



DISSIDENT DRUMS

THE MOOD at dissident republican Easter commemorations this year is likely to be subdued with no sustained armed campaign under way, while the electoral rise of Sinn Féin seems irresistible.

Last Easter a few hundred republicans marched through west Belfast for the annual National Republican Commemoration Committee Easter commemoration. The main address was delivered by Saoradh member Dee Fennell. He gave a downbeat, frank assessment of the situation dissident republicans were in: "What we currently have is a plethora of small groups similar in ideology but different leaderships, strategy and popularity."

Fennell went on to argue that co-operation was necessary to reinvigorate and re-energise dissident republicanism and that "the only way through which the republic can be achieved is through comradely co-operation and collaboration based on mutual respect."

Despite this exhortation, little has changed. In political terms, Saoradh has been quite active in relation to the ongoing conflict in Gaza, activism that built on Saoradh's work in recent years publicising the plight of Palestinian political prisoners. Saoradh has also been active in countering the rise of the far right, with statements condemning the National Party and the attack on the migrant camp on Sandwith Street, as well as activists removing racist graffiti, stickers and posters.

In both cases, however, despite Fennell's analysis and plea for unity, Saoradh activism has largely been on its own terms and not as part of broader campaign groups.

It would appear too that the prospect of armed actions have been seriously undermined by a series of protracted court cases, which have resulted in dozens of prominent dissident republicans spending long periods imprisoned on remand. Last summer the Irish Republican Prisoners Welfare Association highlighted that, at that time, republican prisoners on remand in Hydebank, Maghaberry and Portlaoise had



John Caldwell

been imprisoned for over 11,000 days or over 30 years without conviction.

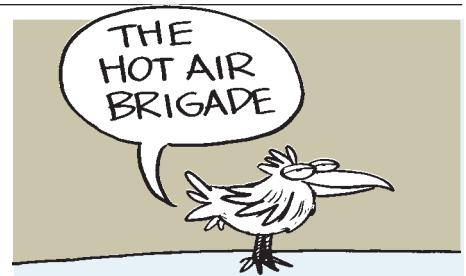
The biggest portion of these days spent on remand were by those arrested and charged with activities linked to the New IRA as part of the MI5-led Operation Arbacia. The evidence for the charges is based on audio and video recordings of meetings held in Co Tyrone in February and July 2020. In August 2020 eight men and two women were arrested and charged on the basis of this evidence.

In the years that followed, bail was regularly refused for those charged until, in November 2023, the High Court accepted that there would be no trial until at least 2025 and, as a result, most have now been released on bail. Those released include Kevin Barry Murphy from Coalisland and David Jordan from Dungannon, who prosecutors have alleged introduced themselves as the chief of staff of the New IRA and chairperson of the New IRA army council respectively.

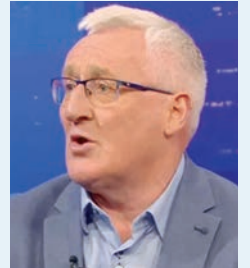
There are other high-profile cases, including the long-running case against Colin Duffy and co-accused Henry Fitzsimons, who were first arrested in relation to a gun attack on a PSNI Land Rover over a decade ago, and the cases of the dozen individuals charged in relation to attempted murder in Omagh of PSNI detective chief inspector John Caldwell in February 2023.

Most likely one of the other small groups to which Fennell was referring in his speech was Arm na Poblachta, comprising former members of Óglaigh na hÉireann (ONH) and the Continuity IRA. It emerged in 2017 with an attempted rocket attack on a PSNI patrol in west Belfast. With some support in Derry, Tyrone, Armagh and Belfast, it has carried out a small number of attacks on the security services in recent years. Last month the group claimed responsibility for two attacks on police with pipe bombs in Dungiven.

The ONH announced a ceasefire in January 2018, so it took observers by surprise when over 20 members of An Garda Síochána's special detective unit (SDU) arrived at a commemoration for the late Martin Rattigan in Navan, organised by the Republican Network for Unity (RNU), which has long been associated in the media with the ONH. Later a car carrying RNU members was forced off the road by the SDU and its occupants were searched at gunpoint with their hands cable-tied behind their backs. This is a little less delicate than the light-touch policing that far-right members enjoy from the Garda SDU.



The whole programme is a bit like a Japanese bullet train whizzing from Osaka to Tokyo. **Pat Spillane on the All-Ireland football season, Irish Independent**



Pat Spillane

It is fitting that he does have such a prominent role in the ESB because

really his role now is about illuminating a dark past and charting a course to a bright future. **Mícheál Lehane on Terence O'Rourke's RTÉ post, Morning Ireland, submitted by reader**

It is not in the character of the English to indulge in bawdy displays of nationalism... Brexit wasn't really a nationalist project... Ireland ought to think carefully about the vision it projects: a braggadocious, narrow and kitschy self-styling has long fallen out of contemporary tastes.

Finn McRedmond on how "English understatement" demands a more sophisticated celebration of Paddy's Day, Irish Times

The many lives she's lived and roles she's taken – from model to wife to mum to actor – have set her up to be open to what life has to offer next. **Shilpa Ganatra on former model and reality TV star Nadia Forde, Sunday Times**

It won't be for long as lulls are not frequent in her multifaceted, polymath existence. **Sinead O'Sullivan on actor Danielle Ryan, Irish Tatler**

Add to that thoroughly trustworthy profile, his unique sartorial style. Baggy corduroy trousers, cotton shirts with big pockets, Fair Isle sweaters, vintage braces and a range of linen scarves sourced on the Greek island of Hydra. Top it all off with his battered hemp hat, and you've got an earthy elegance. **John Daly on Gardeners' World presenter Monty Don, Irish Independent**

I expected Eamon Ryan to take his vast transport and energy department by the scruff of the neck and make Ireland the Saudi Arabia of wind energy. **John Kierans, Irish Mirror**

The home crowd also found their voice in a way not heard in many a year, and all of this was provoked by Ireland becoming akin to the All Blacks in their Tri-Nations pomp. **Gerry Thornley on Ireland's loss at Twickenham, Irish Times**

Josie, a certified cacao-facilitator, was also in attendance and had brought some cacao with her, which they advised was a perfect pairing for some 'blissful breathing'. **Nicole Glennon on 'cacao-drinking', Irish Examiner**

But you don't need to dream continental dreams to consider what could be done better in Dublin city centre. You merely have to hop on a bus or Dart south to the faraway world of Dún Laoghaire. **Una Mullally, Irish Times**



Please send suitable contributions to: The Hot Air Brigade, The Phoenix, 44 Lr Baggot St, Dublin 2 or email: hotair@thephoenix.ie