, for which it holds the United Kingdom Government mainly responsible but in which the Government of the Irish Republic, the SDLP and the "Loyalists" in the North are considered collaborators.

Campaign against the security forces

In its campaign to arouse opposition to the security forces in Northern Ireland, the IRA exploits the inconvenience and occasional abuses which almost inevitably arise in the fight against an insurgent movement operating from within a civilian population. Accounts of ill-treatment have sometimes been falsified.

Almost all encounters between the Provisionals and the security forces are misrepresented in IRA propaganda. According to the former Guardian correspondent in Northern Ireland:

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"... almost every time an IRA man is killed there is a protest about the circumstances of his killing: usually the initial protests ('he never touched a gun in his life - he was the most gentle of human beings, wouldn't hurt a fly') evolved into the truth next day, in the death column of the Irish News, when one would read: 'Seamus -- aged 19, Lieutenant, 2nd Battalion, Creggan Brigade IRA, in action against British Forces'. But in some cases ... the attendant outcry on the death was such that a presumption of innocence became the overwhelming view" (In Holy Terror by Simon Winchester, Faber and Faber, 1974).

In An Phoblacht/Republican News there are frequent allegations of harassment by the security forces of "republican political activists": activities by the police or by the army are characterised as "repression"; it is claimed the British consider nationalist lives "expendable" and that "the Brits can decide to kill a few in order to placate the Unionists". The security forces in the Republic are subject to a similar campaign. In recent years this has concentrated on attempts to misrepresent the conditions in jails and to show that members of the Garda carry out "ill-treatment and torture during ... interrogation" (An Phoblacht, 17 March 1983).

The security forces are responsible for the law; they are also accountable to the law. If they break it their members are liable to prosecution in the same way as any other members of the community. Every complaint alleging criminal misconduct by a police officer is investigated and the Chief Constable must submit every police investigation report to the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland, who is responsible for deciding whether criminal proceedings should be brought. In the case of complaints against the army, where the Royal Ulster Constabulary considers a criminal offence has been committed, it submits a report to the Director for a decision as to whether criminal proceedings should be instituted.

Baton rounds

The Provisional IRA and Sinn Fein have campaigned constantly for the use of plastic baton rounds (PBR's) to be banned. At a conference in Manchester in 1983, Sinn Fein MP Owen Carron said that deaths from plastic bullets were not accidents.

"Children were killed as a method of population control stemming from a simple military logic of terrorising the civilian population.

"It is a fact that the application of this logic is working within the North, in that parents are tending to keep their children indoors and adults are so frightened by the possibility of being struck by one of these missiles that attendances at street demonstrations are declining". (News Letter, 28 February 1983)

Although some riots in Northern Ireland have been spontaneous there is no doubt that some have been instigated by terrorist organisations such as the Provisional IRA. On occasions, rioters under terrorist direction have sought to precipitate the complete breakdown of law and order. To control serious rioting, prevent sectarian confrontation, and minimise the danger to innocent people and to properly, the security forces are equipped with PBR's. Baton rounds are used in a controlled way which minimises the risk of injury to both rioters and the security forces. They are used only when strictly necessary; there is a close relationship between the number of rounds fired and the severity of the rioting. In August 1982, the so-called "marching season" in Northern Ireland when rioting is frequent and sometimes fierce, 336 baton rounds were used: in the following month only four were employed. The highest monthly total expended in Northern Ireland Ireland was over 16,000 fired during the severe rioting which followed the death of the hunger striker Bobby Sands in May 1981, and the total used during 1981 was 29,695. In 1982, the total fell to 500. In the first three months of 1982 only 100 PBR's were fired.

the security forces.

Prisons

Special category status was introduced, in June 1972, as an emergency logistic measure to cope with the sudden increase in the prison population of those sentenced to more than nine months' imprisonment for offences relating to the civil disturbances in Northern Ireland. Such prisoners were not required to work, could wear their own clothes and were permitted additional privileges, such as extra visits and food parcels. In 1975, the Government decided to phase out special category status.

From 1976 to 1982 the Provision IRA campaigned for special treatment - political status - for its members in prison. The underlying motive was the belief that, once the Government agreed to restore special status, it would also grant an amnesty to such prisoners at the end of their campaign of violence; this would naturally help boost recruitment to the Provision IRA. Further more the Provision IRA believed that the protest campaign would increase its support at home and abroad at a time when support from Northern Irish Catholics had fallen considerably. The Government made it clear that there would be no amnesty for convicted terrorists.

The campaign began with the blanket protest in September 1976 when some newly convicted prisoners refused to work or to wear prison clothing. From March 1978, in what became known as "the dirty protest", the protestors began to damage and foul their cells; by smearing excrement and surplus food over walls they made excellent accommodation disgusting.

In June 1980 the European Commission of Human Rights ruled that the protesting prisoners 'are seeking to achieve a status of political prisoner which they are not entitled to under national law or under the Convention'

In March 1981 the dirty protest was suspended to focus attention on the hunger strikes. When the hunger strikes were abandoned in October 1981 the protest action continued at a lower level in the form of refusal to undertake prison work; by 1 November 1982 only 150 prisoners were still taking part, when the protest was abandoned by all but a handful.

Hunger strikes

The tradition of Irish Republican hunger strikes dates back to the deaths in 1916 and 1921 of Terence McSwiney and Thomas Ashe, who thereby became "martyrs" in the struggle against the then administration in Ireland. The IRA has since used hunger strike tactics in the Republic of Ireland, in Great Britain and in Northern Ireland with mixed success. De Valera's Fianna Fail Government made concessions to one hunger striker, Patrick McGrath, in 1939, since when no Irish Government has given in to hunger strikers. Two IRA hunger strikers, Tony Darcy and Sean McNeela, died in prison in Dublin in April 1940, McNeela in fact dying four hours after four IRA colleagues had ended their strike (their protest had been against the De Valera Government's refusal to treat them as political rather than criminal prisoners). President Roosevelt wrote at the time to the then US Minister in Dublin that "the continuation of hunger strikes and outrages of all kinds, IRA or otherwise, only hurts the cause of complete Irish independence ...". Another IRA prisoner, Sean McCaughey, died in April 1946. The Provisional IRA leader, Sean MacStiofain, attracted little sympathy for the hunger strike which followed his arrest in Dublin in November 1973, and his decision to abandon it discredited both him and this form of protest for some time. Subsequent concerted hunger strikes by Republican prisoners at Portlaoise Prison in 1975 and 1977 were also abandoned.

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In Britain, some IRA hunger strikers have sought to force the authorities to transfer them to prisons in Northern Ireland. Two sisters, Dolours and Marian Price, ended their hunger strike (during which under the earlier policy they had been force-fed) in 1974, when the Home Secretary announced that they would be transferred to a prison in Northern Ireland. Francis Stagg undertook four hunger strikes between June 1974 and his death on 12 February 1976. (He died demanding "repatriation" to Northern Ireland, though he had been born in the Irish Republic and had lived with his family in England since 1959). Another hunger striker, Michael Gaughan, was belatedly adopted by the Provisional Republican movement, although he had been convicted of a robbery which he had carried out without IRA approval, and died of pneumonia on 3 June 1974.

Early in 1980 two prisoners associated with Republican groups, Martin Meehan and Seamus Mullan, undertook hunger strikes in Maze Prison, unrelated and unconnected with the "dirty protest", to draw attention to their alleged innocence. Both men had their appeals turned down by the Northern Ireland Court of Appeal and eventually ended their hunger strikes.

In October 1980, seven prisoners on the "dirty protest" began a hunger strike and, later, were joined by others. But in December the protest ceased when one protestor was close to death and they realised that the Government would not concede their demands for special (political) status. On 1 March 1981 a second hunger strike began, during which 10 prisoners starved themselves to death. (One of these was Robert Sands, who had been elected MP for Fermanagh and South Tyrone during the strike). Eventually, in the face of the Government's determination not to grant special status, the hunger strikes were abandoned on 3 October 1981.

/Government

Government of the Republic of Ireland

The extreme republican movement is committed to achieving "a 32 county unified socialist republic" and admits publicly " we need to intervene to destabilise the South" (Owen Carron, Sinn Fein MP, February 1983). They regard the Republic's government with as much hostility as they do that of the British; in the longer term they are as much a threat to democratic institutions in the Republic of Ireland as to those in Northern Ireland.

Articles in An Phoblacht continually attack and attempt to discredit the Government of the Republic and ^{the} main political parties:-

- March 1982. "Garret FitzGerald goes down as yet another Irish leader who has failed and betrayed his people".
- March 1982. "The Brit-like mentality of Free State gardai is quite remarkable in its spiteful pettiness".
- August 1982. "Over the years the Free State's own brand of repressive legislation, encapsulated largely in the Offences Against the State Act, has been its major weapon in collaborating enthusiastically with the British ^{occupation} in the North and attempting to break republican support and activity in the South".
- September 1982. "... displays a totally uncaring attitude from the Free State judiciary towards the protection of those held in garda custody. It would appear that the courts are prepared to sanction the brutal behaviour in garda barracks which is regularly used against both political and non-political detainees"

- September 1982. "The translation of collaboration with Britain into the cynical abuse of personal patronage is such an apt illustration of Free State political degeneracy, that it appears to be too good to be true".
- November 1982. Fianna Fail and Fine Gael are "indistinguishable and offer no hope to the Irish people".
- January 1983. The renewal of the ban on broadcasts by Sinn Fein by the Irish Government is "arbitrary and undemocratic censorship".
- January 1983. "It is common knowledge that bugging, as a method of political repression, has been going on for years under both Coalition and Fianna Fail governments".
- February 1983. "Barry/Minister for Foreign Affairs and Prior Secretary of State for Northern Ireland undoubtedly found themselves in total agreement on practical, everyday repression and collaboration between their respective armed forces"

Government of the United States

Republican publications also contain anti-American propaganda. They^a print/constant flow of criticism of US policy, for example in the Middle East, Latin America and elsewhere:-

"... the United States can napalm Vietnamese children, overturn democratic governments if it does not like their policies, or support the murderous regime of El Salvador"

An Phoblacht, 10 June 1982

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"... the Free State - through the Industrial Development Authority - has sold the Irish working class to US capital US multinationals ... are well rewarded for their generous exploitation of Irish workers"

An Phoblacht, 8 July 1982

"We support the PLO's right to their own country. We morally support their position. We see in the Israelis' attempt at genocide a similarity to the Nazis' attempted genocide of the Jews in the '30s and '40s. That is to say, there is a marked similarity between Israel's present stance and Hitler's final solution. The hypocrisy of the super powers - and of the Reagan administration particularly - and of the EEC governments, is evident and we condemn it".

IRA Spokesman. IRIS, July August
1982

"The Filipino Struggle As in so many of the oppressed areas of the world, the power of the United States military and economic interests faces down-trodden people with the prospect of long and bloody struggles for liberation"

An Phoblacht, 11 November 1982

Kevin Burke, now editor of An Phoblacht, wrote in the publication in June 1982:-

"I am not surprised to see that John Hinkley, the man who tried to kill Ronald Reagan, has been found not guilty of any crime by a United States jury. But what is this nonsense about him being insane?"