

S.B. No. 1 (Plain)

METROPOLITAN POLICE

S.D.S.

Special Report

SPECIAL BRANCH

7th day of July 1980

SUBJECT

1. The following information has been received from a reliable source:-

Reference to Papers

Voices for Withdrawal  
Forum - 14.6.80.

To

10 JUL 1980

P.A. in

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2. "On Saturday 14 June 1980, between 10am and 5.30pm, in the large hall, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1, the Committee for Withdrawal from Ireland, a group organised by the Liberal Party, held a Voices for Withdrawal Forum on Northern Ireland. 266 registered delegates and observers attended the one day Forum. The Chairman for the morning session was Nick MARTIN who is the Chairman of the Hammermith and Kensington Trades Council.

3. The morning session was from 10.30am until 12.30pm and the subject discussed was 'The history of Britain in Ireland', the partitioning of Ireland - the social and economic effects of partition - British culture and Ireland - the last 11 years. The Chairman, after announcing the topic for the morning session, introduced the first speaker, Desmond GREAVES, historian editor of the 'Irish Democrat' and currently President of the Connolly Association. The speaker gave a potted history of the Irish struggle for self-determination from the early 17th century up to and including 1921 Partition, and continued by expressing the opinion that the British had had no intention of allowing 32 counties to have their independence. He concluded by stating that the current partition of Ireland into 26 counties in the South and 6 counties in the North was so 'utterly ludicrous' as to make no sense at all. He urged all those present to increase the pressure on the British Government for the withdrawal of British troops and thereby in his opinion the ending of partition of Ireland.

4. The Chairman then introduced the next speaker, Anthony COUGHLAN, Senior Lecturer in Social Administration and Policy, Trinity College Dublin, and Chairman of the Irish Sovereignty Movement. COUGHLAN commenced his talk on the economic aspects of the partition of Ireland, by stating that over the last ten years the Republic of Ireland had had a growth in its gross national product of at least twice that of Great Britain, and that the current problems of the 'free-state' revolved around under-capitalisation. The speaker went on to say that in his opinion the ending of partition, and thereby the addition of the industrial North with the agrarian South would, with the help of international aid, solve the long term economic problem of under-capitalisation. The speaker concluded, by stating that the ending of partition, would enable the Irish Labour Movement, long torn by sectarian squabbling, to become the strongest political force in a united Ireland.

5. The Chairman then introduced the next speaker, John ARDEN, a playwright who began his talk on British culture in Ireland by recounting stories as to how Irish authors, playwrights, scriptwriters etc were generally unable to get their work taken seriously in Great Britain, referring to the usual criticism of the use in this country of Irish jokes and general denegation of Irish culture. He concluded by saying that he, together with the playwright Margeretta D'ARCY, had collected a lot of evidence about British torture in 'H' Block, to present to the European Court of Human Rights, Strasbourg, but that most of the evidence had recently been confiscated by the police using the Prevention of Terrorism Act. This he felt was absolutely scandalous but only increased his resolve to fight on.
6. The last speaker for the morning session was Maria MULHOLLAND, a member of the Provisional Sinn Fein and of the Armagh 11. In an impassioned and highly emotive speech, she began by outlining some of her experiences whilst at school in Belfast in the mid 1970s, and how she saw the Republican Movement, as the only means of satisfying her Irish aspirations.
7. The Forum resumed after the lunch break with a short 8mm colour film of the Troops Out of Ireland demonstration held in London on August 12th 1979. At 1.30pm the Chairman, Steve DAVE, Secretary of the Committee for the Withdrawal from Ireland, introduced and subsequently screened a 25 minute film made by Chris REEVES, who had previously produced the film 'Home Soldier, Home'. The Chairman explained that REEVES was currently making a film about conditions in Ireland and specifically the 'H' Block, and that part of the film included interviews with former 'blanket' prisoners, Joe MAGUIRE and Frank McCANN. The film centred on those two ex-prisoners describing conditions within 'H' Block and how, despite their awful conditions, the morale of the prisoners remained high, and the importance of the struggle in Great Britain to be intensified in order to gain political status for Republican prisoners both in gaol in the North of Ireland and in England.
8. The Chairman then introduced the subjects for discussion for the first of the two afternoon sessions, as being 'Aspects of the Present Situation in Northern Ireland', 'The British Army', 'Emergency Legislation', 'The 'H' Block' and 'Armagh Jail'. The first speaker was Alistair LOGAN, a solicitor, who spoke about the Prevention of Terrorism Act and the Special Powers Act in Northern Ireland.
9. Marie MULHOLLAND spoke fervently about the conditions of the women in Armagh gaol, accusing the British authorities of inflicting quite unbelievable brutality on the women in Armagh Prison. She concluded by emphasising to the conference that the women in Armagh gaol should not be forgotten.



10. The Chairman then introduced Mike BIGGS, a former British Army Captain and now a conscientious objector. BIGGS explained to the audience that his job had entailed liaising between the British Army and local community leaders in Newry, Co Down, although he was increasingly appalled by the actions and attitudes of his fellow soldiers. Concluding he could see no justification for the British presence in Ireland, except perhaps that the British Army was using it as a training ground for dealing with demonstrations, disputes and public order problems that may arise in England at some later stage.

11. The last speaker for this session was John ARDEN, who explained to the audience, that the playwright Margeretta D'ARCY had agreed to speak at this session, but was currently serving a four month sentence in Armagh gaol for refusing to pay a £40 fine levied after the International Women's Day picket of Armagh last year. He then read a letter from D'ARCY which he claimed had been smuggled out from Armagh gaol, but it contained nothing of particular interest.

12. The second of the afternoon sessions commenced at 3.15pm with the Chair of the forum reverting to its morning occupant Mick MARTIN, who introduced the session under the heading 'Why We Call for Withdrawal from Northern Ireland' and introduced Peter HAIN from the Labour Party to speak on the subject. HAIN, in a very cautious mood and much to the disapproval of the majority of the audience, urged that the conference move slowly towards attempting to get the Parliamentary Labour Party to take up a withdrawal position. He concluded by suggesting that the conference should aim for the next Labour Government to give a clear undertaking to withdraw from Northern Ireland without specifically demanding a date.

13. Ernie ROBERTS, a Member of Parliament, spoke of the problems he had had trying to persuade his fellow Labour MPs to take up a withdrawal position. He urged the members of the audience to contact their local MPs, attend their weekly surgeries etc, to demand that they take up a withdrawal position. ROBERTS, was followed by Clive SOLEY, the Member of Parliament for Hammersmith North, who expressed the opinion, that the conference would do well to look for what he described as the causes of a problem rather than the symptoms. He considered 'H' Block, political status etc, were symptoms and the cause was the partition of Ireland, therefore the main struggle must be for the reunification of the 32 counties and then the other symptoms would disappear.

14. Ruth ADDISON, a former Chairman of the National League of Young Liberals, expressed her unhappiness with the lack of women speakers from the platform and the bulk of her speech related to the fact that the forum should concentrate on working towards Irish unification, in order to let the Irish people subsequently decide what sort of Government they wanted.

15. ADDISON, was followed by Jack BENNET, an Irish political writer. BENNET, in a very strong and uncompromising manner, expressed the opinion that the Protestant 'minority' in Ireland had long lived in special and privileged conditions, and that the fact that these conditions were now threatened, was 'just too bad'. He concluded by saying that the threat of Protestant terrorism in a united Ireland would probably not materialise.

16. The Chairman then introduced Jeff BELL, author of 'The Protestants of Ulster', and a member of the Islington Branch of the International Marxist Group. BELL, in reference to the speech of Peter HAIN, asserted the opinion, that the prisoners in 'H' Block, in Armagh gaol and the people of Ireland could not wait for four years for another Labour Government to get in and then with no date set as to when the withdrawal of British troops would take place. He concluded by urging all those present, if not already a member, to join the Troops Out Movement.

17. The last speaker on the platform for the afternoon session was Phil FLYNN, the Deputy General Secretary of the Local Government and Public Services Union in Ireland, who in a rather long and rambling speech spoke of the struggle for class consciousness and workers power in the 'free state' and how sectarianism had divided and damaged the position of workers in the 32 counties.

18. There then followed 40 minutes of questions and contributions from the floor. The Chairman then introduced Pat ARROWSMITH who spoke about the Charter 80 campaign which she explained had been formed to attract broad based support for the five demands for prisoners in 'H' Block, ie (i) the right to wear their own clothes; (ii) the right to refrain from prison work; (iii) the right to free association; (iv) the right to organise educational and recreational facilities and to receive one visit, one letter and one parcel a week; (v) and the right to full remission of sentences.

19. There then followed a number of other contributions from the floor, including the following speakers: [redacted] Privacy [redacted] Privacy [redacted] Privacy [redacted] Privacy and [redacted] Privacy. Nothing of particular interest emerged from their positions."

20. The following persons were identified as having attended the above meeting:

Ruth ADDISON

John ARDEN

Pat ARROWSMITH



Jeff BELL

Jack BENNETT

Privacy

Mike BIGGS

Privacy

Anthony COWHLAN

Privacy

Steve DAVE

Privacy

Phil FLYNN

Desmond GREAVES

Peter HAIN

Privacy

Mike MARTIN

Privacy

Marie MULHOLLAND

Privacy

Chris REAVES

Ernie ROBERTS MP

Privacy

Clive SOLEY MP

Privacy

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