

PAISLEY PLAYS THE SCOTTISH CARD —

A CHARACTER TEST FOR SCOTTISH NATIONALISTS

le Phil Mac Giolla Bháin

Events at the time of writing means that it will become increasingly difficult for the SNP to run away from the issues raised by the war in the North.

The newly formed Scottish Unionist Party (SUP), and the Orange lodge in Scotland organised a march and rally which was attended by over 15,000 on the 1st November.

The speakers were Ian Paisley, Martin Smyth — in fact a veritable Who's Who of Ulster Unionism.

The SUP have been formed to stand against Scottish Tory ministers in marginal seats; hoping to take enough votes off them to un-seat them, thus making them pay the price for their Hillsborough treachery.

For the first time the Orange vote in Scotland is out in the open — it therefore cannot any longer be ignored.

The SUP is essentially a one issue party — Smash Hillsborough! — but in reality the issue is the UK policy itself.

SNP candidates in "targetted" seats will find themselves being opposed by the SUP.¹

Ireland, as it was in MacLean and Connolly's time, is again an issue in Scottish politics.

Why though, should Ireland be so important in Scotland?

In the same way that the war in the North has been used as a laboratory, a testing ground, by the British state for possible future "mainland" campaigns. Then on a native parallel, just as an earlier generation of Third World revolutionaries were inspired and guided by Barry and Collins, now revolutionary influence is again flowing from Ireland.

The war in the North, on the nationalist side, has not only produced a brilliantly efficient guerilla army, but it has also produced a hot-bed of genius and practical thought.²

American writer and sociologist Paul Theroux has called Belfast — "... the city of the future ..." — with mass state surveillance becoming the norm in daily life.

Nowhere is this more visibly obvious than in the civil engineering projects that will carry Glasgow's sky-line into the 21st century.³ The British state, as far back as the early 70's, in secret talks with the IRA admitted that it feared the spread of separatist violence to Scotland.⁴ It is well known that one of the primary objectives of the Brits in the Six Counties has been to contain the struggle at various levels.

Military containment: "... an acceptable level of violence. ..."

Political containment: in that they have attempted to throw a cordon sanitaire around the North by utilising news management and dis-information.⁵ Their objective has been to contain the ideas generated by the resistance movement to within the Six Counties.⁶

The fact that the Unionists are now calling on their Scottish brethren to state the Unionist

position openly at the ballot box is good news for those wishing to see that ring-fence breached.

Ireland is, without doubt, the SNP's biggest moral and political challenge. The SNP is uncomfortable with the entire subject — by their public utterances on the subject of late — obviously ill-equipped to deal with it.⁷

The SNP in Glasgow was sharply divided on whether or not to pursue the "Sam Campbell issue".⁸

One of the main reasons for this, apart from the customary SNP squamishness, is the view that the entire episode was another example of "sectarianism".

This is part of the conventional British wisdom that categorises the Northern war as a religious conflict and not as a national liberation struggle.

The same attitude this side of the water produces a failure to recognise the Irish in the West of Scotland as part of the Irish diaspora. Despite a welter of evidence to the contrary we are referred to as "Scottish RC's". Any display by our youth of national loyalty (Irish national loyalty, of course) is dismissed as "mere sectarianism".⁹ While the author suspects that other white ethnic minorities in modern Scotland might fair better recognition-wise — the problem that the Irish here present for the SNP is the nature of Irish politics over the last century.¹⁰

The SNP's real fear is Irish nationalism — the failed home rule campaigns of Parnell and Redmond set against the comparative success of Sinn Féin and Óglaigh na hÉireann have too many uncomfortable analogies for anyone willing to think about the direction of nationalism in Scotland into the 90's. In Ireland, of course, being an active nationalist means the possibility of death or imprisonment.

However nationalists in Scotland have also been jailed in recent years.¹¹ Many of them at the time of their arrest were active members of the SNP. There has been no campaign for amnesty or for recognition of the political nature of the offences. Their membership of the SNP becomes an embarrassment to the "national Party".

In Scotland nationalist political prisoners are

pariahs among nationalists. At least one Scottish nationalist has lost his life, many believe in the cause of Scottish freedom and at the hands of agents of the state.¹² Willie MacRae was apparently known to the special Branch for his close links with the SNLA — a former Vice-Chairman of the SNP and parliamentary candidate; this man and the circumstances of his death are rarely mentioned in SNP circles.

Such a state of affairs is hard to imagine being repeated anywhere else. If, say, Seamas Mallon,¹³ was found shot dead in his car after a series of death threats and the coroner said he was shot in the head from a distance — verdict suicide!

Would the SDLP be too embarrassed or frightened to call for a public enquiry? Had the lessons of Ireland, her British troubles, been understood within the "national party" then it is hard to believe that Willie MacRae's death would have been greeted with such silent cowardice.¹⁴

Probably the only way of changing this shameful state of affairs — that must be of concern to all Celts — is for the SNP to have contact with other national liberation movements.

A close look at, and regular contact with, other peoples struggling to be free including those where there has been repression and armed resistance might help to put the SNP's present "struggle" into some sort of perspective.

A pro-independence policy on Ireland would inject an element of principled leadership into the SNP.

This principled stand might well "spill over" into other policy areas. The SNP would be seen clearly as the party of the nation and not merely a whining regionalist pressure group.

A major step forward towards that is when the SNP can mention the struggle of the Irish people of the occupied 6 Counties with respect, admiration and empathy and stop aping the attitudes of an English state that they claim they want to be rid of.

This weekend Ian Kyle Paisley provided a golden opportunity for that process to begin — but soon opportunity will turn to necessity.

REFERENCES

1. The SNP has chosen certain seats that it considers winnable — it is in these seats, coincidentally, that the Scottish Unionist Party will be fielding the majority of their candidates.
2. It is clear the Herri Batasuna/ETA are following the Ballot/Armalite strategy.
3. One example: The New Sheriff court in the Gorbals (cost £40 million) — the biggest of its kind in Europe — complete with moat and huge buttress walls.
4. The Cheyne Row talks in '72 see MacStiofain — Revolutionary in Ireland for a general, sanitised account of the peace talks.
5. See Liz Curtis's *Ireland the propaganda war*.
6. Quite obviously the Free State also wants these dangerous notions contained as well.
7. Jim Sillars, tipped by many as future party leader, confronting Martin Smyth, was regarded by many Sillars watchers to be hesitant — he also did not stray from British orthodoxy.
8. See Carn 55.
9. The author was enlightened recently by a leading Glasgow SNP member that waving the Irish Tri-Colour was "sectarian" (!)