

# Stirring the U.K. Irish <sup>42P</sup>

Why have the Irish in Britain remained so passive over the North? To get them to respond, says EAMONN McCANN, "solidarity" campaigns must win the emigrant working-class to socialist solutions.

EVERY PERSON involved in Irish politics in London is said by someone to be a police spy. This is one of the results of the fact that, despite the presence here of a huge Irish community, all attempts to evoke a mass campaign in solidarity with "the struggle at home" have totally failed. Unable and unwilling to face up to this failure, the solidarity groups have turned inwards, the leaders of each faction attributing the lack of success to the treachery and betrayal of their opponents.

Two years ago it was confidently expected that demonstrations tens of thousands strong could be mounted here. Instead, twenty people expend their energy in interminable strife in rooms above King's Cross pubs. At no time during the past two years has a significant number of the Irish in Britain showed a sustained enough interest in what was happening in Belfast and Derry publicly to demonstrate or to do anything about it. The only people really enthused have been the British revolutionary Left. Thus, the typical audience at a public "solidarity" meeting will comprise mainly student intellectuals, who will listen uncritically while a speaker launches a violent attack on British Imperialism in words and tones which were old to the "United Irishman" ten years ago.

If the speaker resembles Kevin Boland at his most euhoric, the audience usually reminds one of nothing so much as those white liberal gatherings in the United States a few years back which would sit loving it while a black militant lashed them for their in-born racism.

The absence from such audiences of the native Irish is, at first sight, curious. They are, after all, supposed to be the most sentimentally nostalgic of people, obsessed with the land of their birth, its trials and tribulations, forever seeing in their

back by Government intervention, the Irish worker understandably feels that he has more immediate, if less dramatic, problems than the situation in the North. This is not to say that he is uninterested or unsympathetic. He is neither of these things. But the approaches made to him so far have not been linked to the issues which affect him in his day-to-day life. He does not, therefore, respond.

The solidarity organisations are all led by people who claim to be socialists, but not one of them believes that it is right to advocate socialist solutions to the problems of Ireland. This curious contradiction results from a singularly unimaginative, not to mention incorrect, application of Leninist theory of self-determination.

Lenin argued against Rosa Luxemburg that the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party should concede to the Poles an absolute right to self-determination, that Russian socialists had no right to insist that the independent Poland be a socialist Poland. Seizing on this, and flinging Lenin quotations in all directions in an effort to cover their tracks, every Irish revolutionary dialectician in England (there are many) sets his face like flint against any advocacy of socialism for Ireland.

## Mischief or worse

The effect of this was that the central co-ordination slogan became "End the Border." Anyone suggesting that we needed a more radical critique of the problem and more radical solutions was denounced as at best a mischief-maker, at worst a paid agent of MI6.

This implacable refusal to campaign for anything more meaningful than re-unification meant that bodies like the Irish Solidarity Campaign (Marxist) and Irish National Liberation Solidarity Front (Maoist) were really suggesting to Irish exiles that the North's problems would be solved if it was subsumed into the Twenty-Six county area.

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less impressed by the ability of that State to solve anyone's problems. Post-independence exiles make reluctant Republicans.

The assumption by Civil Rights and some Republican strategists that a potential fifth column a million strong existed in England has been shown to be false. There is no horde of proletarian Irish, enraged by Army Brutalisation of Catholic areas of Belfast, ready and waiting to pour out from Camden Town, Cricklewood and Kilburn to stop the heart of the Empire. They are too worried about the rent rises announced last month by the Greater London Council.

The leaders of the solidarity campaigns, the ideologues of exile emotion, find it difficult to accept this. They are men who have spent the last decade fixated on Ireland, selling newspapers outside Irish dance halls, speaking at Hyde Park on Sundays about the cataclysm to come, and, underneath it all, calmly certain that, sooner or later, their hour would come round at last.

Their hour will never come until they focus attention on the grievances and resentments accruing from the everyday lives of the people they address and until they pierce deeper than the first layer on the skin of the problem and acknowledge that there is more wrong with Ireland than the border drawn across it. When that is done, we might be spared a repetition of February 21, when a tiny knot, perhaps ten people in all, representing the Irish Solidarity Campaign, struggled through London with their Tricolour in the wake of 110,000 trade union marchers, of whom thousands were Irish.

## SOCIAL and PERSONAL

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The main defect in this approach is that the overwhelming majority of Irish people in Britain came from the 26 Counties precisely because it could not offer them a decent living or acceptable life. By definition, there can be few groups

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## SOCIAL and PERSONAL

THE PRESIDENT was represented by Lt-Col. T. MacDonagh, A.D.C., at the unveiling of a memorial to the memory of Commandant Dan Allman and Lieut. Jim Baily at Headfort Junction, Killylarney, yesterday.

Mrs. Dorothy Tubridy and her fund raising sub-committee of the Dublin Theatre Festival thank all those who sponsored and attended the Masked Ball at Leopardstown, on March 17th.

This week at Switzers — meet Carl Davies — top make-up man from Elizabeth Arden London and receive voucher worth £100, that may be deducted from any Elizabeth Arden purchase of £25 and over.

This is Fabric Week at Brown Thomas — in a new setting on the ground floor. Come and see the most exciting collection of Spring/Summer Fabrics ever — even at Brown Thomas. Every day this week.

Visit the "Gay Nineties" Charcoal Grill for quick-service lunch or succulent steaks. Royal Mansions Hotel, Dun Laoghaire. Telephone 801911.

Wedding Gifts of beauty and quality — Sheet sets (including king size), blankets, Continental quilts, bedspreads, towels, cushions, picture table mats, etc. J. P. Glass Ltd., 30 Wicklow street.

### CHARITY PRAISED

The Bishop of Cork and Ross, the Most Rev. Dr. Lucey, opening the annual bazaar of the Cork Ladies' Association of the Society of St. Vincent and Paul, Saturday, paid tribute to the five-year-round charitable work of the Ladies' Association. The bazaar, normally held in November and which has been back to the spring of organising difficulties.

### SHARPEVILLE DEAD COMMEMORATED

A special Service of commemoration was held in Dublin to mark the anniversary of Sharpeville, when 69 Africans protesting against the pass laws in their country were killed by South African police.

There were readings from scripture by the Rev. Austin Flannery, O.P., the Rev. Ernon Perdue, and the Rev. Terence McCaughey. Other participants included Mr. Kadar Asmal, vice-chairman of the Irish Anti-Apartheid Movement, Senator John Horgan and Mr. Bill Meek. The Service was held in the chapel of the Dominican Boys' Home at Dominick Street, Lower.

### CHURCH BLESSED IN BALLINASLOE

A new £35,000 church was blessed and dedicated in Ballinasloe, Co. Galway, yesterday by the Bishop of Clonfert, the Most Rev. Dr. Ryan. The Church of St. Brigid, at St. Brigid's Hospital in Ballinasloe, has seating accommodation for 50 and replaces the church used by the hospital for 100 years.

It was built by Bantile Ltd., of Banagher, and the architect was Chevalier J. R. Boyd-Barrett, who has been the architect of every building in the hospital during this century.

### Middle-class

The Irish community in England tends to see itself increasingly not as a detached section of the Irish race, but as a distinct community, Irish but rooted here. It has developed its own middle class with all the depressing vulgarity of *nouveau* not so *riche* everywhere. The first few timidly capitalistic pincers have broken through. They have begun to move out of the ghettos. Even within the traditionally Irish areas, they are more likely to be found in council flats than in kip houses. It is not possible to mobilise this community by appealing merely to its Irishness—and none of the solidarity campaigns have made much attempt to do anything else.

Only the working-class Irish have a capacity for mobilisation. The middle classes were never going to march, or meet or demonstrate anyway. The Irish workers—some of them — do march and demonstrate. However, as they become ever more firmly rooted in Britain they naturally tend to demonstrate about "British" issues. The radicalism they inherit from their Irish political tradition comes to be expressed in the fight against the Industrial Relations Bill rather than against the Special Powers Act.

Thus as prices, rents and fares go on rising while wages are held