

THE EXTREME IRISH REPUBLICAN MOVEMENT IN BRITAIN

More than a million people of Irish birth - and many more of Irish extraction - live in Britain. The overwhelming majority of them reject violence by terrorist organisations such as the IRA and the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) and condemn their followers for the persistent terror they inflict. The killing and maiming of innocent people in Britain, Ireland and in continental Europe has shocked civilised people the world over. The Roman Catholic leader of Ireland, Cardinal O Fiaich said in November 1981:

"... Most of the murders have been claimed by the IRA. Let me therefore state in simple language with all the authority at my command, that participation in the evil deeds of this or any other paramilitary organisation, which indulges in murder, wounding, intimidation, kidnapping, destruction of property and other forms of violence, is a mortal sin which will one day have to be accounted for before God in judgement. To cooperate in any way with such organisations is sinful and if the cooperation is substantial the sin is mortal ... what we all need now is an end to violent deeds before the whole population is engulfed in an orgy of death and destruction"

(Irish Times, Dublin, 21 November 1981).

The Provisional IRA

The first bombs attributable to the Provisional IRA exploded in London on 8 March 1973, injuring more than 200. At the subsequent trial in November 1973, when eight of those arrested were sentenced to life imprisonment, it was revealed that an "active service" unit, including the sisters Dolours and Marian Price, had been sent to Britain specifically to plant bombs. In April 1973, Frank Stagg, who lived in England for 14 years, and an English-born

Roman Catholic priest, Father Patrick Fell, were charged and later convicted for conspiracy "to cause an explosion" and for offences connected with the formation of an IRA unit (in Coventry).

After a series of letter and parcel bomb incidents in London in August 1973, an explosion in Birmingham in September claimed the first bomb disposal officer. Three years later, a Provisional IRA "explosives officer" was sentenced to life imprisonment for organising the campaign. Explosions also occurred at two London railway stations. There were other attacks in 1974 and on 4 February a coach carrying soldiers and their families was blown up on a motorway killing 12. Later the same month two people were injured in an explosion at the National Defence College in Buckinghamshire. More people were injured when bombs exploded at Heathrow Airport (May), Westminster Hall (June: when six people were injured), the Tower of London (July: one person killed and 42 injured, including a number of children), two Guildford public houses (October: five people killed and 67 injured) and a public house near Woolwich barracks (November: two people killed and 35 injured).

The Provisional IRA's involvement in these bombings became clearer in testimony given at trials during 1974, and in November that year they claimed that explosions at Euston railway station, on the motorway and at the National Defence College, together with 50 other operations in Britain, were "authorised operations" carried out by units of the IRA. On 17 November, the Provisional IRA leader, David O'Connell, questioned on British television, said:

"We strike at economic, military, political and judicial targets. Pressed on this, particularly from the viewpoint of civilian casualties, he said that railway stations were considered economic and military targets. As for the M62 coach blast, in which two children were among the victims, O'Connell said it was a legitimate military target and the

unit which carried out the attack believed that only military personnel would be on board.... There would be no warnings of attacks on military targets because the British forces were waging war, not just on the IRA, but on the people of Ireland...." (Irish Times, Dublin, 18 November 1975).

On 14 November 1974, James McDade, later acknowledged by the Provisionals as a "lieutenant", was killed when the bomb he was planting at Coventry telephone exchange exploded. The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Birmingham would not allow a funeral service in his diocese, and as the police refused to allow a procession, McDade's body was flown to the Irish Republic on 21 November. The same night, 20 people were killed and more than 183 injured in two explosions at public houses in Birmingham.

Public reaction in the United Kingdom, the Irish Republic and elsewhere to the Birmingham incidents severely damaged the Provisionals' cause. In October 1976, a Birmingham man who had provided shelter for IRA members on the run was sentenced with four others to ten years in prison. The five men had caused damage worth more than £500,000 in the Birmingham area between January and August 1974.

Despite the Provisionals' unilateral ceasefire in 1975, preparations for attacks continued. Breaches of their own discipline and police action led to a number of successes against members. In February 1975, a London policeman was shot dead while giving chase to a suspect. Bomb-making equipment, ammunition and an automatic pistol were found in a house nearby. Other shooting incidents in July resulted in the discovery in Liverpool of 450 pounds of explosives, the biggest hoard found in Britain, together with firearms, ammunition and bomb-making materials. In November, 400 pounds of gelignite were found at a block of flats in Southampton.

Bomb attacks continued in August, when 40 people were injured in an explosion in a public house near army barracks in Caterham, Surrey. Subsequent

explosions in London occurred at the Hilton Hotel on 5 September (two people killed and 63 injured), in Piccadilly on 9 October (one person killed and 21 injured), under a private car on 23 October (killing by mistake a cancer expert of international standing), outside a Mayfair restaurant on 29 October (18 people injured), at another Mayfair restaurant on 12 November (one person killed and 15 injured), and at a third restaurant on 18 November (two people killed and 20 injured). On 13 October, a bomb packed with coach bolts was defused outside a London restaurant shortly before it was due to explode. A new tactic was employed on 27 November when the writer Ross McWhirter was shot dead at his home in North London. Two days later a telephone caller to Britain's domestic news agency the Press Association claimed that the Provisional IRA had been responsible for 15 bomb attacks over the previous three months (The Times, London, 1 December 1975). This intense phase ended when another restaurant attack in London led to a police siege of a flat in Balcombe Street in which four men held several hostages. The four surrendered after six days without harming their hostages. In February 1977, they were each sentenced to life imprisonment with a recommendation that they serve a minimum of 30 years. Among the 32 charges they faced were ten for murder.

The hunger strike by Frank Stagg, serving a prison sentence for IRA offences in Coventry, brought demands from Provisional IRA members for a renewal of the terrorist campaign. At a Provisional Sinn Fein rally in Londonderry on 1 February 1976, Kevin Agnew told the audience: "They have had bombs in Birmingham, Manchester and London but let it go out from this meeting that they have seen nothing compared to what they will get in the not too distant future if Stagg dies...." (Irish Press, Dublin, 2 February 1976). Later the same month, on 12 February, Stagg died. On 13 February bomb disposal officers defused in a London underground railway station what could have been a disastrous device. The IRA members who planted it were sentenced to life imprisonment with a recommendation that they served at least 20 years.

Other attacks on the underground system followed, and on 15 March a train driver was shot dead while pursuing a suspected bomber. The murderer, a member of the Provisional IRA, was sentenced to life imprisonment (to serve a minimum of 30 years) in July 1977. A further bomb exploded on 27 March at an exhibition in London, injuring 85 people, one of whom died. In January 1977, the Provisional IRA placed 13 bombs in the Oxford Street area during peak Saturday shopping hours. The devices caused widespread damage and included seven high explosive bombs and five incendiaries.

After a lull of almost two years, the Provisional IRA resumed its bombing campaign in Britain in December 1978 when, over two consecutive days, 13 devices were planted in London and the provinces. Nine (including two car bombs in London) exploded, injuring eleven people. In January 1979 bombs exploded at a gas holder in Greenwich and a fuel storage tank on Canvey Island, causing extensive damage but failing in their main aim.

In December 1980 IRA bombs damaged the Territorial Army barracks at Hammersmith and a gas holder at Bromley-by-Bow, both in London. The attacks continued in 1981. In January people were treated for lacerations and shock when an IRA bomb blasted the Royal Air Force base at Uxbridge. On 10 December, just a week after the collapse of the IRA hunger strike in the Maze Prison, Belfast, a nail bomb exploded outside Chelsea Barracks killing two civilians and injuring 39 people. On 17 October the Commandant-General of the Royal Marines, Sir Stenart Pringle, was seriously injured when a bomb exploded under his car as he was driving away from his home in south-east London. On 26 October a police explosives officer was dismantling a terrorist bomb in a snack bar in London's Oxford Street when it exploded, killing him instantly; a second device, found in a nearby department store, was disarmed. There were two incidents in November. On the 13th a bomb wrecked part of the London home of the Attorney-General (he and his family were away at the time), and on the 23rd the IRA directed its mindless brutality to children: they claimed responsibility for planting a plastic toy gun packed with explosives in a

street in Woolwich; the "toy" exploded, injuring two women.

In 1982 the Provisional IRA carried out two major terrorist attacks in London, both on 20 July. A bomb exploded in Hyde Park as mounted guardsmen on ceremonial duty passed by, killing three soldiers. A second bomb exploded under a bandstand in Regent's Park where the Royal Greenjackets were giving a concert, killing six bandsmen. More than 50 soldiers and civilians were injured in the two explosions.

Political activities

Prior to the introduction of the Prevention of Terrorism Act's of 1974 and 1976, both the Provisional and Official movements were represented in Great Britain by political organisations of reasonable strength (Sinn Fein and Clann na h'Eireann). But the application of the PTA affected them badly and support fell considerably. Some attempts are made to organise fund-raising social events, demonstrations and propaganda, but with little success. According to Part I of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1976 it is an offence to solicit or invite financial or other support for a proscribed organisation, to make or receive any contribution to a proscribed organisation, or to arrange or address a meeting to support or further the activities of such an organisation. Under Section 10 it is an offence to solicit or invite a person to give or lend money or other property, or to receive or accept money or other property from another person, intending it to be used in connexion with acts of terrorism. Various devices, such as collecting money said to be for Republican prisoners and their families, are been used to circumvent the Act, but there is little evidence of support for the IRA, particularly among the expatriate Irish communities in Britain.

Provisional Sinn Fein (Britain)

Sinn Fein (Britain), the Provisionals' political wing on the mainland, is careful not to become implicated in the violence of the Provisional IRA campaign without actually condemning it. Its hard-core membership is small and confined mainly to London, Birmingham, Manchester and Glasgow, where it

has become increasingly involved with left-wing, including Trotskyist, pressure groups. In May 1977, it announced plans to establish links with African, Asian and Caribbean revolutionary "freedom movements" in London.

Until November 1974, Brendan Magill (sentenced in March 1971 to two years' imprisonment on explosives charges) was the national organiser of Sinn Fein as well as commanding officer of PIRA in Britain. Since then he was sentenced to a year's imprisonment for IRA membership; an exclusion order has been made against him. Magill was succeeded by Derek Highstead, who had been interned in Northern Ireland during the IRA's campaign of 1956-62. He died in a road accident in July 1976. Leading members of Sinn Fein currently include Michael Holden (who is also treasurer of the "welfare" organisation, An Cumann Cabhrach, in Britain) and Eddie Caughey from Birmingham.

The Official IRA

The Official IRA's activities in Britain have been much more limited than Sinn Fein's. On 22 February 1972, it admitted responsibility for an explosion at an army officers' mess at Aldershot, which killed six civilians and a Roman Catholic chaplain and injured 17 other people; but privately, many members were reported to believe that the action was a major blunder, alienating people who had supported them on civil rights grounds (Sunday Telegraph, London, 27 February 1972). Since their ceasefire in May 1972, Official IRA supporters in Britain claim to be concerned only with political activities.

Clann na h'Eireann

Clann na h'Eireann was founded in Britain in 1963 when the Republican Movement in Britain dropped the title "Sinn Fein" in an attempt to amalgamate a wide range of Irish immigrant groups. It sided with the Officials at the time of the IRA split in Ireland in 1970. In March 1974, two members of the Clann, Michael Egan and Robert Gallagher, were sentenced to four and six years' imprisonment respectively for possessing explosives

and ammunition. In November 1974, exclusion orders were served on several prominent members of the Clann under the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

The Clann attempted to develop into a broad-based "Socialist" movement in alliance with such organisations as the Communist Party of Great Britain, but with little success. Like Sinn Fein, its hard-core membership is small. Its President is Seamus Collins from Birmingham.

Prisoners' Aid Committee

When Irish Republicans began to be imprisoned for illegal activities in Britain, both factions formed organisations to press for their release and to look after their welfare, although much of the money collected for welfare purposes was, and is, spent on arms and explosives. The Prisoners' Aid Committee (PAC) was set up by the Officials in 1971 but, in 1974, broke away after "policy disagreements" and became a separate organisation, dominated by Jacqueline Kaye. Its publications include PAC News and The Irish Prisoner, and in November 1978 it sponsored a film, Prisoners of War, made by the Workers' Revolutionary Party (WRP). Latterly Jacqueline Kaye has aligned herself and the PAC with the Provisionals in Great Britain.

The Provisionals claim to look after the welfare of prisoners' dependants in Britain through An Cumann Cabrach in Dublin, although they are also associated with the PAC.

Troops Out Movement

Provisional IRA supporters attempt to make common cause with small non-Irish groups in Britain which also seek the withdrawal of the army from Northern Ireland. Although the Provisionals failed to get support from the radical pacifist British Withdrawal from Northern Ireland Campaign, some backing was given by the original Troops Out Movement (TOM), formed in September 1973 to campaign mainly within the trade union movement.

Throughout 1976, however, there were internal problems in the mainly Trotskyist-dominated TOM, which culminated in a split in mid-1977 and the

establishment of a breakaway United Troops Out Movement (UTOM). UTOM produced a pamphlet, British Soldiers Speak Out on Ireland, and an anti-recruitment film, Home Soldier Home. A UTOM delegate attended the Provisional Sinn Fein annual convention in Dublin in November 1978. In February 1980, TOM held a blanket protest in Fleet Street, London, home of Britain's national newspapers, as part of the movement demanding political status for IRA members held in Northern Ireland prisons. TOM enjoyed a limited revival during the Maze hunger strike protests of 1981, and is now attempting to co-ordinate opposition to the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Although it continues to receive support from a number of far Left groups including the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) and the Revolutionary Communist Group (RCG), the association is fragile.

The International Marxist Group, the Socialist Workers' Party and other small Trotskyist and ultra-Left groups which form the hard-core support for TOM and UTOM generally support the Provisionals as an "anti-imperialist" force; but they have criticised the more indiscriminate acts of violence, particularly those in Britain. In July 1978 the WRP defended the Provisionals' right to fight back against the British "army of occupation" in Northern Ireland but dissociated itself from the bombing campaign in Britain.

Irish National Liberation Army (INLA)

Like the Provisional IRA, the INLA is proscribed throughout the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. In March 1979, it claimed responsibility for the murder in London of the Opposition Spokesman on Northern Ireland, Airey Neave, who was killed by a car bomb as he drove from the House of Commons car park.

The Prevention of Terrorism Act

The first Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act (PTA) came into force in November 1974; it was superseded by the 1976 PTA, which is subject to renewal by both Houses of Parliament each year.

Under the Act the IRA (both Official and Provisional wings) and the INLA are proscribed and it is a criminal offence to belong to either

organisations or to support them in any way. The legislation empowers the Home Secretary to exclude from Great Britain any person who is or has been concerned in terrorism related to Northern Ireland affairs. The Act also gives the police powers to detain suspected terrorists and establishes a security control over travellers entering or leaving Great Britain or Northern Ireland.